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## THE ANDROPOV FILE

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WHEN Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov was merely head of the K.G.B., his image was that of the stereotypic hard-line "police boss." His major accomplishment, according to C. L. Sulzberger, writing in *The New York Times* in 1974, was "a fairly successful campaign to throttle the recent wave of liberal dissidence." Nor was he viewed as much of an admirer of foreign culture. In 1980 Harrison E. Salisbury wrote in the *Times* that Andropov "has been working for three years on schemes to minimize the mingling of foreigners and natives. . . . Now Andropov's hands have been freed to embark on all kinds of repressive measures designed to enhance the 'purity' of Soviet society." Completing this picture of a tough, xenophobic, wave-throttling cop, Andropov was physically described, in another *Times* story, as a "shock-haired, burly man."

Andropov's accession to power last November was accompanied by a corresponding ennoblement of his image. Suddenly he became, in *The Wall Street Journal*, "silver-haired and dapper." His stature, previously reported in *The Washington Post* as an unimpressive "five feet, eight inches," was abruptly elevated to "tall and urbane." The *Times* noted that Andropov "stood conspicuously taller than most" Soviet leaders and that "his spectacles, intense gaze and donnish demeanor gave him the air of a scholar." *U.S. News & World Report*, on the other hand, reported that "he has notoriously bad eyesight and wears thick spectacles."

His linguistic abilities also came in for scrutiny. Harrison Salisbury wrote, "The first thing to know about Mr. Andropov is that he speaks and reads English." Another *Times* story took note of his "fluent English." *Newsweek* reported that even though he had never met a "senior" American official, "he spoke English and relaxed with American novels." Confirmation of his command of English appeared in *Time*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *The Washington Post*. *The Economist* credited him with "a working knowledge of German," and *U.S. News & World Report* added Hungarian to the growing list. And this quadrilingual prodigy was skilled in the use of language, too:

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*Time* described him as reportedly "a witty conversationalist," and "a bibliophile" and "connoisseur of modern art" to boot. *The Washington Post* passed along a rumor that he was partly Jewish. (Andropov was rapidly becoming That Cosmopolitan Man.)

Soon there were reports that Andropov was a man of extraordinary accomplishment, with some interests and proclivities that are unusual in a former head of the K.G.B. According to an article in *The Washington Post*, Andropov "is fond of cynical political jokes with an anti-regime twist. . . . collects abstract art, likes jazz and Gypsy music," and "has a record of stepping out of his high party official's cocoon to contact dissidents." Also, he swims, "plays tennis," and wears clothes that are "sharply tailored in a West European style." Besides the Viennese waltz and the Hungarian czarda, he "dances the tango gracefully." (At a press conference within hours of Andropov's accession, President Reagan, asked about the prospects for agreement with him, used the unfortunate metaphor, "It takes two to tango.") *The Wall Street Journal* added that Andropov "likes Glenn Miller records, good scotch whisky, Oriental rugs, and American books." To the list of his musical favorites, *Time* added "Chubby Checker, Frank Sinatra, Peggy Lee, and Bob Eberly," and, asserting that he had once worked as a Volga boatman, said that he enjoyed singing "hearty renditions of Russian songs" at after-theater parties. *The Christian Science Monitor* suggested that he has "tried his hand at writing verse—in Russian, as it happens, and of a comic variety."

The press was less successful in ferreting out more mundane details of his life. Where, for example, was he born? *The Washington Post* initially reported that he was "a native of Karelia," a Soviet province on the Finnish border. *The New York Times* gave his birthplace as the "southern Ukraine," which is hundreds of miles to the south. And *Time* said he had been born in "the village of Nagutskoye in the northern Caucasus." His birthplace was thus narrowed down to an area stretching from Finland to Iran. There was also some vagueness with respect to his education. *The Wall Street Journal* reported that he had "graduated" from an unnamed "technical college," but *U.S. News & World Report* had him "drop out" of Petrozavodsk University, while *Newsweek* awarded him a diploma from the Rybinsk Water Transportation Technicum, a vocational school