

## Money Doesn't Buy Happiness

*Ballad of the Whiskey Robber* is a true story about the bank robber, Attila Ambrus. Born in 1967 in Romania, Attila wanted to make a new life for himself and he escaped under a train to Hungary in 1988. Attila worked as a gravedigger, Zamboni driver, and an animal pelt smuggler before he became a bank robber. Before every robbery, Attila would get drunk which gained him the name Whiskey Robber. *Ballad of the Whiskey Robber* is a story about capitalism, national identity and the post-communist in Europe.

The *Ballad of the Whiskey Robber* is intended for adults who would understand the communist era and politics in Europe. The book has a good sense of comedy and tragedy, and is easy to follow, so teenagers can understand the track that Attila took throughout his life as a bank robber. Julian Rubinstein uses his point of view to tell the story of Attila's life in a biography form. A biography is a good way to tell this story, because we can see the views of multiple people in the story. The book was written in chronological order, from beginning to end. Julian Rubinstein is an award winning journalist, author, and a professor of journalism. Rubinstein had the experience to interview and write about Attila and the police officers on the scene.

Rubinstein went to Budapest and wrote about the Whiskey Robber for Details Magazine, but then moved on to write a book about Attila. He spent three years researching the life of Attila Ambrus, and walked in his shoes. In order to primarily track down hundreds of people, including Romanian pelt smugglers, criminals and cops that Attila humiliated, Rubinstein lived in Budapest and Transylvania for eight months. Rubinstein had never lived in Europe before and did not speak a word of Hungarian. He had to use an interpreter for nearly all of his interviews. ✓

Rubinstein also used some secondary sources to understand Hungary and Romania, during the communist era, the society and the history. "In the approximately eleven hundred years since the handlebar-mustachioed Chief Arpad rode into the Carpathian basin in 896 and founded Hungary, the country has been plundered so relentlessly that defeat could be considered the national pastime. In 1241 the Mongolian Tatars swept in, killing a third of the population; the Turks arrived in 1526 on a 150-year bender in which they pounded Hungary into their Ottoman Empire; at the end of the seventeenth century, the Hapsburgs of Austria cut in and swallowed Hungary whole" (Rubinstein 1) Rubinstein also spent five weeks at the Supreme Court

building in Budapest going through all the police and court files from Attila's case. He also had hundreds of Hungarian newspaper stories about the Whiskey Robber. Some of Attila's girlfriends in Transylvania and in Budapest, Rubinstein could not locate. Information about them was from interviews with Attila, Attila's aunt and uncle, and Attila's first book, *En a Whiskeys*.

Rubinstein was asked to write about the Whiskey Robber for Details Magazine; over time he became more interested and decided to write a book about Attila Ambrus in more detail of his life as a robber. Throughout the book Rubinstein told the story from both the police officers and Attila's perspective, back and forth. Rubinstein, over time, had begun to respect him and developed a sympathetic portrait for Attila in the book.

Although this book is non-fiction, the quotes in the book seem falsely recorded. Rubinstein had to get into the skin of people to understand them and figure out what kind of things they would say in their situation. Rubinstein had to put all his information and make it into a story.

*Ballad of the Whiskey Robber* relates to everyday life, and what we hear on the news or read in the newspaper. Everyday we hear about people robbing stores or houses, but we never get to hear the whole story, or the robber's side of the story. For the majority I really enjoyed reading the book, and I would recommend this book to anyone who likes a little bit of action and comedy. This book is definitely worth reading because it explains what lengths people go to make more money. Attila had a couple jobs at one point, but he still didn't make a lot of money, so he began to rob post offices, to buy the things he liked. This book also tells the reader that money does not buy happiness. Attila had ended up stealing a lot of money but he was depressed and unhappy for a long time, and he turned to drinking. Attila eventually became an alcoholic.

interesting!

*Ballad of the Whiskey Robber*, provokes one to think about the criminals side of the story, rather than the victims. We always think that robbers are just horrible people. Attila Ambrus is actually a very nice human being and no one expected him to be The Whiskey Robber. Attila being such a nice man, this makes the book more appealing and interesting and I would say that is one of the strengths of the story. When Attila robs a store or bank, the book gets suddenly more interesting and exciting. I found that when Rubinstein would explain the issues in Hungary or Romania it was slightly boring and dry. Overall, the *Ballad of the Whiskey Robber* is a very entertaining story about the life of the famous gentleman robber.

**Critical Book Review Rubric**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*Kylee*

Criteria		Grade	Comments
<b>Content</b>	<b>Brief Summary:</b> A brief plot summary is offered.	0 1 2 3 <u>4</u>	
	<b>Style and Form:</b> The Review discusses the author's style and form by referring to the text.	0 1 2 <u>3</u>	
	<b>Basis of Research:</b> The Review explains in depth how research was conducted and what resources were consulted.	0 1 2 <u>3</u>	
	<b>Accuracy and Bias:</b> The Review explains by referring to the text whether the writing was accurate or showed signs of bias.	0 1 2 <u>3</u> <u>4</u>	
	<b>Evaluation:</b> The Review provides an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the writing and identifies thought provoking moments.	0 1 2 3 <u>4</u>	
<b>Organization:</b> The Review is properly organized with an introduction, body, and conclusion. Flow is established and maintained.		0 1 2 3 <u>4</u>	
<b>Mechanics:</b> The Review is mechanically sound; spelling and grammar mistakes do not detract from the message.		0 1 2 3 <u>4</u>	
<b>References:</b> Direct references to the book are included to support main ideas.		0 1 2 3 <u>4</u>	
<b>Total</b>		<u>30</u> / 30	