KOSSUTH, CLAUSEWITZ AND THE HERO'S JOURNEY

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The Hero's Journey is a universal pattern. Although it can be infinitely varied, the basic form is both universal and constant. Kossuth first crossed the threshold when he entered national politics. After his imprisonment for disloyalty and sedition, he emerged as a national martyr and hero. He became and remained a revolutionary. He never reached the resurrection stage, made no compromise, and became a symbol for independence and liberty.

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Joseph Campbell, in his book *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, states that, "Wherever the poetry of myth is interpreted as biography, history, or science, it is killed." Such was the fate of Lajos Kossuth as he traveled Britain and America between 1851 and 1852 in hopes of resuscitating a dead revolution. Here was a person who befits the romantic age in verse, appearance, and sentiment. Like the mythical figures of Gilgamesh, Odysseus, Aeneas, and Beowulf, Kossuth too embarked upon an adventure that mortals must undertake in their lives in order to become heroes. It was no different for Lord Byron earlier in the century: a veritable Don Quixote chasing windmills in the southern Balkans. Unfortunately, Kossuth's adventure becomes one of failure because of his unwillingness to accept change and his reluctance to compromise.

Kossuth's journey is more than history. It is symbolic like the man himself. It is as poignant as those journeys taken by literary heroes. Historians, for Alexander Dumas, simply defend points of view and select heroes who help them in this endeavor. Novelists, however, are impartial, they do not judge, they show.² Kossuth's life is as metaphoric as Edmond Dantes in Dumas' novel *The Count of Monte Cristo*, where the hero escapes from his unjust imprisonment to seek revenge against those responsible for his fate. It is as dramatic as Sir William Wallace and Robert the Bruce in Jane Porter's *The Scottish Chiefs*, the story of a courageous and honorable man and the ideals and country for which he died. Kossuth

too is a tragic hero because, in spite of his Herculean efforts, his journey must end in failure.

Many authors write about the tragic hero. Aristotle, however, is still the "major authority on tragedy." For Aristotle, in order to be a tragic hero the individual must have a major flaw. Usually the flaw is *hubris*, or excessive pride.³ Kossuth's pride is evident in his failure to compromise on an independent Hungary. His travels in Britain and America and his life as an exile reveal that he would never be willing to accept that his cause, his *raison d'état* had ended.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán referred to Kossuth's failure on Monday, 11 February 2002 in a speech on European Security at Tufts Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Orbán told his audience that 150 years ago the governor of Massachusetts welcomed Kossuth to Boston and said, "The moment is near when we will welcome Hungary to the family of republican, constitutional, sovereign states." Orbán remarked that "this moment took 138 years to arrive." Kossuth's tragedy goes beyond his own quixotic behavior. As István Deák states, "Kossuth was a child of his age: a liberal and nationalist for whom the two ideologies were not incompatible." Unfortunately for Kossuth, his ideas were incompatible in an age of growing imperialism and empire. He was attempting an impossible task: the creation of a nation-state without the assistance of a Great Power. Moreover, such powers were all empires involved in either the expansion or maintenance of their empires, and were not interested in an independent Hungary or a republic unless it served their purposes.

Initially it may seem unfair to consider Kossuth, an international hero, and a champion of freedom and liberty, along with poets and mythological figures. Such figures, however, are more emblematic of the hero. The British poet Siegfried Sassoon continued his journey far beyond the trenches of World War I. He, along with such literary men as Robert Graves, Max Plowman, Cecil Lewis, and Edmund Blunden, were all involved in the Battle of the Somme in 1916. Their literary legacies are a testament of their journeys, which did not cease with the end of hostilities. This generation produced "most of the novels and poems and plays that constitute Western literature" in the twentieth century.⁶ For this generation the "romance of war died on the Western Front." Whereas the romantic spirit allowed poets and artists to stretch the limits of creative expression, it was disastrous for statesmen.8 Kossuth is different in that he is a hero who refuses to complete his journey. His journey is as tragic as Byron and Wilfred Owen, both of whom die before their journeys are completed. Inevitably, Kossuth's failure was a result of his "inability to face the world as it was instead of as it might have been."9

According to Vogler, "The pattern of the Hero's Journey is universal, occurring in every culture, in every time. It is as infinitely varied as the human race itself and yet its basic form remains constant ... The ideas embedded in mythol-

ogy and identified by Campbell ... can be applied to understanding almost any human problem."¹⁰ In the beginning the hero finds himself or herself in the ordinary world, such as Hungary before the Revolution of 1848. Afterward our "hero is presented with a problem, challenge, or adventure to undertake." At this time the hero is confronted with a call to adventure. In the case of Kossuth, he must leave the comfort of his everyday ordinary world. It is here that he is confronted with a challenge of modernizing and democratizing the Hungarian nation and state. It is here where our hero will initially be reluctant to answer the call. Kossuth then abandons his ambition "to make a name for himself as a scholar or a playwright," and turns to politics. ¹² It is then that Kossuth is introduced to his mentors, his "Merlin-like character(s) ... (who) prepare the hero to face the unknown." It is in the Reform Diet of 1832-36 where Kossuth is encouraged by István Széchenyi's example, and the radicalism of Baron Miklós Wesselényi and the poet Ferenc Kölcsey. 14 Now Kossuth is ready to cross the first threshold; he is committed to the adventure and ready to face the challenge and consequences posed by the journey. It is here when he "encounters new challenges and tests, makes allies and enemies, and begins to learn the rules" of the game. 15 Kossuth's Parliamentary Reports and more radical Municipal Reports bear witness to his entrance into this stage. They help to lead him to the next important stage, his approach to the inmost cave, the dangerous place or lair of his enemy. He is now Theseus entering the labyrinth of the Minotaur, or in modern mythology, Luke Skywalker entering the Death Star in Star Wars. Upon entering this place our hero will cross the second major threshold. 16 Kossuth enters it when he is arrested and imprisoned for three years for disloyalty and sedition. He successfully passes this test as he emerges from prison with the reputation of "a national martyr and hero." ¹⁷ Now Kossuth is prepared to face his ordeal, the revolution. The experiences of the preceding stages have led up to this moment. It is here where our hero "must die or appear to die so ... (he) can be born again."18

The Revolution of 1848 made Kossuth an international celebrity and a voice of freedom. Revolution was a new force in the modern world. It heralded new "challenges and announce(d) the coming of significant change." Unfortunately, for the remainder of his life he was unwilling to abandon his role as a revolutionary. That role had taken him from a well-known Hungarian politician in the Habsburg Empire to world prominence. The revolution became his purpose in life. He could never accept that there was no role for him in the future unless he changed and showed willingness to compromise with his former enemies. Mazzini, for example, learned that lesson during his revolution in Italy. He realized that the creation of Italy had to take precedence over a republic. Once Italy was created, the republic would become the next objective. These were stages of his hero's journey. Kossuth failed to realize that the revolution was only a stage in his journey. It is only one stop on the call to adventure for our hero. As a consequence of his failure

to move forward, Kossuth never reaped his reward. The reward, or the seizing of the sword, is the next stage of the journey. "The 'sword' is knowledge and experience that leads to greater understanding and a reconciliation with hostile forces." It is here when Kossuth fails in his reconciliation by not coming to grips with the realities of his failed revolution. Kossuth never makes the decision to follow the road back, to once again return to the ordinary world. It is a stage when "the hero realizes that the Special World must eventually be left behind." In Judaism and Christianity, this stage is "coming down from the mountain top," as Moses did with the tablets of the Law, or as Christ did after the transfiguration. In Kossuth's case, it is abandoning the revolution for compromise.

Kossuth's mistake was his decision to take his revolution to England and American instead of attempting to resurrect the April Laws of 1848 within the context of the Habsburg Empire. Ironically, as early as September 1848, Kossuth offered to resign as long as the April Laws and national self-determination were guaranteed.²² By failing to give up the revolution, he never reached the resurrection stage where the hero must be "reborn and cleansed in one last Ordeal ... before returning to the Ordinary World."²³ It is during this stage where Kossuth was tested to see if "he really learned the lesson of the Ordeal." It is a stage where a hero has new insight. It was a stage that Abraham Lincoln, an early supporter of Kossuth and his Hungarian cause, entered when he spoke at Gettysburg of America having "a new birth of freedom." Lincoln spoke of the creation of a new America after the Civil War. He realized the war had changed him and his nation. It was an important stage in his journey. Kossuth was never transformed into a new being because of his experiences. He never returned, as Campbell deemed necessary, with the elixir and ultimate victory. Kossuth was destined to become a symbol, a metaphor for independence and liberty for Hungarians and oppressed people throughout the West. Although an international hero, he experienced personal failure. In the end he never returned with the Holy Grail, or the knowledge of what he learned would be useful to creating a more democratic Hungary. He becomes the tragic hero who helps to initiate Hungary on a path that will lead to the Compromise of 1867, the Trianon Peace of 1920, the post-World War II Soviet domination, and eventually to freedom following the collapse of Communism in 1989 (that Prime Minister Orbán spoke of in his speech). Kossuth's war eventually became what Clemenceau believed to be "a series of catastrophes which result in victory."25

While considering Kossuth's dilemma, I recalled an article that I read years ago on Clausewitz that focused on Napoleon at Waterloo. It included a quote from a Belgium peasant who watched the emperor pass by on his way to battle. The peasant was suppose to remark that if Napoleon's face had been a clock one would be too frightened to look at it to tell the time. It is a poignant remark, an appropriate metaphor. After all, how practical or useful is a clock that cannot be used to tell

time? It is worthless. It fails to change. Consequently, it has no functionality. So it was with Napoleon. Here was someone whose revolutionary approach to war and politics had dominated the continent for over a decade. He seemed to be a titan wrestling with the gods. Yet he failed to recognize that his opponents, particularly the Prussians under vom Stein, Scharnhorst, and Gneisenau, in order to defeat the French, had been practical enough to adopt many of the changes Napoleon himself had initiated. They had been willing to change and adapt to the new realities. When Napoleon took Moscow in 1812, he fully expected Alexander to make peace. After all, that is what the tsar had done following his previous defeats at the hands of the French. This time, however, Alexander showed he had learned from his previous mistakes. Eventually it would be the conservative coalition that would march down *Des Champs Élysées* and across the fields of Belgium. Like Napoleon, Kossuth failed to understand that the game had changed. He failed to adapt to the new reality. Time had inextricably passed him by.

Clausewitz, like Kossuth, was a revolutionary. However, he was pragmatic. He understood the reality of great power politics and the balance of power. He knew that "revolutionary movements will seek to turn themselves into revolutionary governments." What impressed Clausewitz and the other reformers was that the French Revolution gave Napoleon the weapons he needed to defeat the old monarchies. It was those weapons they wanted to introduce to Prussia, not the revolution. Change, modernization was his goal, not the destruction of the Prussian state. He was not willing to use military power against the state for revolutionary ends.

Clausewitz's journey reached its threshold in 1811 when he spoke out against the treaty with the French as being a surrender that was both unheroic and politically unwise. With some thirty officers he resigned his commission in the Prussian army. Afterward he enlisted in the Russian army and continued his fight against Napoleon. According to Peter Paret, Clausewitz "carried the revolutionary message that under certain conditions a Prussian officer's conscience or political judgement took precedence over his oath of obedience." Even though the course of events would justify his actions, Clausewitz would be branded a revolutionary and deemed untrustworthy by the king and court conservatives. This label proved significant as the state became more conservative and reactionary after the French threat subsided.

Clausewitz understood the primacy of state power and the significance of the international balance of power. He knew that public opinion was not a reflection of state interest. During the Polish revolt in 1830 Clausewitz wrote his reaction to this revolution in two articles, "On the Basic Question of Germany's Existence," and "Europe since the Polish Partitions." Clausewitz determined that state power had primacy over ideology and moral sympathy. ²⁹ He believed that support for the Poles should not be seen as a substitute for a state's political interest. ³⁰ Even though

revolutions "resulted from internal dissension, most had international implications."³¹ Clausewitz analyzed revolutions from a foreign policy perspective. He was concerned about "the threat they posed to Prussia's security and to the balance of power."³²

It is in revolution that both Kossuth and Clausewitz approached Campbell's "black moment" or Ordeal. It is here where they encountered both supreme wonder and terror. It is here where our heroes pass through "the belly of the whale." Clausewitz passed the test on two occasions. Prussia was strengthened and the European balance was maintained. But Clausewitz paid a steep price for his principles. His journey resulted in the loss of both the ambassadorship to the Court of St. James and his life. Kossuth, however, never fully understood that his revolution would have to take on an evolutionary cycle to be successful. It would not end with defeat in 1849. On the contrary, it would take until the compromise of 1867 to fulfill the revolutionary mission. Initially the revolution's goals were the April Laws of 1848. Even after their removal with Hungary's defeat and the establishment of the Olmütz or Stadion Constitution, it was always possible to achieve their objective with patience and compromise. This fact is evident by the accomplishments of both Ferenc Deák and József Eötvös.

Kossuth made two tragic mistakes on his journey. The first and most catastrophic mistake was not granting democratic and autonomous concessions to the minorities once he assumed power during the revolution. His second mistake was when he dethroned the Habsburg Monarchy on 14 April 1849 in Debrecen. This decision ruled out a compromise with the monarchy, while costing Kossuth the support of many conservatives, loyalists, and monarchists within Hungary. This group was the most important and influential one that respected and supported the monarchial system.

After Hungary's defeat in 1849, Kossuth became an exile and embarked upon one adventure after another to keep alive his dream of an independent Hungary. Early in his emigration he reached the conclusion that the monarchy was obsolete, and that change, or his vision of change, was necessary if Hungary was to survive. The emergence of a democratic Hungary required a give and take, but as long as he had power within the emigration community, compromise with the Habsburgs was out of the question. Kossuth was left with two other alternatives. The first was to seek assistance from the West to keep Russia from intervening in Hungary's future struggle for independence. This solution would exclude the Danubian Principalities and Serbia from participation in the struggle, although their assistance would be considered quite valuable to the Hungarian cause. The support of the national minorities within Hungary would be awarded with the creation of a federated democratic state that would welcome their participation in its processes. The Croats, because of their historic constitution and tradition of statehood, would be given the opportunity for independence if they desired. Ironically, in the years

before the revolution, Kossuth advocated independence for Croatia.³⁵ But Fiume with a corridor to the sea had to be given to Hungary as a price for this independence.

Kossuth's second alternative was to reach an accommodation with the other nations in the Danubian basin for joint cooperation in creating a confederation for the mutual protection and benefit of each national group. It took Kossuth time to realize that he had to look beyond the Hungarian problem and include the other nations in a solution that could guarantee an independent and democratic Hungary. He needed to broaden his horizon and realize that the issues involved the whole basin and not just Hungary. Unfortunately, Kossuth advocated these solutions from a position of political weakness. He was not in a position to implement such a policy. He advocated such solutions when he was not faced with the political responsibilities for their implementation. More important, both these solutions could only be successful if Britain and France supported them.

Although Kossuth supported accommodation with the nationalities while in exile in Turkey, he abandoned such cooperation when he left for Britain and America. At this stage of his journey he hoped to use public opinion to influence the governments of both states to accept his principle of intervention for non-intervention. Unlike Clausewitz, Kossuth mistakenly believed that public support would eventually translate into government policy in the western democracies. He was hoping that an Anglo-American alliance could be used to counter-balance the alliance of despots and prevent Russia from aiding Austria during his second war of Hungarian independence.

Up to the Crimean War, Kossuth's speeches illustrate that he firmly believed Hungary was strong enough to secure its independence as long as Russia was not allowed to interfere. He believed that he was dealing from a position of strength. He needed neither the nationalities nor an association with them to achieve the Hungary he desired. Cooperation with the nationalities would mean giving them territorial concessions within historic Hungary. All Kossuth needed was to convince both Britain and America to accept his vision and Hungary would be as good as free. This task was as unrealistic as it was immense: try and force public opinion to convince the Palmerston government, which acquiesced in the Russian suppression of Hungarian independence in 1849, to violate its own self-interest and adopt Kossuth's idealistic vision; then to convince Americans, on the verge of Civil War themselves, to abandon their isolationism and ally themselves with their main antagonist against the alliance of despots in Europe.³⁶

Despite Kossuth's preparations, Britain and America would not join forces in an alliance. Besides its impending domestic crisis, the United States had differences with Great Britain in South America. Americans felt that Britain was its main nemesis. And in actuality, they had more to fear from Britain than any other power. It is also important to realize that America's closest great power friend was

Russia, which desired a strong America to counterbalance British power in the Mediterranean. Both America and Russia saw the main threat to their expansive policies as coming from Britain. What Kossuth failed to realize was that reality took precedence over ideals. Democracy also played second fiddle to world politics.

Afterward, neither the Crimean War, the Italian Wars of Unification, nor the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 would bring about Kossuth's dream of independence. He and his cause were used as pawns in international politics. Failing once again, Kossuth renewed his cooperation with the nationalities that he had abandoned once he left Turkey in 1851. On 22 May 1867, Kossuth sent his famous "Cassandra" letter to Deák, criticizing the impending agreement with the Habsburgs. Ironically, others, inside of Hungary, would use Kossuth for their own political objectives. His letter was important in silencing the remaining objections of the landed nobility to the Compromise of 1867.

Edmund Burke said "that a State without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation." Deák used the legality of the Pragmatic Sanction and the April Laws as the basis for negotiations. Kossuth's rejection of a compromise with the Habsburgs was of valuable assistance to both parties — to Francis Joseph and the Hungarian Diet — in reaching a final settlement. Kossuth, considering himself a patriot, realized that the Compromise did not deal adequately with the nationality question, besides not coming to any workable accommodation with the surrounding states. He felt that the next conflict would be initiated in Hungary as a result of these failures. More important, it would end with the destruction of historic Hungary. In the end, the Compromise embodied most of the legal and humanistic rights that Kossuth had been demanding for the Hungarians in the years before and including 1848. It was another stage in Hungary's road to independence and democracy.

Independence from Austria, however, was not an option. It should not have been Kossuth's objective. He failed to realize that Hungary's often-tarnished sovereignty was partly a consequence of its unfortunate geographical position. Austria's existence was essential to the Eastern Question and the European power balance. The formula for the nineteenth century included empire and great power politics. Austria was much too valuable to this equation to risk its replacement on a series of weak successor states or a loosely constructed and unreliable confederation. As far as the great powers were concerned, there was no place for an independent Hungary in this equation. For Britain, the maintenance of the status quo in the Balkans depended on Austria's ability to counterbalance that of the Russians. An independent Hungary, or a confederation, could in no way replace Austria's role as desired by Britain. As such, Britain never supported and often hindered these ideas and Kossuth's plans. Without foreign support his goals were

unattainable. As George Bernard Shaw stated, "Revolutions have never lightened the burden of tyranny, they have only shifted it to another shoulder." ⁴⁰

In the final analysis, Kossuth as a tragic hero is important for Hungary and the democratic West primarily for the symbolism he represents. He became an icon of liberalism and democracy. It is important to remember that "Tragic heroes are often superior people with extraordinary powers." According to Sir Archibald Wavell, "No amount of study or learning will make a man a leader unless he has the natural qualities of one." Kossuth had those qualities and the ability to exert his influence on Europe and America for a brief moment in history. The hero's journey is just a metaphor for what goes on in a human's life. The needs of the individual dictate the structure of the story. Kossuth's journey was doomed to fail, but his legacy was destined to endure. It is this endurance that is embodied after 138 years in his goal of an independent and democratic Hungarian state.

Notes

- Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Princeton, NJ: Bollingen Series/Princeton University Press, 1973), 249.
- 2. Patrick Rambaud, The Battle, translated by Will Hobson (New York: Grove Press, 1997), 301.
- 3. Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 2nd edition (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 1998), 91–92. "Over weaning pride or insolence that results in the misfortune of the protagonist of a tragedy. *Hubris* leads the protagonist to break a moral law, attempt vainly to transcend normal limitations, or ignore a divine warning until calamitous results." William Harmon and C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*, 83rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 255.
- Viktor Orbán, "Speech on European Security at Tufts Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy," The Tufts Daily, 11 February 2002, http://www.tuftsdaily.com/.
- István Deák, The Lawful Revolution, Louis Kossuth and the Hungarians, 1848–1849 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), xvi.
- Samuel Hynes, The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 32.
- 7. *Ibid.*, 75–76.
- John H. Komlos, Kossuth in America 1851–1852 (Buffalo: East European Monographs, 1977),
- 9. *Ibid.*, 26.
- 10. Vogler, The Writer's Journey, 10–11.
- 11. Ibid., 15.
- 12. Deák, The Lawful Revolution, 13.
- 13. Vogler, The Writer's Journey, 17–18.
- 14. Deák, The Lawful Revolution, 27.
- 15. Vogler, The Writer's Journey, 18–19.
- 16. Ibid., 20.
- 17. Deák, The Lawful Revolution, 33.
- 18. Vogler, The Writer's Journey, 21-22.

- 19. *Ibid.*, 61.
- 20. Ibid., 22.
- 21. Ibid., 24.
- György Szabad, Hungarian Political Trends Between the Revolution and the Compromise (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1977), 50.
- 23. Vogler, The Writer's Journey, 24.
- 24. Ibid.
- Georges Clemenceau, cited in *The Military Quotation Book*, James Charlton, ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 50.
- 26. Peter Paret, *Understanding War: Essays on Clausewitz and the History of Military Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 23.
- 27. Ibid., 82.
- 28. Ibid., 103-104.
- 29. Carl von Clausewitz, *Historical and Political Writings*, Peter Paret and Daniel Moran, eds. and trans. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 377.
- 30. Paret, *Understanding War*; 194. Ironically, during the 1830 Revolution in Russian Poland the two reformers Clausewitz and Gneisenau were ordered to the Russian border at the outbreak of hostilities. It was here where they would both contract cholera that would eventually kill them.
- 31. Ibid., 191.
- 32. *Ibid*.
- 33. Vogler, The Writer's Journey, 145.
- 34. Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 90-95.
- 35. György Szabad, "Hungary's Recognition of Croatia's Self-Determination in 1848 and its Immediate Antecedents," War and Society in East Central Europe, vol. IV, East Central European Society and War in the Era of Revolutions, 1775–1856, Béla K. Király ed. (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs: distributed by Columbia University Press, New York, 1984), 596.
- 36. The independent Hungary that Kossuth desired was impossible to implement under the current political situation. Even if Britain and the United States fully supported Kossuth, the political reality was such that an independent Hungary would never have taken place. It would have required the military defeat of Russia, and the destruction of the Habsburg Empire and the balance of power.
- 37. Edmund Burke cited in Mountstaurt E. Grant Duff, *Francis Deák Hungarian Statesman* (London: np, 1880) 26.
- 38. C.A. Macartney, *The Habsburg Monarchy 1790–1918*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969), 537.
- 39. Lajos Kossuth, Kossuth Lajos nyílt levele Deák Ferenchez és Pulszky Ferency nyílt válasza Kossuth Lajoshoz (Szeged: Burger Zsigmond, 1867), 1–4.
- 40. George Bernard Shaw, cited in *The Military Quotation Book*, 45.
- 41. Vogler, The Writer's Journey, 92.
- 42. Sir Archibald Wavel, cited in The Military Quotation Book, 61.
- 43. Vogler, The Writer's Journey, 238.