

“A Foil’d European Revolutionaire”: The American Literary Renaissance Meets Lajos Kossuth

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The events of the revolutionary wave of 1848-49 in Europe were closely observed in the United States. The early republican phase of the revolutions met with the sympathy of the American public, which took pride in the Old World’s apparent imitation of the American type of democracy. Particularly the fight for national self-determination and unity in Italy, Bohemia and Hungary was supported with enthusiasm, as it reminded Americans of their forefathers’ fight for independence. In a few months, however, they were in for a bitter disappointment: conservatism and the restoration of monarchical rule prevailed in all countries — and soon only the Hungarians and Italians still stood fighting desperately for their independence. The American press rejoiced when the Hungarian republic was proclaimed, especially when they learned that the American Declaration of Independence was used as a model when wording its Hungarian counterpart.¹ The American government was seriously considering the recognition of Hungary as an independent state, but by the time Special Emissary Dudley A. Mann arrived in Vienna, the fate of the Hungarian freedom fight had been sealed by the coalition forces of the Habsburgs and the Russian Tzar: the Hungarian troops surrendered on August 13, 1849.

Lajos Kossuth, the charismatic leader of the Hungarian freedom struggle, became the emblem of the fight for national self-determination, as well as that of political and constitutional reforms and lifting feudal burdens. Massachusetts Governor George S. Boutwell wrote about Kossuth’s growing popularity in the United States: “Hungary was only a marked spot on the map of Europe, and the name of Kossuth, as a leader in industrial and social progress, had not been written or spoken on this side of the Atlantic; but [after 1848]

there was no other person of a foreign race and language of whose name and career as much was known."²

The collapse of the Hungarian dream of freedom and democracy came as a shock to the American public. Kossuth, fleeing Hungary in order to escape Habsburg retaliation, was soon transformed from the Hero of Democracy to the Martyr of Democracy, further elevating his popularity overseas.³ Despite his internment in Asia Minor in the Ottoman Empire — which was aimed at protecting him from the Habsburgs who were demanding that the Sultan extradite him — American newspaper readers did not lose sight of Kossuth. In politics, the so-called Young America movement urged that the United States should reconsider her traditional isolationist foreign policy, in order to, as historian Henry Meyer put it, “assume the form of a revised doctrine of Manifest Destiny whereby the onward tide of civilization (with all the millennial and perfectionist overtones) was most felt in these revolutionary advances of freedom and self-determination.”⁴

Congress passed a joint resolution authorizing the president to provide transportation for Kossuth and his group and invite him to the United States as the “Nation’s Guest.” Accepting the invitation (with the permission of the Sultan who was relieved to finally get rid of the Hungarian exiles, since they caused diplomatic tension), Kossuth boarded the *U.S.S. Mississippi* on September 10, 1851, first traveled to Britain, and after a highly successful one-month tour, set foot on American soil on December 6, 1851.

The Kossuth craze in America knew no boundaries: the country had not seen anything comparable to his visit since the similar reception welcoming Lafayette in 1824-25. The Kossuth hat became the fashion of the day, a newly-founded county in Iowa was named after the Hungarian revolutionary, along with thousands of babies, as their parents demonstrated their sympathy for Kossuth by naming them after him. In order to “translate the nation’s sympathy into economic and military support for the European rebels,” as historian David S. Spencer interpreted his mission,⁵ Kossuth toured the country extensively, was the honoured guest of hundreds of receptions and banquets, and gave some 600 public speeches in front of huge audiences.⁶ He was invited to deliver a speech at the joint session of Congress, the second foreign citizen to do so, again Lafayette being the first, and he was also received in the White House by President Fillmore.

Despite the interest and sympathy of the overwhelming majority of the American public, Kossuth failed to achieve his major goal: to secure American intervention in a renewed Hungarian freedom fight he was sure would commence in the near future in order to prevent the intervention of Russia. Such American diplomatic intervention did not materialize — the isolationist tradi-

tions of American foreign policy proved to be too strong, for the time being at least. Kossuth also made many enemies: Catholics saw the anticlerical revolutionary in him, and Southerners were convinced that this champion of freedom was secretly planning to bring about the end of slavery in America. In vain did Kossuth refuse to interfere in American domestic politics, all he "achieved" was that even the abolitionists turned against him for keeping silent about slavery: both William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Philips condemned him for this. Having lost not only the support but the interest of the American public as well, on July 14, 1852 the disappointed Kossuth left the United States for good and returned to Britain.

Although more divided than the general public, the American intelligentsia, particularly the literary circles, showed great interest in both his figure and the cause he represented.⁷ Kossuth's *Tour de America* coincided with the *anni mirabiles* of the American literary renaissance, roughly the first half of the 1850s when such literary masterpieces were published as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* (1850), Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851-52). New England was the geographical center of the literary movement, and, since Kossuth visited the region between April 22 and May 18 in 1852, it constituted the most significant point of encounter between the Hungarian revolutionary leader and the representatives of the Romantic Period in American literature. What follows is a study how some of the key figures of the American literary renaissance related to the cause of Hungarian freedom and to the persona of Kossuth.⁸

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Harriet Beecher Stowe is undoubtedly the most significant representative of the movement in popular women's domestic romances that coincided with the classical American Renaissance. Her *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly*, published in 1852, is among the most influential books ever written in American history. It was the best-selling novel of the 19th century, and the second best-selling book of that century, surpassed in the number of copies sold only by the Bible. Stowe's sentimental novel had a profound effect on how African-Americans and the institution of slavery were perceived; it definitely gave a momentum to the abolitionist movement fighting against the territorial expansion of the "peculiar institution" in the short run, and hoping to rid the country of the blemish of slavery in the long

run. The influence of the book on shaping American public opinion in the ever growing sectional strife between free and slave states was considered so significant that upon meeting Stowe in the first year of the Civil War. Abraham Lincoln reportedly greeted her: “So, you are the little lady who started this great war.”⁹

Harriet Beecher Stowe was a strong supporter of Kossuth and the cause of Hungarian liberty. She took special interest in the “great controversy now going on in the world between the despotic and the republican,” which she called “the great, last question of the age.”¹⁰ Her brother, Henry Ward Beecher, the prominent Congregationalist clergyman at Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, put his church at Kossuth’s disposal. When introducing Kossuth, he called on his congregation to “Bear witness to me how often from this place prayers have been offered and tears shed when we have heard of the struggles of Hungary.”¹¹ He supported other Hungarian refugees as well: Col. Nicholas Perczel and his wife, for instance, stayed at Beecher’s house for several weeks and the clergyman assisted Perczel in setting up a small academy where he taught German and French to upper-class students.¹²

On October 23, 1851, when it seemed certain that Kossuth would visit the United States, Beecher published his “Liberal Meditations – Kossuth and Cotton” in the religious anti-slavery newspaper, *The Independent*. This was an imaginary conversation between the American clergymen and the Hungarian politician in which Beecher “caustically depicts the absurdity if not hypocrisy of pretending to honor the champions of Liberty in other lands while upholding Slavery and such acts as the Fugitive Slave Law in our own,”¹³ as the abolitionist journalist Gamaliel Bailey, editor of the *National Era*, pointed out. To illustrate this dichotomy, Beecher makes the clergymen tell Kossuth that he, as a white man, has the right to run away, but they deny this right to African-Americans.¹⁴

As an ardent abolitionist, Harriet Beecher Stowe also regularly contributed to *The Independent*. She wrote her maiden essay in defence of Kossuth when the *New York Observer* attempted to ruin Kossuth’s reputation by presenting his exorbitant tavern bills with the conclusion: “Like DIVES in the Gospel, he fares sumptuously every day, while his poor country, like LAZARUS, lies bleeding, licked by dogs.”¹⁵ In her essay, Stowe defended Kossuth whom she called the “great Apostle and martyr of Liberty and Christianity” and scorned the “petty scandalmongering” of the *Observer*.¹⁶

Stowe was working on the second half of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* during Kossuth’s tour in America (the story was being serialized in the *National Era*), and one of her primary goals was to gain sympathy for the African-American

race in general, and those in bondage in particular. In an eye-opening attempt to prove the humanity of the coloured people, she made extensive use of comparisons, most of which are just as readily understandable for today's readers as they were for her contemporaries. Just to mention one example, the universal nature of the parallel may easily be seen between Mrs. Bird losing a child and the brutal separation of little Harry, sold down the river by his master, from his mother, Eliza. Other comparisons, however, are not so straightforward for today's reader who lacks background knowledge of history: among them are the novel's two allusions to the ill-fated Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence in 1848.

The first allusion to Hungary occurs when Phineas Fletcher, a Quaker, leads George Harris and his runaway group to a secret mountain hideaway to protect them from the slave hunters, Tom Loker, Marks, his partner, and the justices.¹⁷ When one of the justices orders the fugitives to surrender, George refuses. He replies that he would not accept the authority of the laws of the country which does not accept him as a citizen, and takes a vow to fight for his freedom. Stowe demonstrates the gallantry of George Harris, who has "just made his declaration of independence," by comparing him to Hungarian freedom fighters:

If it had been only a Hungarian youth, now, bravely defending some mountain fastness the retreat of fugitives escaping from Austria into America, this would have been sublime heroism; but as it was a youth of African descent, defending the retreat of fugitives through America into Canada, of course we are too well instructed and patriotic to see any heroism in it; and if any of our readers do, they must do it on their own private responsibility. When despairing Hungarian fugitives make their way, against all the search-warrants and authorities of their lawful government, to America, press and political cabinet ring will applause and welcome. When despairing African fugitives do the same thing, it is – what is it?¹⁸

This comparison might not be obvious today, but surely it was for contemporary readers. As Larry J. Reynolds notes, Stowe "drew upon contemporary interest in Kossuth and the Hungarian cause to add unity and force to her novel" and she "used revolution in Europe as an ominous backdrop for the novel, one portending the possible apocalyptic uprising of the oppressed masses at home as well as abroad."¹⁹

The second allusion to Hungary in the novel is in connection with what many Americans, including Stowe, considered the greatest achievement of the Hungarian revolution: the fact that Hungarian noblemen voluntarily lifted the

feudal burdens of their peasants. The abolitionists clearly saw an obvious parallel between Hungarian serfdom and American slavery. In the novel, the benevolent St. Clare follows the Hungarian example when, after the death of Eva, he decides to free all his slaves:

“Do you suppose it possible that a nation ever will voluntarily emancipate?” said Miss Ophelia.

“I don’t know” said St. Clare. “This is a day of great deeds. Heroism and disinterestedness are rising up, here and there, in the earth. The Hungarian nobles set free millions of serfs, at an immense pecuniary loss; and, perhaps, among us may be found generous spirits, who do not estimate honor and justice by dollars and cents.”²⁰

The liberation of slaves becomes just as sacrificial an act as the emancipation of serfs by Hungarians noblemen: St. Clare is stabbed shortly after his “great deed.” His heroism is linked to George’s heroism as well as to the contemporary political events in Hungary.

One of Stowe’s main concerns was the idea that individuals would willingly sacrifice some of their personal and collective interests for the common good, and she set them, as well as the American Founding Fathers, as examples for the present generation. In her *House and Home Papers* (1865), Christopher Crowfield (Stowe’s pen name) says: “The women of Hungary and Poland, in their country’s need, sold their jewels and plate and wore ornaments of iron and lead. In the time of our own Revolution, our women dressed in plain homespun and drank herb-tea.”²¹

Stowe was disappointed when she saw that the enthusiasm of the Americans had evaporated, and Kossuth left the country without achieving his goals, particularly when she read the allegations in the press that Kossuth had pocketed American donations and used them for his personal purposes. When she traveled to Europe in 1853, she made sure to visit Kossuth in his “obscure lodging on the outskirts of London,” as she noted in her diary, and remarked: “I would [sic] that some of the editors in America, who have thrown out insinuations about his living in luxury, could have seen the utter bareness and plainness of the reception room, which had nothing in it beyond the simplest necessities.”²²

Similarly to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow also joined the Kossuth frenzy and could not understand those who remained untouched by the importance of the issues at stake and the grandeur of Kossuth’s personality. On October 25, 1851, he recorded in his journal “[It is] disheartening to see how little sympathy there is in the hearts of young men

here for freedom and great ideas. Instead of it, quibbling and criticising style and phrase of Kossuth's address to the democracy of France."²³ He followed the events of Kossuth's visit in New York City with keen interest, and, having read his first speeches in America, acknowledged: "Kossuth's power of oratory and the pleading of a sincere heart," yet, referring to the nation-wide mania surrounding the Hungarian governor's tour, he grumbled: "why need people go clean daft?"²⁴ Longfellow was well aware of the major tenet of American foreign policy in the past half a century or so, and that this was the greatest obstacle standing in the way of the Hungarian politician; "He [Kossuth] has begun here with a stirring speech, but will he have power enough to make us abandon an old policy of non-intervention?" — pondered Longfellow in his letter to John Foster.²⁵

It was in April 1852 in Boston that Kossuth and Longfellow met for the first time. Longfellow recorded this in his diary: "We were struck with his dignity. He received us very cordially; took my hand in both of his and said: 'Though I am not a man of genius myself yet I know how to appreciate one. I am very glad to see you.'"²⁶ He was also impressed by the two-hour speech the Hungarian politician delivered at Faneuil Hall: "Wonderful man! to speak so long and so well in a foreign tongue. He was not impassioned this evening but rather calm and historic."²⁷

On the occasion of Kossuth's visit to Harvard, Longfellow, who had held a professorship there since 1836, was one of the hosts. Kossuth gave a short speech in front of the students and the members of the faculty, and received a long applause. Longfellow was deeply moved by the tragedy of the Hungarian people and recorded his sympathy for Kossuth and his fellow refugees: "What a sad fate! I am sorry for all the unhappy ones; but I have more pity for those, who, torturing themselves in their exile, see their homeland only in dreams."²⁸ He remained perhaps the most ardent friend and supporter of the Hungarians in Boston: he signed up for János Kalapsza's riding school and made a large purchase of Hungarian wine from a Hungarian refugee engaged in importing Tokaji wine. (This wine was his personal favourite, and he kept mentioning it even 20 years later.)²⁹

The defining moment of Kossuth's tour in New England was his visit to Concord in Massachusetts, the scene of the first battle of the American War of Independence. The city was not only of historical importance but it rose to being probably the most important literary center in the country as well when Ralph Waldo Emerson moved there in 1835 to become its most prominent citizen and the leading figure of a group of Transcendentalists, with Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry David Thoreau among them. No wonder that Kossuth's visit to the city affected all three of them, although in quite different ways.

Emerson, as his son, Edward, recalled, “to all meetings held in Concord for the cause of Freedom, spiritual or corporal, felt bound to give the sanction of his presence.”³⁰ It went without saying that he would act as a host for the Hungarian exile, and he delivered the speech welcoming the illustrious guest in one of the shrines of American history. He expressed his sympathies with the Hungarian cause and reminded Kossuth that “everything great and excellent in the world is in minorities.”³¹ Referring to the mission of the Hungarian revolutionary, he pointed out: “The man of freedom, you are also the man of Fate. You do not elect, you are also elected by God and your genius to the task.”³² Nathaniel Hawthorne, highly critical of the press ruled by the Kossuth-mania, congratulated Emerson for “having said the only word that has yet been worthily spoken to Kossuth.”³³

In his response to Emerson, Kossuth made it clear that it was men and arms what he sought in America: “The doors and shutters of oppression must be opened by bayonets, that the blessed rays of your institutions may penetrate into the dark dwelling-house of oppressed humanity.”³⁴ Emerson entertained the Hungarian guests in his house for a short time after the festivities, and then Kossuth left Concord for good. For the rest of his life, Emerson referred to the Hungarian revolutionary as “one of the great men of the age.”³⁵

In contrast, Nathaniel Hawthorne remained disinterested in the Kossuth-craze. In 1852, in his letter to Edwin P. Whipple, a Massachusetts essayist, he wrote: “Are you a Kossuthian? I am about as enthusiastic as a lump of frozen mud, but I am going to hear him at Charlestown, tomorrow, in hope of warming up a little.”³⁶

His son, Julian, however, was eager to see the Hungarian freedom fighters. Half a century later he recalled having seen Kossuth as a child: “The excitement was not confined to persons of mature age and understanding; it raged among the smaller fry, and every boy was a champion of Kossuth.”³⁷ He also noted the extraordinary nature of Kossuth’s tour in America: “Not since the visit of Lafayette had any foreigner been received here with such testimonials of public enthusiasm, or listened to by such applausive audiences,” yet he also pointed out to the relative fruitlessness of it: “certainly none had ever been sent home again with less wool to show for so much cry.”³⁸

His father nevertheless remained apolitical and this conservative political quietism characterized him in the turmoil surrounding the “Nation’s Guest.” His work, *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), nicely illustrates his aloofness: he has the unreliable narrator, Miles Coverdale, say:

Were there any cause, in this whole chaos of human struggle, worth a sane man’s dying for, and which my death would benefit, then –

provided, however, the effort did not involve an unreasonable amount of trouble -- methinks I might be bold to offer my life. If Kossuth, for example, would pitch the battle-field of Hungarian rights within an easy ride of my abode, and choose a mild, sunny morning, after breakfast, for the conflict, Miles Coverdale would gladly be his man, for one brave rush upon the levelled bayonets. Farther than that, I should be loath to pledge myself.³⁹

In a later phase of his life, however, Hawthorne moved beyond this ironic allusion to Kossuth and the Hungarian cause. In 1855, serving as American consul in Liverpool, he was frequently approached by Hungarian refugees living in Britain, and in a letter to Catharine Sedgwick he expressed his wish that the President would find “some way of affording [them] our national protection,” since “these exiled Hungarians are in a very bad condition, being absolutely without a country.” He added that several Hungarians visited him, “having never been to America, with only the plea that they have no claims on anybody else, and therefore must have claims on an American consul.” (Indeed, during the first half of the 1850s, many Forty-Eighters decided to migrate to America.)⁴⁰ Hawthorne concluded: “All exiles — all poor and oppressed peoples — claim our country for their own and most certainly they do honor us thereby,” yet he admitted that, as a consul, he found “this kind of citizenship very difficult and perplexing to deal with.”⁴¹

The sympathy he expressed in this letter, nevertheless, proved to be short-lived. In the “Consular Sketches” of his *Our Old Home* (1863) he recalled that [to his Consulate] “came a great variety of visitors [...] especially the distressed and downfallen ones like those of Poland and Hungary, Italian bandits, (for so they look) proscribed conspirators from Old Spain[...] in a word, all sufferers, or pretended ones, in the cause of Liberty.” As for his own attitude towards the refugees, Hawthorne wrote that he was not of a “proselytizing disposition, nor desired to make his Consulate a nucleus for the vagrant discontents of other lands.”⁴² It is clear, however, that whatever little sympathy he felt towards the refugees, as a consul he had very limited room to provide actual assistance.

Among the literary figures responding to Kossuth, Henry David Thoreau was without doubt the most rejective to the fuss and feathers surrounding the Hungarian revolutionary’s American tour. Unlike his mentor and friend, Emerson, Thoreau believed that the news of the European revolutions intruded too extensively into the American media. In his journal he grumbled, “It is a strange age of the world this, when empires, kingdoms, and republics come a-begging to our doors and utter their complaints at our elbows. I cannot

take up a newspaper but I find that some wretched government or other, hard pushed and on its last legs, is interceding with me, the reader, to vote for it, — more importunate than an Italian beggar.”⁴³ He addressed the events of contemporary politics and their corrupting influence: “You cannot serve two masters[...]To read the things distant and sounding betrays us into slighting these which are then apparently near and small. [...] All summer and far into the fall I unconsciously went by the newspapers and the news, and now I find it was because the morning and the evening were full of news to me. I attended not to the affairs of Europe, but to my own affairs in Concord fields.”⁴⁴

Thoreau’s rejection of Kossuth widened his separation from Emerson. Thoreau remained disinterested even when the Hungarian freedom fighter visited Concord. He wrote in his *Journal*: “This excitement about Kossuth is not interesting to me, it is so superficial. It is only another kind of dancing or of politics. Men are making speeches to him all over the country, but each expresses only the thought, or the want of thought, of the multitude.... So superficial these men and their doings, it is life on a leaf or a chip which has nothing but air and water beneath.”⁴⁵ Thoreau attended neither Kossuth’s lecture nor the reception Emerson held in honour of the Hungarian politician. In the midst of the excitement in Concord, all he noted in his journal was: “P.M. — Kossuth here.”⁴⁶ Even a decade later he dismissed the Kossuth phenomenon and its significance downright: “For all the fruit of that stir we have the Kossuth hat.”⁴⁷ Still, in the Appendix of *The Maine Woods* Thoreau actually listed an “Old Kossuth hat” among the essential items to be taken for an excursion in the Maine woods longer than 12 days.⁴⁸

Despite Thoreau’s refusal to get involved in political issues and his rejection of the Kossuth mania, his philosophical thinking was very much influenced by the media attention the Hungarian politician received. He returned to the manuscript of *Walden*, which he had earlier declared unpublishable, and started to revise it. The writing of the fourth draft of his masterpiece coincided with Kossuth touring the country, and the newly-added segments clearly reflected his denunciation of the public obsession with European revolutions as well as his indifference towards contemporary politics: “I delight to come to my bearings not walk in procession with pomp and parade... but to walk even with the Builder of the Universe, if I may, — not to live in this restless, nervous, bustling, trivial Nineteenth Century, but stand or sit thoughtfully while it goes by.”⁴⁹ His observation from a distance, “from a place to sit far above men and their doings,” is dramatized in *Brute Neighbors*, the classic battle of ants, which was arguably the most famous addition to the manuscript in 1852. Describing the two opposing sides in the conflict, “the red

republicans and the black despots or imperialists,” Thoreau clearly referred to contemporary events: during Kossuth’s visit to Washington the American press was extensively debating the very nature of European revolutions in general and that of the Hungarian War of Independence in particular. Thoreau observes the combating ants under a magnifying glass, and the isolated picture of the black “imperialist” ant severing the head of the red “republican” ants is a clear reference to the fate of the European republican movements. He, however, did not know, or care for, either the cause of the ant war or the outcome of it, and this ironic presentation, as Larry J. Reynolds points out, is “diminishing the importance, not of the ants, but of the men they resemble.”⁵⁰

Thoreau was not the only one who refused to support Kossuth: there were some who heavily criticized him, even among the Transcendentalists. Orestes Brownson, a New England preacher, publicist, and editor of the *Boston Quarterly Review*, was very much against the Revolutions of 1848 in general — he saw them as “work[s] of one vast satanic conspiracy, hatched by modern liberalism and aiming to destroy law, order and religion,” as his biographer Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. put it.⁵¹ He considered European revolutionaries “foes of Christianity,” who “shouted ‘liberty! liberty!’ although true liberty lay in obedience to God.”⁵²

In light of the above, it is no wonder that Brownson had a very low opinion of Kossuth, who, he wrote, “advocated conspiracy against all legitimate authority, against all religion except an idolatrous worship of what is blasphemously called the God-People or the People-God, against all morality, all law, all order, and indeed society itself.”⁵³ He was fiercely against the official welcome of Kossuth to the United States. He was convinced that Kossuth was insignificant and would not leave a lasting impression: “We shall have a good time with him, feast ourselves, have our own jollification, let him laugh a little at us in his sleeve while we laugh a good deal at him in ours, and then — cast him off.”⁵⁴ The attention Kossuth received during his visit outraged him: “Our people have shown their usual bad taste in attempting to make him the object of their hero-worship.... in Kossuth they have selected a second rate revolutionist.”⁵⁵

Displaying a surprisingly conservative disposition for a mind-nineteenth century American intellectual, and thinly veiled hatred for European revolutionists, Brownson was more than willing to jump on the bandwagon of anyone attacking Kossuth and his followers. The public opinion in the United States was generally favourable for Kossuth, yet, as time passed, the initial enthusiasm faded/waned. Public celebrations honouring him served different purposes: some saw a new prominent U.S. citizen in him, others hoped to capitalize on the prospect of advancement of republicanism in

Europe. Kossuth, however, made it clear that he did not intend to settle in America (to “end his days in philosophical retirement,”⁵⁶ as many newspapers predicted) and that he represented the cause of Hungarian freedom only. The disappointment of Kossuth’s former supporters, diversely motivated as they were, added up to open attacks against him in a series of articles. Beside the previously-mentioned charges of isolationists, slave-holders, and, ironically, abolitionists, several articles expounded on Kossuth’s perceived arrogance. They quoted, among others, Attorney General John C. Crittenden, who, referring to Kossuth and other European Forty-Eighters, warned his audience: “Beware of the introduction or exercise of foreign influence among you [Washington’s words], We are the teachers, and they have not or will not learn, and yet they come to teach us!”⁵⁷

Having read some articles in the American press accusing Kossuth and the Hungarian revolutionaries of nourishing hopes of creating a nation state in which all other ethnic groups were to be subjected to the Magyars, Brownson became even more hostile towards them. He interpreted the events of 1848–49 in Hungary as follows: “The Magyars were the oppressors, not the oppressed, and while they were seeking to render themselves independent of the empire, they were fighting to keep eight millions of Hungarians of other races in subjection to themselves.”⁵⁸

Brownson was largely influenced by the anti-Kossuth articles of Francis Bowen, a philosopher and educator, who was reviewing Auguste de Gérando’s⁵⁹ *De l’esprit public en Hongrie, depuis la révolution française* [The Hungarian public spirit since the French Revolution] and concluded that the Hungarian freedom struggle was more a war of races than a Hungarian fight for liberty. He argued that the Magyars declared their independence only after Emperor Francis Joseph had granted a liberal Constitution allowing Croats and other races privileges equal with those of Hungarians and they “assumed the position of a nation striving to impose or to continue the yoke upon the necks of their own dependents, instead of laboring to throw off a yoke from their own shoulders.”⁶⁰ Bowen concluded that Kossuth was nothing but a dictator.

Bowen underestimated the strength of the pro-Kossuth sentiments of the public, and his articles prompted many prominent Americans to criticize him. Mary Lowell Putnam wrote an article for the *Christian Examiner* in response to Bowen. In this she defended Kossuth and the Hungarians claiming that there had not been racial discrimination in Hungary as far back as the rule of King St. Stephen.⁶¹ Bowen in his reply called Putnam ignorant and accused her of misrepresenting her sources.⁶² This article, however, turned Mrs. Putnam’s brother, the Romantic poet and social reformer James Russell Lowell,

against him. Similarly to his sister, Lowell also showed great concern over the cause of Hungarian freedom, and as early as January 1849 he called for American financial assistance to be given to Hungary, which he considered to be "a debt owed by the Lovers of Freedom to those who had fought for it."⁶³ He published a series of articles in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard of New York* and a poem as a tribute to Kossuth, as well. In this he makes the Hungarian champion of liberty say about his mission: "I was the chosen trump where through/ Our God sent forth awakening breath;/ Came chains? Came death? The strain He blew/ Sounds on, outliving chains and death."⁶⁴

The outraged Lowell wrote two articles in the *Boston Daily Advertiser* in defence of his sister, harshly attacking Bowen.⁶⁵ This and Bowen's notorious anti-Kossuth sentiments probably played a major role in his tentative appointment as McClean Professor of History at Harvard not being approved by the Board of Overseers, making him, as Lean Howard put it, the "first professor of history in the United States to lose his post because the conclusion to which he was led by his historical perceptions did not correspond with those indicated by popular prejudice."⁶⁶

Like Lowell and Mrs. Putnam, John Greenleaf Whittier, the influential Quaker poet and ardent abolitionist, endorsed the cause of Hungarian liberty and enthusiastically supported Kossuth. He was, however, very explicit about the controversial nature of welcoming a foreign champion of liberty while passing the Second Fugitive Slave Act and upholding the institution of slavery in his own country. In his poem, *Kossuth* (1851), he wrote: "Who shall give/ Her welcoming cheer to the great fugitive?/ Not he who, all her sacred trusts betraying,/ Is scourging back to slavery's hell of pain/ The swarthy Kossuths of our land again!"⁶⁷

Thoreau was not entirely right about the Kossuth phenomenon being quickly forgotten in the United States. The image of the Hungarian freedom fighter was imprinted in the American public mind, and Kossuth was listed among the greatest politicians and orators of the age. His name became inseparable from the idea of fighting against oppression worldwide; so much so, that when slavery was finally abolished by the 13th Amendment (1865), Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, an educator and Transcendentalist writer, saw it as the very fulfilment of Kossuth's efforts: "His 'Future of the Nations' is realized — even in his life-time. America is now truly the land of the brave and the home of the free," she wrote to Horace Mann.⁶⁸ She actually referred to Kossuth's lecture delivered in the Broadway Tabernacle in New York on June 21, 1852, before his departure for Europe in which he warned that "as long as the principles of Christian morality are not carried up into the international relations — as long as the fragile wisdom of political exigencies

overrules the doctrines of Christ, there is no freedom on Earth firm, and the future of no nation sure."⁶⁹

Similarly to Peabody and Harriet Beecher Stowe, Walt Whitman remembered Kossuth even after he had left America and the general public lost sight of him. In 1856 he wrote a poem "To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire," in which he regretfully acknowledged the failure of the European republican revolutions, obviously referring to Kossuth himself: "The great speakers and writers are exiled, they lie sick in distant lands,/ The cause is asleep, the strongest throats are choked with their own blood." Despite the apparent hopelessness, Whitman's message to those having fought for their freedom is optimistic: "Liberty is to be subserv'd whatever occurs; That is nothing that is quell'd by one or two failures, or any number of failures."⁷⁰ Whitman kept mentioning Kossuth among the greatest historical figures of the nineteenth century for the rest of his life. In "Broadway Sights" of *Specimen Days* (1882) he listed the Hungarian politician among the most influential people he had had the chance to see: "I knew and frequented Broadway — that noted avenue of New York's crowded and mixed humanity, and of so many notables. Here I saw, during those times, Andrew Jackson, Webster, Clay, Seward, Martin Van Buren, filibuster Walker, Kossuth, Fitz Greene Halleck, Bryant, the Prince of Wales, Charles Dickens, the first Japanese ambassadors, and lots of other celebrities of the time."⁷¹

* * *

Lajos Kossuth's tour in the United States is undoubtedly one of the most significant events in the history of Hungarian-American links and contacts, which largely contributed to shaping the American public perception of Hungary. It marked the culmination of the responses the revolutionary wave of 1848-49 in Europe enticed among American political and cultural leaders as well as ordinary people. The overwhelming majority of these responses were of positive nature in the two latter groups, whereas the political reactions, despite the enthusiasm of the Young America movement, often reflected unreceptiveness and exaggerated caution. Intellectuals, among them literary circles, paid special attention to the European revolutions. This is often ignored although, as has been demonstrated, the European events had a profound impact on American thinking, and the European revolutionary, of which the figure of Kossuth became the perfect embodiment, was frequently depicted in literary works. This adds an intriguing international dimension to the American literary renaissance, as the question necessarily arises: what made the Forty-Eighters appealing in the eyes of American writers and poets?

Besides the obvious and simplistic presentation of the European revolutionary conflicts as those between "Good" and "Evil" and the necessary parallels many Americans drew between their own Founding Fathers and the European freedom fighters, many intellectuals hoped to find the values they feared had long been lost, and which they had earlier considered to be genuinely American. As a consequence, their reactions to the European revolutions were often triggered by their own worries about the political and social problems of the United States, providing an explanation why the initial enthusiasm and support Kossuth (as the key representative of European Forty-Eighters) had received, seemed to fade away by the second half of his American tour, and why some became disappointed either with him or with the cause they believed he represented.

Regardless whether the responses were positive or negative in literature, the European revolutions were by all means "quicken[ing] the American literary imagination and shaping the characters, plots and themes,"⁷² as Larry Reynolds points out. The image of Kossuth and the Hungarian freedom fighter in particular captured the American literary imagination, and this can arguably be the most lasting influence of Lajos Kossuth's visit on the American cultural sphere.

NOTES

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¹ The Hungarian Declaration of Independence followed the logic of the Declaration of Independence of the United States by listing the grievances of the Hungarian people caused by the mistreatment of power on the part of the Habsburgs. Its first sentence imitates the starting sentence of the Preamble of the Constitution of the United States. For the English translation of the original text of the original document see, Henry M. De Puy, *Kossuth and His Generals* (Buffalo: Phinney & Co., 1852), 202-225.

² George Sewall Boutwell, *Reminiscences of Sixty Years in Public Affairs*. 2 vols. (New York, 1902), 1:184.

³ Kossuth himself emphasized the self-sacrifice of all Hungarian freedom fighters. In a letter written from internment in August 1850 he wrote about his fellow-

exiles: “They are firmly and unitedly resolved to continue in the *thorny path of martyrdom* — a convincing proof that their love of country is still pure and steadfast.” Quoted in (among many other newspapers) *Albany Evening Journal*, September 3, 1851, 2.

⁴ Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 416-417.

⁵ Davis S. Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America: A Study of Sectionalism and Foreign Policy, 1848-1852* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1977), 10. Hereafter cites as Spencer, *Kossuth and Young America*.

⁶ For a detailed analysis of Kossuth’s American tour see, John H. Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America, 1851-1852* (Buffalo, NY: East European Institute, 1973).

⁷ In his Bibliography on Kossuth’s American tour, Joseph Szeplaki found that some 250 poems, dozens of books, hundreds of pamphlets, and thousands of editorials were written in response to his visit. See, Joseph Szeplaki, *Louis Kossuth, the Nation’s Guest: A Bibliography on his Trip in the United States, December 4, 1851- July 14, 1852* (Ligonier, PA: Bethlen Press, 1976).

⁸ It is noteworthy that this subject has avoided the attention of even Hungarian scholars, although the literary scene of the era has been thoroughly studied. The definitive source to consult: László Ország and Zsolt Virágos, *Az amerikai irodalom története* [A history of American literature] (Budapest: Eötvös József Könyvkiadó, 1997), 67-102.

⁹ For a long time, this anecdote was taken as carved in stone both by Lincoln and Stowe scholars. Contemporary Lincoln scholars like Stephen B. Oates, David Herbert Donald and Mark Neely seem to agree that its historical validity is questionable. For a detailed analysis see, Daniel R. Vollaro, “Lincoln, Stowe, and the ‘Little Woman/Great War’ Story: The Making, and Breaking, of a Great American Anecdote,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 30, 1 (Winter 2009): 18-34.

¹⁰ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin; Presenting the Original Facts and Documents upon which the Story is Founded* (1854, rpt, New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968), 237-238.

¹¹ Quoted in Lyman Abbott, *Henry Ward Beecher* (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1903), 214.

¹² Stephen Beszedits, “The Life and Times of Nicholas Perczel,” *Vasváry Collection Newsletter* (2006/1) (35) http://www.sk-szeged.hu/statikus_html/vasvary_newsletter/06jun/perczel.html (Accessed on May 5, 2010).

¹³ *The National Era*, November 6, 1851, 1.

¹⁴ Henry Ward Beecher, “Liberal Meditations – Kossuth and Cotton,” *The Independent*, October 23, 1851.

¹⁵ Reprinted in *New York Daily Times*, May 18, 1852, 2. The story is about a rich man (‘dives’ in the Latin Bible) and a poor beggar, Lazarus. The rich man lived in luxury, while the beggar was starving and the sores covering his whole body were

licked by dogs. When both of them died, the rich man got into Hell to spend his afterlife in agony, whereas the angels carried Lazarus to Heaven to Abraham's side.

¹⁶ Quoted in Joan D. Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe. A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 227.

¹⁷ The hotly-debated Second Fugitive Slave Act was part of the Compromise of 1850 and declared that each runaway slave was to be taken back to their masters. Any person assisting a runaway slave was subject to a 1,000-dollar fine or 6 months' imprisonment.

¹⁸ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962), 203. Hereafter cites as Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

¹⁹ Larry J. Reynolds, *European Revolutions and the American Literary Renaissance* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988), 153-154. Hereafter cited as Reynolds, *European Revolutions*.

²⁰ Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 321.

²¹ *The Writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe. House and Home Papers* Vol. VIII. (New York: Houghton and Mifflin, 1896), 102.

²² Charles Edward Stowe, *Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1891), 237.

²³ October 25, 1851. Quoted in Robert L. Gale, *A Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Companion* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 2003), 134. Hereafter cites as Gale, *Longfellow Companion*.

²⁴ December 19, 1851. Quoted in Gale, *Longfellow Companion*, 134.

²⁵ Longfellow to John Foster, December 7, 1851. In: *The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 3: 317. Hereafter cites as *Letters of H.W. Longfellow*.

²⁶ Longfellow's Journal. April 30, 1852. Manuscript. Quoted in *Letters of H.W. Longfellow*, 3:342.

²⁷ Samuel Longfellow, *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (S.I.: s. n., 1992), 221.

²⁸ The original was written in Italian: "Di tutti is miseri m'incresce; maho maggior piet  di coloro, i quali, in esiglio affliggendiosi, vedono solamente in sogno la patria loro!" Longfellow to Charles Sumner. May 13, 1852. *Letters of H.W. Longfellow*, 3: 344.

²⁹ Frank Preston Stearns, *Cambridge Sketches* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), 23.

³⁰ Edward Waldo Emerson, *Emerson in Concord* (Boston and New York, 1890), 87.

³¹ Quoted in Gay Wilson Allen, *Waldo Emerson* (New York: Viking Press, 1981), 563.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Ralph L. Rusk (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 4: 292.

³⁴ Cited in *The New York Weekly Tribune*, May 22, 1852, 6.

³⁵ Reynolds, *European Revolutions*, 160.

³⁶ Hawthorne to Whipple. May 2, 1852. *Letters, 1843-52*, eds. Thomas Woodson et al (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1984), 16:536.

³⁷ Julian Hawthorne, *Hawthorne and His Circle* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1903), 48.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1852), 2: 284-285.

⁴⁰ For a detailed analysis see, István Kornél Vida, "Extra Hungariam Non Est Vita, Si Est Vita, Non Est Ita: The Hungarian Diaspora in the Antebellum United States," in *European Migrants, Diasporas, and Indigenous Ethnic Minorities*, ed. Matjaz Klemencic and Mary N. Harris (Pisa: Plus-Pisa University Press, 2009), 37-53.

⁴¹ Unpublished letter quoted in: James L. Machor, "Hawthorne and the Hungarians: A New Hawthorne Letter," *The New England Quarterly*, 77, 4 (December 2004): 646-647.

⁴² Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Our Old Home* (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1864), 4-5.

⁴³ *The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau* eds. Torrey Bradford and Francis H. Allen, 14 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), 2:101-102. Hereafter cited as Thoreau, *Journal*.

⁴⁴ January 20, 1852, Thoreau, *Journal*, 3: 208.

⁴⁵ May 4, 1852, Thoreau, *Journal*, 4: 15-16.

⁴⁶ Thoreau, *Journal*, 4: 16.

⁴⁷ "Life Without Principle" *The Thoreau Reader. Annotated Works of Henry David Thoreau*. See: <http://thoreau.eserver.org/lifewout.html> (Accessed on July 2, 2010).

⁴⁸ Henry David Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*. See online: <http://thoreau.eserver.org/woodsapx.html#6> (Accessed on July 5, 2010).

⁴⁹ *Walden, and other Writings of Henry David Thoreau* (Ed. Brooks Atkinson) (New York: Modern Library, 1950), 293.

⁵⁰ Reynolds, *European Revolutions*, 169; For a study on Thoreau working on the successive versions of Walden see, J. Lyndon Shanley, *The Making of Walden* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 30-31.

⁵¹ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Orestes A. Brownson* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1939), 207.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Quoted in Henry Francis Brownson, *Orestes A. Brownson's Middle Life From 1845-1855* (Detroit: Brownson, 1899), 422.

⁵⁴ *Brownson's Quarterly Review* (January, 1852), 139.

⁵⁵ *Works of Brownson*, 16: 213.

⁵⁶ *Daily Scioto Gazette*, October 18, 1851. Quoted in Spencer, *Kossuth and Young America*, 49.

⁵⁷ Nathan Sargent, *Public Men and Events from the Commencement of Mr. Monroe's Administration, in 1817, to the Close of Mr. Fillmore's Administration, in 1853* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1875), 2:381.

⁵⁸ *The Works of Orestes A. Brownson* (New York: AMS Press, 1966), 16:213. Hereafter cited as *Works of Brownson*.

⁵⁹ August De Gerando (1819-1849) married the Hungarian Countess Emma Teleki. De Gerando settled in Hungary and published a series of articles about the country in the French newspaper *Le National*. He supported the Hungarian revolution of 1848, and fought in the battle of Győr.

⁶⁰ Francis Bowen, "The War of Races in Hungary," *The North American Review*, Vol. 70, No. 146, (January 1850): 80. Bowen's work is riddled with historical inaccuracies. In reality, Hungary's position within the empire was determined by the reform legislation passed by the Hungarian Diet in April 1848, signed into law by the Emperor Ferdinand V. After the abdication of Ferdinand V, the new emperor, Francis Joseph I, refused to be bound by the April Laws, for which Hungarians did not consider him to be legitimate king until the Compromise of 1867. On March 4, 1849 Francis Joseph I issued his Olmütz Constitution, in which he indeed guaranteed certain individual rights, yet made an attempt to turn the various ethnic groups of the Empire against the rebelling Magyars. Eventually it never went into effect. For a detailed study see, István Deák, *The Lawful Revolution: Louis Kossuth and the Hungarians, 1848-49* (London: Phoenix Press, 2001).

⁶¹ Mary Lowell Putnam, "The North American Review on Hungary," *Christian Examiner*, (March 1851): 279-352.

⁶² *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 28, 30, 1851.

⁶³ Lean Howard, *Victorian Knight-Errant. A Study of the Early Literary Career of James Russell Lowell* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1952) Hereafter cited as Howard, *Victorian Knight-Errant*.

⁶⁴ *The Complete Writings of James Russell Lowell* (New York: AMS Press, 1966), 16:283-284.

⁶⁵ "Mr. Bowen and The Christian Examiner," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, (December 28, 1851 and January 2, 1852).

⁶⁶ Howard, *Victorian Knight-Errant*, 305.

⁶⁷ *The Complete Writings of John Greenleaf Whittier* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1894), 4:72.

⁶⁸ Letter to Horace Mann, Jr. February 25, 1865. In *Letters of Elizabeth P. Peabody*, ed. Bruce A. Ronda (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 325.

⁶⁹ Louis Kossuth, *The Future of Nations: A Lecture* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1854), 39.

⁷⁰ Walt Whitman, "To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire," in *The Portable Walt Whitman*, ed. Michael Warner (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 153.

⁷¹ Walt Whitman, "Broadway Sights" in *Specimen Days*. See online, <http://www.bartleby.com/229/1012.html> (Accessed on June 15, 2010).

⁷² Reynolds, *European Revolutions*, 207.