

## The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 As Seen Through the Collaborative Illustrated Diaries of Two Preadolescent Boys

Gergely Kunt

**Abstract:** In this paper, Gergely Kunt analyzes the collaborative diary writing of two preadolescent boys from the period of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, during which they decided to act as reporters and writers to create their own chronicles of the events transpiring between October 1956 and March 1957. Twelve-year-old Gyula Csics and thirteen-year-old János Kovács were close friends and neighbors in a tenement house in Budapest, which resulted in their collaborate project of writing and illustrating their own diaries in an attempt to record the events of the Hungarian Revolution. During this collaborative project, they would read and copy each other's diaries, which primarily focused on public events, rather than the preadolescents' private lives. In addition to their handwritten entries, the two boys illustrated their diaries with drawings that depicted street fights or damaged buildings, as well as newspaper clippings and pamphlets, which they had collected during and after the Revolution.

**Keywords:** 1956 Revolution, war diary, adolescent diary, diary and gender, teenage masculinity

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The overwhelming majority of child and adolescent diaries written in the twentieth century were presumably by girls, which might explain why feminist literary theory largely considered the diary to be a "women's genre," or talked of the feminization of diary writing in general. For example, Rebecca Hogan contrasted the diary as a feminine genre to the autobiography, which she considered a masculine genre, arguing that the diary was a feminine genre because it produced a fragmented, non-teleological narrative with an associative structure, while the autobiography, which she considered a masculine genre, produced a complete, carefully constructed, and teleological narrative (Hogan 1991: 95–96.) According to Hogan, the feminization of diary writing began in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when women were encouraged to write diaries in the course of their education, as the diary was seen as suitable to document the private lives of women. In other words, the genre was inherently considered



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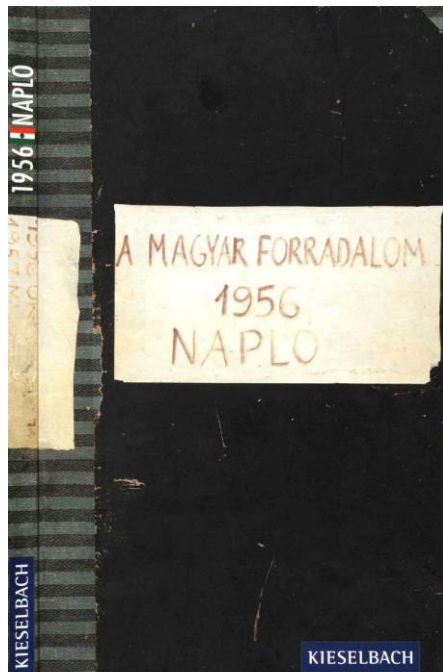


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personal, private, and confined. However, I believe that Hogan's characterization of the diary as feminine and the autobiography as masculine is inherently flawed, because the characteristics she describes result from the specificities of the genre, rather than from the gender of the diarist. In this respect, I argue that the fact that girls and women keep diaries more frequently than do boys or men is motivated by age characteristics as well as psychological factors and socialization, which greatly affect how each gender perceives the world, and how they formulate their interpretations into texts. I argue that, based on characteristics that largely pertain to the specificities of the given genre, we cannot consider diary writing feminine, or autobiographies masculine, because such categorizations are ultimately based on stereotypes and generalizations that ignore the specificities of the genres, as well as certain exceptions, such as autobiographies written by women, or diaries written by men. Indeed, the illusion that the diary is a feminine genre might also stem from the fact that, in contrast to diaries written by girls or women, diaries written by boys or men are rarely discussed by scholars, especially if the author in question was not an important political, cultural, or scientific figure. Therefore, in this study, I aim to present two "exceptions to the rule" by discussing the diaries of two Hungarian preadolescent boys.

In this study, I shall examine the diaries of two boys in order to remedy the lack of research on diaries written by boys and men, and to show that the two diaries are unique in several respects. Not only were these diaries written by preadolescent boys between the ages of twelve and thirteen during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, but both boys conceived of their diary writing as a collaborative effort, which resulted in two richly illustrated diaries. The boys obtained all their information of current events from the outside world, including from their parents, the radio, the press, and the residents of the tenement house where they both lived, which means that their knowledge of the events was mostly shaped by adults. However, in their diaries, the worldview of the boys can also be traced through their methods of diary writing, their drawings inspired by the damaged urban landscape, and the commentaries attached to these drawings.

In the following, I shall do a comparative analysis of the two diaries in order to examine those specificities of the diary entries that stemmed from the age and gender characteristics of the diarists. Regarding this approach, scholars using feminist literary theory have recently conducted similar research on the diaries of adolescents, including, most famously, the diary of Anne Frank, which, in one study, was examined as a document recording the first experiences of adolescent femininity and sexuality (Charnow 2012, 291–308.) Here, I shall focus primarily on the drawings of the diarists to examine the ways in which the two preadolescent boys perceived and imagined the Hungarian Revolution and subsequent events, but my visual analysis will also be supplemented by an analysis of the boys' diary entries.



*Figure 1*



*Figure 2*

In 2006, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution, the two diaries discussed here were published entirely independently of each other, one by art historian, art collector, and art dealer Tamás Kieselbach, and the other by János M. Rainer, former director of the 1956 Institute. In February 2004, Rainer had held a lecture on the Hungarian Revolution in Tatabánya, where he met Gyula Csics, who gave him a copy of his diary. In contrast, the diary published by the Kieselbach Gallery was found by art historian Péter Molnos in 2002 at the Ecsér flea market, the largest flea market of Budapest, though how it got to the market is uncertain, with one theory claiming that it was sold by a homeless person who had found the diary while searching through the trash, and another that it was a rubbish collector who had found the diary during a seasonal curbside trash disposal (György 2006, P. Szabó 2006.) In any case, due to the fact that the name of the author was missing from the manuscript, the identity of the writer remained a mystery to Molnos, which prompted both him and Tamás Kieselbach, the owner of the Kieselbach Gallery, to search for and identify the diarist. The first partially successful attempt to find the owner of the diary was made by Molnos's mother, who managed to find some of his classmates, and even to locate the tenement house where he had lived, which pointed to the author being one János Kovács, but since the manuscript did not include the author's name, the identity of the diary writer could not be determined beyond a reasonable doubt (Kulcsár 2006.) Later Molnos managed to identify the former address and the school of the diarist, but due to the fact that the residents of the tenement house had changed significantly, no one could any longer recall a thirteen-year-old boy named János Kovács living at that address during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Therefore, when the diary was published by the Kieselbach Gallery, Molnos and Kieselbach decided to leave the name of the author as a blank, (hopefully) to be filled in later.

Until the fiftieth anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the two publishers remained unaware of each other's plans to publish diaries related to the Revolution, let alone the fact that the diaries might be connected. However, when Tamás Kieselbach presented the diary he published at a press conference, news soon reached the 1956 Institute, where the diary of Gyula Csics was still forthcoming, so in the end, it was Gyula Csics who confirmed beyond doubt that the diary published by Tamás Kieselbach had been written by his childhood friend, János Kovács.

The original, jointly kept diaries of János Kovács and Gyula Csics shared many similarities. For instance, both diaries started with an identical first page containing the Kossuth coat of arms, the inscription *MAGYAR FORRADALOM 1956* ['HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION 1956'], and the first line of the national anthem of Hungary, "*Isten áldd meg a magyart!*" ['O God, Bless the Nation of Hungary!']. However, the publishers decided to use the external front covers of the diaries, so the diary published by the 1956 Institute was titled *Magyar forradalom 1956: napló* ['Hungarian Revolution, 1956: A Diary'], while the diary published by the Kieselbach Gallery was titled *Magyar forradalom, 1956: Isten áldd meg a magyart!* ['Hungarian Revolution, 1956: O God, Bless the Nation of Hungary!']. In reality, based on the internal front cover, the latter should have been the title of both diaries. The two diaries also consist of two large chapters, the first one pertaining to the revolution, and the second one pertaining to subsequent events. It is worth noting that both diarists gave the same title to the second chapter, which was "*Magyarország a forradalom után*" ['Hungary after the Revolution'].

Despite the fact that the diaries of János Kovács and Gyula Csics shared many similarities, in terms of quality, the published volumes turned out vastly different. The Kieselbach Gallery, which is famous for its high quality catalogues, published the diary of János Kovács in an incredibly high quality that defies the usual technical term *facsimile edition*. Perusing the volume, the availability of resources, and the professionalism, technical knowledge, and enthusiasm of the editors is evident. The diary manuscript, which counted over two hundred pages, was published in its original size. The contemporary newspaper clippings, drawings, and pamphlets collected by Kovács were also reproduced on the same type of paper in their original sizes, which means that ones larger than the diary itself became folded pages inside the volume. The diary was not edited in any way, or supplemented by notes, and also retained its original title. The resulting visual effect is so stunning that only the lack of wear and tear suggests that it is a facsimile edition. In contrast, the 1956 Institute obviously had fewer resources available for their publication of the diary of Gyula Csics. The diary, which was presumably written in an A/4 size hardcover spiral notebook, was shrunk to half of its original size, and its contents split into four parts instead of two. The first part is an introduction by János M. Rainer, who informs the reader of how he obtained the diary, followed by the facsimile of the diary, and its typewritten version annotated by Gyula Csics. The volume then ends with an epilogue by Gyula Csics titled "*Ötven év múlva*" ['Fifty Years Later'], in which he mentions the diary of János Kovács as a manuscript that was most likely lost in the flow of time.

We only know of the former environment, residence, and childhood friendship of the two diarists from Gyula Csics's memoirs, which were published as a supplement appended to his own diary. Csics recounts that he and János Kovács were neighbors, as the two families lived on the ground floor of the same tenement house at 10 Rökk Szilárd Street, in District VII of Budapest, where each family also ran their own family businesses. Gyula's mother was employed at a small restaurant owned by her brother, where she worked as a cashier, waitress,

and kitchen helper. Meanwhile, the other business was owned by the Kovács family, who ran a small convenience store (Csics 2006, 215–222.) Unfortunately, following the communist takeover, the two businesses were nationalized. Although János Kovács's parents were able to remain at their store as employees, Gyula's uncle, who owned the family restaurant, was forced to quit his business and become a mason.



*Figure 3*



*Figure 4*

The two boys and their families, as well as their neighbors, were only passive supporters of the Hungarian Revolution, but lived close enough to the centers of armed resistance to “hear” the events, or be able to visit the sites of armed conflict. For instance, Gyula noted that they were only a short walk away from the burned-down headquarters of the official newspaper of the Hungarian Communist Party, *Szabad Nép* [‘Free People’], or from the sites of armed resistance in Corvin Lane, the Kilián Barracks, or Köztársaság Square (Csics 2006: 215). In fact, due to the proximity of these sites to their building, the revolutionary “documentation” of the two boys consisted of not only their diaries, but they were also able to collect from the street two boxes worth of “relics” pertaining to the Revolution, but since these items could not be pasted or tucked into their diaries, they were forced to store them separately. Unfortunately, the two collections were lost without a trace, leaving only the diaries, which frequently mentioned the collected relics.

The friendship of the two boys stemmed from being next-door neighbors, as well as the fact that they both attended the same primary school and secondary school, so it is not surprising that in October 1956, they both decided to keep diaries of the events of the Hungarian Revolution. Apparently, once János started keeping a diary, his friend Gyula was also compelled to start his own diary the day after János began writing his. The two boys also concluded their revolutionary diaries on March 15, 1957, the anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. However, while Gyula stopped writing completely, János actually opened a new chapter titled "*Kiegészítések, pótlások*" ['Supplements, Amendments'], which ended with an entry from May 13, 1957. His decision seems closely related to the length of the boys' respective notebooks, as Gyula chose a sixty-page notebook, while János started his own diary in a one hundred-page notebook. Even after János's "final" entry on March 15, 1957, many blank pages remained, which he apparently felt compelled to fill. One year later, János also pasted a newspaper clipping onto the internal back cover of the notebook, dated June 17, 1958, which was about the verdicts issued in the case of Imre Nagy and associates, and their executions. On the other side of the internal backcover, János pasted another newspaper clipping of the portraits of Count Lajos Batthyány and Imre Nagy, two Prime Ministers who shared the same fate (Batthyány was executed in 1849, one year after the Hungarian Revolution of 1848). This clipping appears to be from a newspaper printed after the political system change of 1989, which suggests that János Kovács took up his diary one more time as an adult to paste in the newspaper clipping of the two executed prime ministers, thereby completing the diary. It is worth noting that there are no other traces of similar modifications in his manuscript.



*Figure 5*

Upon graduating from secondary school, the two boys, now young adults, were forced to part ways, but still kept in touch. While Gyula Csics became a librarian, and eventually moved from Budapest to Tatabánya, János Kovács worked at the IBUSZ Travel Agency for several decades (P. Szabó 2006.) However, the epilogue written by Csics suggests that at the time of the

publication of the two diaries, Kovács at age sixty-three was in critical physical and mental condition (Csics 2006: 221). According to other sources, at the time of publication, Kovács was living on his own and struggling with illness at a social housing service (P. Szabó 2006). It is likely that after Kovács was admitted to a social care institution, his relatives cleared his apartment, and upon finding his diary, they threw it out with the trash, which is how it ended up at the Ecsér flea market and ultimately in the possession of Péter Molnos.



*Figure 6*

### **The Boys' Chronicles of the Revolution**

As János Kovács and Gyula Csics started their diaries at the ages of thirteen and twelve, respectively, the resulting narratives show none of the characteristics typical of adolescent diaries. In fact, adolescent characteristics such as self-reflexivity, or reflection on the diarist's romantic orientation or sexuality, are completely absent from the diary entries of both boys, whose narratives focus on the documentation of external events. Since such records leave no room for self-analysis, interpretation, or retrospection, we could consider the two volumes to be chronicles despite the fact that the boys themselves called these diaries, because the authors are only present as narrators, whose priority was to document the sequence of events of the Hungarian Revolution.

It is worth noting that while the general goal of adolescent diaries is to create a personal, secret universe hidden from the outside world (including the diarist's family and relatives), the diaries of János Kovács and Gyula Csics were treated as public, collaborative documents. In other words, the notebooks not only recorded all available information on the Hungarian Revolution, but also the opinions of the Kovács and Csics families, as well as the general

atmosphere of the tenement house during the Revolution, and the first few months of the consolidation process. The idea that the boys aimed to produce a public chronicle as the narrators of the events of the Revolution is evident from the diaries. For instance, János Kovács not only illustrated his entry dated October 24, 1956 (written one day after the outbreak of the Revolution) with several drawings, but also had it signed by the commissioner of a group of police officers who were hiding in the Kovács family's apartment during the armed conflict because of their refusal to take action against the revolutionaries. Meanwhile, in another entry dated October 28, 1956, one word, *lövegekkel* ['with guns'] was corrected by an adult to *lövedékekkel* ['with ammunition'].

For the two boys, the urge to write a diary did not stem from the desire for personal reflection, but was triggered by external events, the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution in János's case, and in Gyula's case, the idea that his good friend and neighbor started writing a diary. When we compare the two diaries, it becomes evident that János, the older of the two, started writing his diary before Gyula, who ended up copying several of János's diary entries and illustrations. The fact that these diaries served as chronicles is also evident from the first and final entries, which were not tied to personal anniversaries such as the diarist's birthday or family events, but to the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolutions of 1956 and 1848 (and in János's case, to the execution of Imre Nagy), which were general events preserved in Hungarian collective memory. However, this also means that after major events were over, the two boys had less and less to report about, which led them to combine the events of several days to be able to produce a single entry. In Gyula's case, this occurred as early as November 5 and 6, 1956, which he summarized in a single entry, while János, who wrote much longer and more detailed entries, started writing summaries for November 16 and 17.

The decision of János Kovács and Gyula Csics to write event-centric chronicles of the Hungarian Revolution was determined by two major factors. One factor was that the two boys were born in the final years of World War II—with János born in 1943, and Gyula, in 1944—which means that they were raised in families that were fundamentally affected by the two world wars, and even experienced the siege of Buda firsthand. In fact, the environment in which they lived still bore traces of the armed conflicts of World War II, which served as the boys' inspiration to record those events that left similar traces on the local urban landscape, including the arrival of the Soviet tanks, the destruction of buildings, or armed conflicts on the open streets. Meanwhile, the other major factor was that the two boys lived in the proximity of several sites of armed resistance, which greatly determined the information (and relics) they could gather. Since Gyula and János were young, they were rarely allowed to go out on their own, not to mention that they lived only within earshot of the armed conflicts, which means they were not so much witnesses as bystanders while staying indoors. However, when they did venture out on their own, the boys attempted to imagine the events of the Revolution based on what they had heard themselves, the information they had received from adults, and the changes of the urban landscape.

János Kovács's diary and Gyula Csics's memoirs confirm that both diarists originally started their diary projects with a draft, which served to produce a final product reminiscent of the printed media of the era. Unfortunately, the drafts did not survive, but it is probable that they did not contain any illustrations, or supplements in the form of newspaper clippings and pamphlets. Moreover, we can clearly trace the boys' mimicry of book covers and newspaper headlines through the use of various typographical elements in their diary manuscripts, mostly in



connection with the drawings and newspaper clippings that illustrated their diary entries. The concept of writing their own books of the Hungarian Revolution is also evident from the fact that both boys originally chose plain-looking notebooks to serve as their diaries. Later on, Gyula switched his for a larger hardcover spiral notebook, in which he framed every page with the colors of the Hungarian flag, while János copied certain entries of his original draft into a new large hardcover notebook, in which he began each and every entry with a red, white, and green header also inspired by the Hungarian flag. Finally, both boys imitated the style of newspaper headlines (as well as each other) in giving thematic titles to certain entries, which were written in uppercase, while the entries themselves were written in cursive.

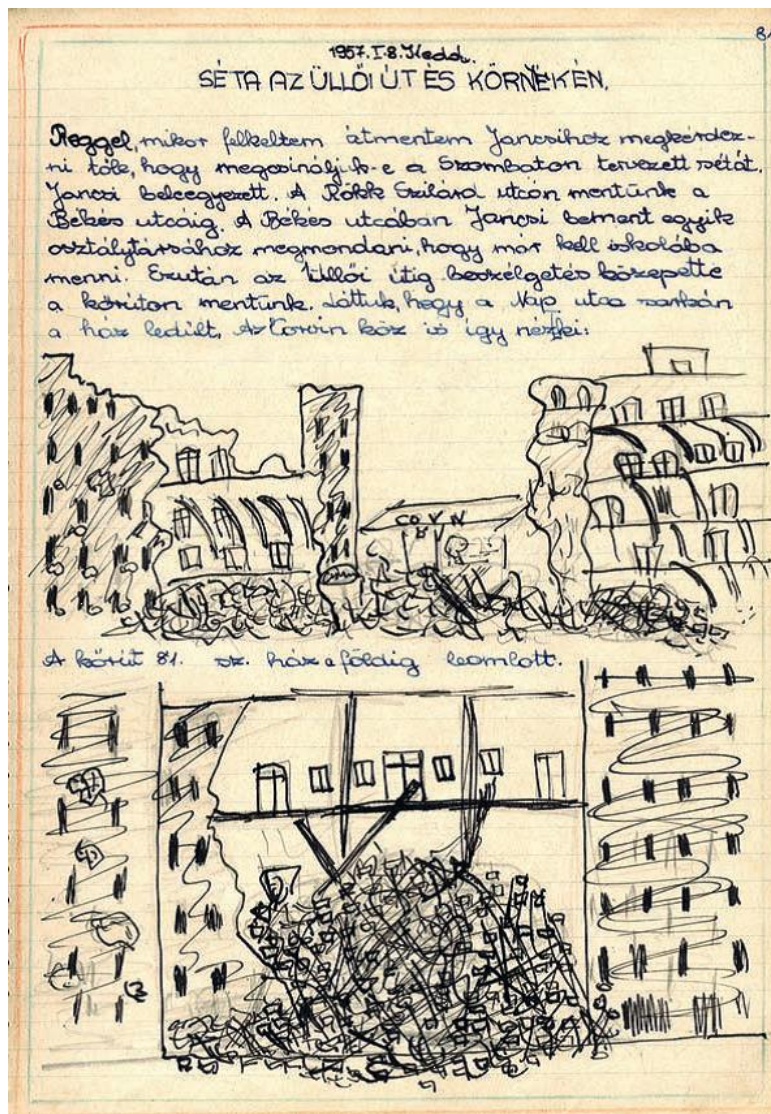


Figure 7

### **The Revolution from the Perspective of Two Boys**

In the analysis of the diaries kept by János Kovács and Gyula Csics, it is important to consider that the literary experiences of these two Hungarian preadolescent boys mostly consisted of nineteenth-century Anglo-American and French adventure novels, which had a profound impact on their worldviews and imaginations. In fact, I would argue that the two boys, who were growing up in Budapest as both witnesses and products of the war-torn twentieth century, decided to write and illustrate their respective chronicles under the influence of their literary experiences. Their favorite novels were often mentioned in their diaries, and included books such as *The Mysterious Island* and *Dick Sand, A Captain at Fifteen* by Jules Verne, *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens, *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* by Howard Pyle, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain, *Tarzan* by Edgar Rice Burroughs, or *Egri Csillagok* ['Stars of Eger'] by Géza Gárdonyi. If we wanted to briefly summarize these novels, they are all about young boys or men who go on exciting adventures, during which they prove their courage, capabilities, and strength as men.

Of the novels that excited the imaginations of the two preadolescent boys, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* might be worth discussing in detail, because my analysis aims to show the impact of this novel on the boys' interpretations of 1956. The *Bildungsroman* of Mark Twain, originally published in 1876, featured a protagonist the same age as János and Gyula, who, in the course of his adventures with his friends, gradually entered into manhood (Wolff 1980: 640–641). The basic concept might not have been new at the time, but Twain's choice of characters actually contributed a new element to discourses of boyhood by establishing the genre of the "bad boy book," which departed from the trope of the idealized "good boys" of earlier novels. Twain's depiction of "bad boys" had a profound impact on imagining not just boyhood, but also manhood and masculinity, as these books were originally read not by children or adolescents, but by adults. Indeed, the bad boy books became so successful that, at the end of the nineteenth century, they were constantly featured on the top lists in the United States (Prchal 2004: 188–190). My analysis of János and Gyula's diaries aims to show that the two preadolescent boys viewed the extraordinary events of the Hungarian Revolution as an adventure similar to Tom Sawyer's treasure hunts. To the two boys, novels like *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* not only defined ideas like manhood, but also had an impact on how they interpreted the events around them, which they only heard or heard about, as they were confined to the tenement house and its backyard by their families to keep them safe. Therefore, in the diaries, they tried to describe armed conflicts based on information from their families, neighbors, and their own vivid imaginations.

When we examine the drawings made by the two boys to illustrate their diaries, we find two major themes, weaponry and architecture. The former included drawings of tanks, cannons, or shotguns, while the latter involved recording damage to local architecture, such as damaged or destroyed buildings, and their post-revolutionary reconstruction. It is probable that, of the two themes, drawings dedicated to damaged or destroyed buildings feature predominantly because this was the actual personal experience of the two boys, who were not present in any armed conflicts, and therefore did not actually see how the buildings were damaged or destroyed. At the same time, the boys also supplemented their diary entries with various newspaper clippings, which also reflected and illustrated the two themes discussed above.

I would argue that during János and Gyula's attempts to record and imagine the events of the Hungarian Revolution, drawings became an important means of self-expression, as well as a source of friendly collaboration and competition. Since the two boys produced their diaries together, they made similar drawings by copying each other, but in the process, they also competed against each other to see whose diary was better illustrated. Studies do suggest that unlike diaries kept in adolescence or adulthood, where textual content takes precedence over visual content, diaries written during preadolescence frequently contain drawings or illustrations (Gerő 2003, Feuer 2000: 187–227), but beyond the fact that the boys' affinity for drawing was characteristic of their age, they also made illustrations to visually capture and record the events around them. In other words, the drawings became a selective visual chronicle of the events of

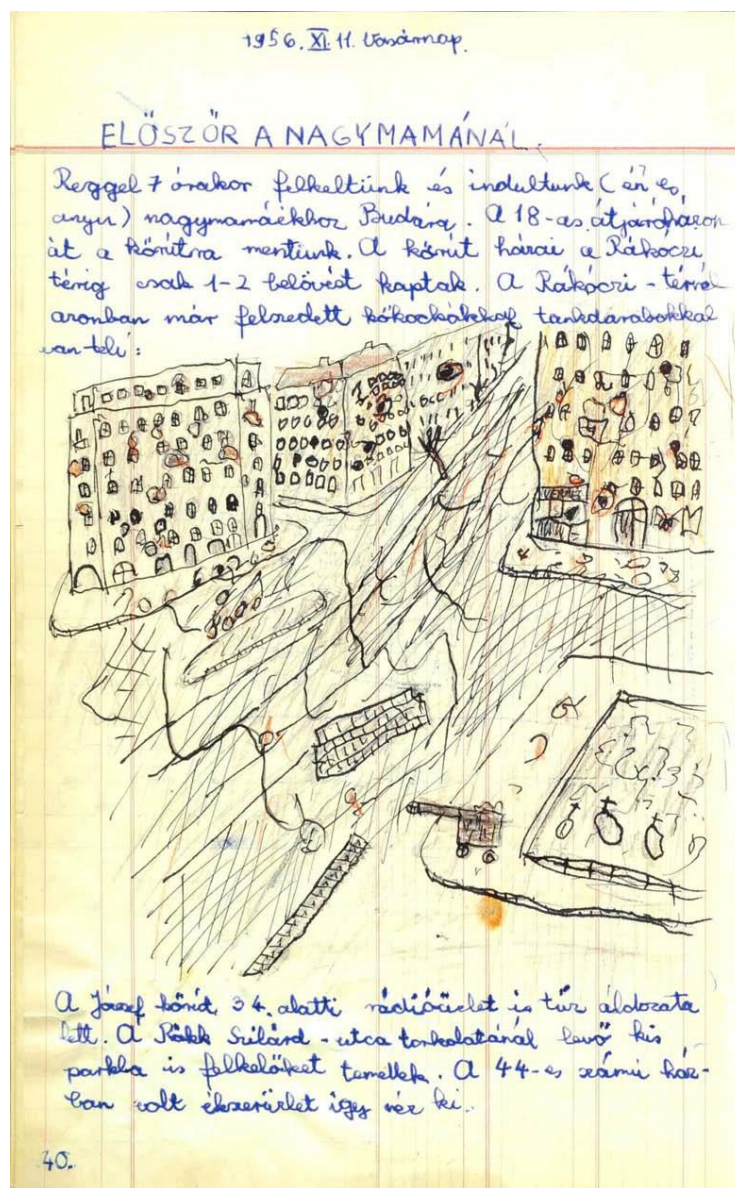


Figure 8

the Hungarian Revolution, through which we can trace what sort of visual information interested the two boys. Based on the thorough examination of the drawings in the two diaries, as well as certain diary entries pertaining to the subject, it appears that the boys first made sketches using graphite pencils, then used black ink for the line art, and finally colored their drawings with colored pencils. In Gyula's case, his initial drawings were eventually abandoned in favor of pasted newspaper or comic book clippings, while János preferred drawing overall. At this point, it is important to note that it would be meaningless to compare the drawings to actual photographs of the events to confirm their veracity. Instead, it might be more productive (and interesting) to treat the drawings as selective constructs of the boys' personalities and imaginations, and examine them in terms of their theme, size, and level of detail (Feuer 2000: 243–373.)

Due to the fact that János Kovács and Gyula Csics were not witnesses of the events of the Hungarian Revolution, they often made their illustrations based on information from adults, which was filtered through their own unique perspectives. Perhaps one of the best examples is János's diary entry from the day after the outbreak of the Revolution, titled "*Utcai harc*" ['Battle on the Street'], which reads as follows: "The police did not want to participate in the battle, so six of them escaped to us from the revolutionaries; Hungarian and Soviet troops were deployed to take them out. Soviet tanks moved in front of the [Radio] Studio, the revolutionaries shot them, and made a hole in the oil tank of one of them" [*A rendőrök a harcban nem akartak részt venni, ezért hatan hozzánk menekültek a felkelőktől való tisztogatásra magyar és szovjet alakulatokat vetettek be. Szovjet tankok vonultak a [Rádió] stúdió elé a felkelők rálövöldöztek, s egynek a tartályát kilyukasztották*] (Kovács 2006: 9). The illustration attached to this description shows a revolutionary shooting a tank from which oil is pouring conspicuously. The same drawing, albeit under a different description, also appears in Gyula's entry from the same date, but in Gyula's case, it was meant to depict an event that occurred in Röck Szilárd Street, where the boys lived: "Afterwards because the tanks could not move on the boulevard they moved down our street and however the [revolutionaries] shot them, so its oil tank was pierced and the street was covered in oil" [*Ezután mivel a tankok a körúton nem tudtak menni a mi utcánkon jöttek és azonban a rálövöldöztek, úgyhogy kilyukadt olajtartálya és az utca csupa olaj lett*] (Csics 2006: 9). As neither boy was witness to these events, they only saw traces of the aftermath, yet there is still a tangible difference between the drawings. Whereas János envisioned the tank and the figure of the firing revolutionary in a blank space, Gyula placed them into Röck Szilárd Street by drawing the plaque of a former hair salon at 5 Röck Szilárd Street into the background (the salon was nationalized under the communist regime, but still bore the name of the former proprietor, Widow Gézáné Aranyosy).

The largest drawings in János and Gyula's diaries were dedicated to the urban landscape of Budapest and its radical transformation in the wake of the Hungarian Revolution. On the rare occasions that the two boys were allowed to go outside, they went on walks in the neighborhood in order to see the aftermath of armed conflicts, and recorded their experiences in the form of illustrations. In this manner, they recorded events that were radically different from their previous experiences of the local environment, including toppled trams used as barricades during armed combat, or the traces of public book burnings. Documenting the aftermath of armed resistance was of special interest to the two boys, as they were able to see the complete transformation of the urban landscape they used to navigate daily. This is especially apparent in

the fact that both preadolescents recorded the damages of prominent buildings, often by drawing them separately as unique sites of interest. At the same time, they also dedicated several drawings to disarmed tanks, or the traces of gunshots on the walls of buildings. For instances, one entry from Gyula's diary reads as follows:

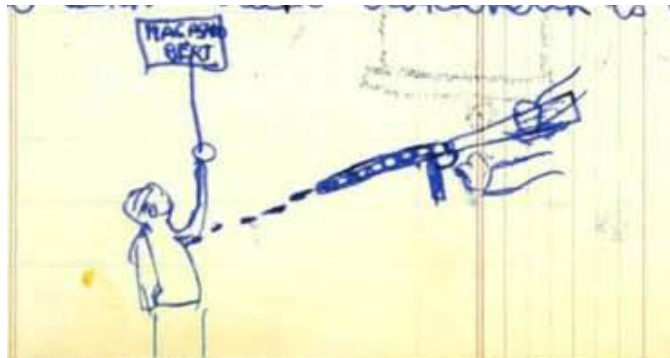
In the afternoon, Mom and I went to Aunt Bözsi's. When we reached Rákóczi Road we were met with a very miserable sight: many hits, collapsed upper floors, torn down electricity lines. The tower of the Rókus Chapel collapsed. Rókus Hospital, despite the big flag with the crimson cross, got shot at five times. The upper floor of the Minőségi ['Quality'] supermarket was completely burned out. On our way back we went down Wesselényi Street and the boulevard. We checked if something happened to the house of Aunt Vali or not. The furniture store on the corner of Wesselényi Street burned out. The house under 4 Erzsébet Boulevard collapsed (Csics 2006: 41).

*[Délután Anyuval elmentünk Bözsi nénihez. Mikor kiértünk a Rákóczi útra nagyon siralmas kép tárult elénk: rengeteg belövés, emeletleszakadás, villamosvezeték leszakadás. A Rókus kápolna tornya ledőlt. A Rókus kórház a két emeletes vörös keresztet zászló ellenére is öt belövést kapott. A Minőségi áruház emelete teljesen kiégett. Visszafelé a Wesselényi utcán és a körúton jöttünk haza. Megnéztük, hogy Vali néniék házának nem e lett baja. A Wesselényi utcasarkán a bútorüzlet kiégett. Az Erzsébet krt. 4. sz. ház ledőlt.]*

According to the diaries of János and Gyula, the boys' impressions of the aftermath of armed resistance in the once familiar urban landscape of Budapest had a fundamental impact on their relationship to the events of the Hungarian Revolution. In the days following the Revolution, the two boys often took walks together, which gave them the opportunity to see the aftermath of events they could not directly witness. Based on their diaries, their first impressions had such a deep impact on the two boys that they dedicated their walks to documenting the routes they had taken, along with all relevant sites of interest, especially tanks, or severely damaged and destroyed buildings. In other words, their visual experiences became one of their most important sources of information, as viewing the traces of armed resistance, interpreting the available visual clues, then evaluating and documenting them allowed the boys to directly confirm the events for themselves. The visual impact of the transformed urban environment is evident not only in the detailed illustrations of the diaries, but also the references to objects related to armed conflicts, which were collected during the boys' "sightseeing tours" in the neighborhood. For instance, one of Gyula's entries from November 1956 informs us that the boys found a bullet casing near the National Museum.

After the repression of the Hungarian Revolution, János and Gyula found less news and fewer events to record in their diaries, which led to a shift from large, detailed illustrations and long diary entries, to smaller drawings and short entries about the children's private lives. In other words, the chronicles started to become typical preadolescent diaries. Following the Revolution, walking around the neighborhood was the boys' greatest source of information and excitement, which is evident from their detailed illustrations. However, once they had documented everything they deemed important, they found less and less to record in their diaries.

Therefore, in the second half of the diaries, which both boys titled "*Magyarország a forradalom után*" ['Hungary after the Revolution'], drawings became fewer and smaller than in the first half, and mostly pertained to the everyday lives of the boys, including Saint Michael's Day, their literary studies, Christmas, or their celebration of New Year's Eve. Even the diary entries were divided into two sections at this point. Under one section, titled "*Mi történt a politikában?*" ['What Happened in Politics?'], they recorded news they had read in the papers, while in the second section, "*Mit csináltam én?*" ['What Did I Do?'], they briefly summarized their daily routines.



*Figure 9*

The walks János and Gyula took in Budapest after the repression of the Hungarian Revolution were not only a form of "sightseeing," but also a means of remembrance by revisiting the most important local sites of armed resistance. For instance, in February 1957, they decided to visit Kőbánya on the outskirts of Budapest, where in January, the Soviet troops opened fire on workers demanding higher wages and the restoration of Imre Nagy as Prime Minister of Hungary. János decided to record the news of the "riots" in an illustration, where a large hand holding a shotgun is firing at a figure holding a picket sign that reads "*Magasabb bért!*" ['Higher Wages!'] (Kovács 2006: 120). It is interesting to note that in terms of proportion, the disembodied hand symbolizing the Soviet troops is much larger than the figure symbolizing the Hungarian workers.

News of the repressed workers' riots in Kőbánya motivated both János and Gyula to visit relevant sites in Kőbánya so they could document the events and their aftermath. According to Gyula, "we went on this walk because there had also been shootings in Kőbánya" [*Ezt a sétát azért tettük, mert Kőbányán is lövöldözések voltak*] (Csics 2006: 123). Meanwhile, János discussed the same issue in greater detail in his own diary, highlighting the fact that these sites of resistance were important "attractions" to the two boys: "We were determined to do this, because we heard that they had blown entire houses apart in Kőbánya, and we haven't seen these yet, and I have never even been to the main square and center of Kőbánya" [*Erre, azért határoztuk el magunkat, mert azt hallottuk, hogy Kőbányán is szétlőtték a házakat, és még mi ezeket nem láttuk, és Kőbánya főterén, és főutcáin, én még nem jártam*] (Kovács 2006: 158).

The boys also visited the site of the workers' riots in Kőbánya, which resulted in diary entries where Gyula primarily made detailed illustrations, while János wrote long and detailed entries of the traces of armed conflict. For instance, one of the main attractions of this particular walk was the building of the Hungarian Royal National Iron-, Steel- and Machine Factory

(*Magyar Királyi Állami Vas-, Acél- és Gépgyárak, MÁVAG*), where Gyula only noted that the building was shot at several times. Meanwhile, János's diary suggests that not only did the boys examine the building closely, but they also made an attempt to count the number of bullet holes on the walls. According to his entry, "on the wall of the MÁVAG machine factory, we saw the traces of three gunshots, which must have happened during the riots of January 11" [... *a MÁVAG gépgyár falán 3 puskalövés nyomát láttuk, ami biztos a január 11-i zavargások alkalmával történt*] (Kovács 2006: 158). The diaries of János and Gyula show that the two boys were primarily interested in the traces of armed resistance in Kőbánya:

...we arrived to Zalka Máté Square, one of the most beautiful squares of Kőbánya. Here, too, we counted several bullet holes on the houses. These allegedly originated from someone firing a shotgun, and so the Russians started shooting all over the place with tanks [...] ...the huge new building on the corner of Kőrösi-Csoma Road also received several shots, it bears the traces of many gun shots (Kovács 2006: 159).

[... *megérkeztünk a Zalka Máté térre, kőbánya egyik legszebb terére. Itt is a házakon több lövést számoltunk meg. Ezek állítólag abból eredtek, hogy valaki egy puskát elsütött, és erre az oroszok tankkal össze-vissza lövöldöztek. [...]*...*a Kőrösi-Csoma út sarkán lévő hatalmas új épület is több belövést kapott, rengeteg puskalövés nyoma látszik rajta...*]

However, when the boys were faced with the dilemma of which building to draw for their daily illustration, they were inspired by (and copied) each other in choosing the most severely damaged buildings. The fact that Gyula often copied or followed the example of János is clear from the entries, as Gyula only managed a pencil sketch for that entry, while János made two lined drawings, which he later colored in pencil. Moreover, Gyula's pencil sketch is completely identical to one of the drawings of János's diary entry from the same day.

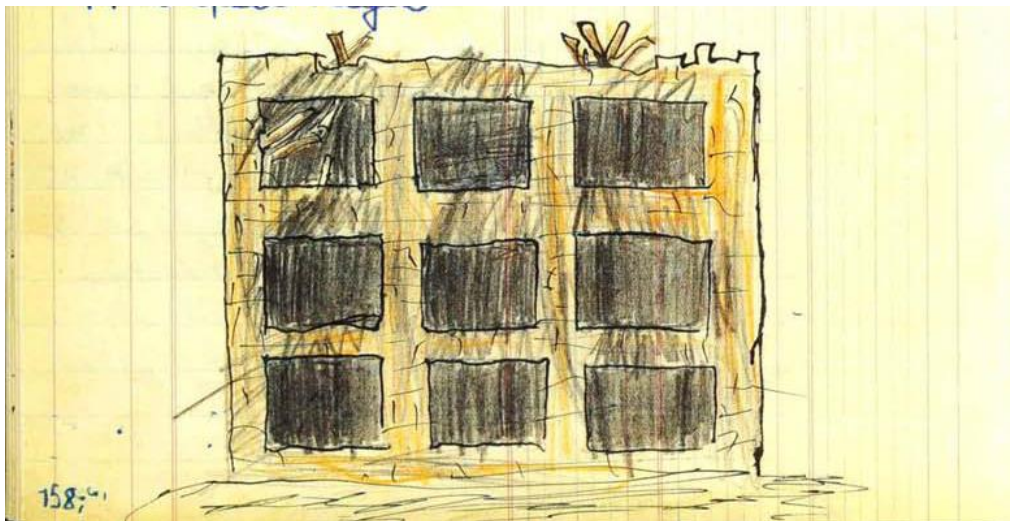


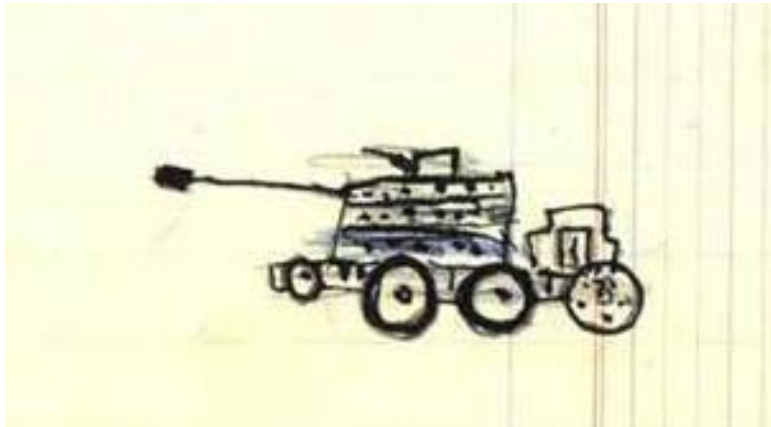
Figure 10

### **The Hungarian Revolution as a Source of Preadolescent Play**

János and Gyula's visual experiences of the events of Hungarian Revolution had a deep impact on them and both attempted to incorporate these external events into their own private lives by basing their play on revolutionary and post-revolutionary events. In other words, since they had become familiar with the traces and aftermath of armed resistance, the imaginations of the two boys primarily revolved around reconstructing the battles waged on the streets of Budapest based on the destruction of the local urban landscape. In fact, the diaries hint at several instances of play revolving around the Revolution, but only document two instances in greater detail.

According to the illustrations of János's diary, he often incorporated external events into his own play, especially those revolving around weaponry and their destructive power, so he not only illustrated several diary entries with drawings of tanks, but also built tanks from toy building sets. In the 1950s, one of the most popular toys in Hungary was the metal building set *Technokid*, which contained various elements that could be assembled in several ways according to the instructions of the toy catalogue. Unlike the plastic building set *Lego*, which was unavailable in the Eastern Bloc at the time, *Technokid* building elements, including all wheels and rims, were made of aluminum, and had to be connected to each other with screws. This building set did not include weaponry, of course, only machines that Gyula and János had assembled several times, including wheelbarrows, road signs, windmills, fast rails, or truck lifts. However, János was more adept at construction than his younger friend Gyula, as evidenced by the fact that he also attempted to construct models that were not included in the toy catalogue. He thus built a tank out of *Technokid* parts, which was especially interesting to him (and of course to Gyula) because after the repression of the Revolution, the Soviet troops started patrolling the streets with tanks, to deter the population from further action against the communist regime. According to the two diaries, the tanks frequently passed through their street at night, which inspired János to make several drawings of tanks for his diary. For example, he concluded his entry written on December 27, 1956 with a schematic drawing of a tank to illustrate his final news of a tank moving down their street, and his spying on it from his home. A few days later, on December 30, János made several constructs from *Technokid* parts, including a tank, which inspired another illustration in his diary. It is likely that Gyula did not see this drawing, as it is one of the few illustrations that are only present in János's diary. János even dedicated a detailed entry to his success in constructing the tank on his own without any instructions available, whereas other constructs usually only received a passing mention: "In the morning, I made a tank from *Technokid*, based on my own blueprints, because it was not included in the sample sheets. The tank did not have a caterpillar track, because I could not find any. However, I made its cannon rotatable. Afterwards, I took the tank to the landlady's to show them. Little Bro liked this very much" [*Délelőtt a Technokidből tankot csináltam, saját terveim szerint, mert az a mintalapokon nem volt benne. A tanknak lánctalpa hiányzott, mert ezt nem találtam hozzá. A csövét azonban forgathatónak csináltam. Ezután a tankot átvittem a házinéniékhez megmutatni. Öcsinek ez nagyon tetszett*] (Kovács 2006: 103).





*Figure 11*

Another instance of János and Gyula incorporating the events of the Hungarian Revolution into their play involved a snowball fight on November 23, 1956, which is also illustrative of certain differences between the two diaries. While Gyula's entry of the day was titled "*Néma tüntetés és a hócsata*" ['Silent Protest and the Snow Battle'], his older friend János titled his entry "*Egy hónapja*" ['It's Been One Month'], which obviously references the Hungarian Revolution. However, both boys dedicated long and detailed entries to the snowball fight in the backyard of the tenement house.

It is worth comparing the interpretations of János and Gyula, and how they narrated the same event of the snowball fight against the girls living at the tenement house. In Gyula's diary, he first called this event a "snowball fight" (*hógolyózás*, the usual term for this game), but later referred to it as a "snow battle" (*hócsata*):

It had been snowing since morning, so the backyard was covered in soft snow. Jancsi [János] attempted to make a snow bomb on a stick, but just as he wanted to throw it, I hit the stick, and the snow fell off. After that came Maja, and the three of us had a snowball fight. Not long after, the girls came down. We decided to hold a snow battle. Jancsi made snowballs from the snow in the backyard, while I made the cover, which consisted of a large basket and a sieve. When all the snow in the backyard was gone [...] Mari and the others made their cover by the front of the garage. They placed a tub against the garage, and even put a basket on top (Csics 2006: 52).

[*Reggeltől már esni kezdett a hó, és így az udvart finom hóborította. Jancsi egy hóbombát akar csinálni egy botra, de én éppen mikor dobni akarta ráütöttem a botra, és a hó leesett róla. Ez után jött Maja, és hárman hógolyóztunk. Nem sokára lejöttek az emeletről a lányok. Elhatároztuk, hogy hócsatát rendezünk. Az udvaron lévő hóból Jancsi hógolyókat csinált míg én meg csináltam a fedezéket, amely egy nagy kosárból és egy rostából állt. Mi kor az udvaron már el fogyott a hó a [...] Mariék a garázs elejénél csinál ták meg a fedezéküket. ők a garáznak támasztottak egy teknőt és a tetejére egy kosarat is tettek.]*



*Figure 12*

János recounts the events above in a similar manner, but also diverges in explaining the adult roles the children adopted during the snowball fight, and the meanings with which they imbued their originally spontaneous play. Gyula's narrative does imply that the snowball fight was inspired by the recent events of October 1956, as he used the term "the snow battle" instead of "a snowball fight" to refer to their game, which suggests that the fight was not only meaningful in some way, but also occurred between two opponents. However, Gyula does not mention who these opponents were supposed to be. It is obvious from both diaries that the snow battle occurred exactly one month after the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution, which not only determined the relevant diary entries, but was so important that János and Gyula again copied each other's illustrations. However, the reinterpretation of the snowball fight to suit the one-month anniversary was completely lost in Gyula's narrative, while János explicitly noted that the children of the tenement house had split into two groups of Hungarians and Russians. It appears that the reinterpretation of the snowball fight as a memorial battle to honor the events of October 23 was János's idea, which meant that he could also determine who would be on the "good" and the "bad" side in battle. He ultimately split the group along gender lines, where he and Gyula became the Hungarians, and the girls became the Russians. According to Gyula's diary, there were several girls present, and since János and Gyula were close friends, it is likely that the large number of girls and the boys' close friendship played a role in assigning their sides in the snow battle.

After the snowball fight was over, the two boys wrote diary entries in which they both attempted to narrate the events as an actual battle by using terms such as "cover," "assault," "battle," or "bomb." Before we read János's version of the snow battle, it is also important to note that in Hungarian, the *golyó* of *hógolyó* ['snowball'] means "orb"—*labda* ['ball'] is used for the inflatable spherical toy, while *golyó* is used for dense spherical objects, like marbles. As such, *golyó* is used for snowballs, as well as pistol or shotgun bullets, and cannonballs. In other words, the use of "ball" in the excerpt, shortened from "snowball" in accordance with the Hungarian original, is meant to evoke the idea of producing ammunition for the battle:

Initially I formed a stick bomb and several balls with my leather-gloved hands. Then Gyuli [Gyula] brought a bucket, and a shovel. [...] I used my leather-gloved hands and Gyuli used the shovel to put snow in the bucket. At this point we quickly called dibs on being the Hungarians, so the girls were the Russians. When the bucket was full we took it behind our cover in the backyard. The cover consisted of two standing crates and a fine mortar sieve. On top of the crates, we placed helmets that belonged to the shelters long ago, so the balls would bounce off them. Mari and the others put window display margarine samples brought by Uncle Radics into their balls, so we also put some in ours. Behind the cover, we turned one part of the bucket of snow into balls. The rest was to be made during the battle (Kovács 2006: 61).

*[Eleinte bőrkesztyűs kezemmel formáltam egy nyélbombát bombát és több golyót. Ekkor Gyuli hozott egy vedret, és egy lapátot. [...] Én a bőrkesztyűs kezemmel, Gyuli pedig a lapáttal tette a vederbe a havat. Itt mi gyorsan lestopoltuk, hogy mi vagyunk a magyarok, a lányok pedig az oroszok. Mikor a veder megtelt fedezékünk mögé vittük az udvarra. A fedezék két felállított ládából, és egy vékonylyukú malterszűrőből állt. A ládák tetejére, a régen az óvóhelyeken volt sisakokat tettünk, hogy a golyók lepattanjanak róla. A Mariék a Radics bácsi által hozott kirakati margarinmintából is tett a golyójukba, ezért mi tett ilyen bele. A fedezék mögött a vödör hó egy részét golyóvá alakítottuk. A többit majd harc közben fogjuk átalakítani.]*

In conclusion, János and Gyula's interpretations of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was the product of preadolescent age characteristics, as well as gender characteristics influenced by the boys' literary experiences of boyhood adventure narratives. The two central elements of the boys' interpretations revolved around weaponry, as well as the destruction of the local urban landscape. By taking walks after the repression of the Revolution to visit important sites of armed resistance in Budapest, the boys were able not only to witness the aftermath of armed conflict, but also to record and document events that they personally did not participate in. János and Gyula's collaborative diary writing had a great impact on the two preadolescent boys, who even incorporated elements of the Revolution into their own play. Two important instances of such event-inspired play included building tanks (the most iconic weapon of the Revolution) from metal toy building sets, and assuming the role of Hungarians fighting against the Russians during a snowball fight turned "snow battle."

## Description of Figures

1. Original External Front Cover of the Diary of János Kovács, as published by the Kieselbach Gallery
2. Internal Cover of the Diary of Gyula Csics. *MAGYAR FORRADALOM 1956. Isten áldd meg a magyart!* ['HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION 1956: O God, bless the nation of Hungary']. The internal cover is almost identical to the external cover of the diary of János Kovács. However, the published version of the diary of Gyula Csics does not contain the original external cover.
3. Diary of János Kovács: *Utcai harc* ['Battle on the Street']. October 24, 1956.
4. Diary of Gyula Csics: *Kitört a forradalom* ['The Revolution Has Started']. October 4, 1956.
5. Diary of Gyula Csics: *Az oroszok megtámadták hazánkat* ['The Russians Have Attacked Our Homeland']. November 4, 1956.
6. Diary of János Kovács: *Így néz ki a Stúdió* ['This Is What the Studio Looks Like']. November 19, 1956.
7. Diary of Gyula Csics: *Séta az üllői út és környékén* ['A Stroll on and around Üllői Road']. January 8, 1957.
8. Diary of János Kovács: *Először a nagymamánál* ['At Grandma's for the First Time']. November 11, 1956.
9. Diary of János Kovács: *Zavargások budapesti gyárakban* ['Riots in Factories in Budapest']. January 17, 1957.
10. Diary of János Kovács: *Séta Kőbányán* ['A Stroll in Kőbánya']. February 8, 1956.
11. Diary of János Kovács: *Az év utolsó előtti napja* ['The Penultimate Day of the Year']. December 30, 1956.
12. Diary of János Kovács: *Egy hónapja* ['It's Been One Month']. November 23, 1956.

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