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Political Functions of Slovene National Mythological Heroes with Regard to the Changing Socio-Political Circumstances and Needs

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Political Functions of Slovene National Mythological Heroes with Regard to the Changing Socio-Political Circumstances and Needs

When literary historiographer and theorist Jakob Kelemina addressed the characteristics of myths and fairy tales in the 1930s introduction to *Fables and Tales of the Slovene Folk* (*Bajke in pripovedke slovenskega ljudstva*), he noted that the fairy tale evolved from myth, but the mythic core had been veiled: "Mythical beings in a certain era take on human characteristics and become, like heroes, bearers of the oldest historical messages of a nation" (Kelemina 7). Kelemina asserted that the Slovene folk hero Peter Klepec once had the same mythical quality as Kresnik (one of the most relevant Carantanian-Carniolan Slavic gods), but over time he "became just a young peasant man who distinguished himself in battles with the Mongols and who possessed unusual strength and other peculiarities" (5). According to this view, the shift of the mythic character to other, non-mythological contexts is a sort of degradation, with an increasingly pale reflection of earlier, higher social messages. In this discussion I do not intend to dispute the claim that a certain historical or important social message can be preserved in modern adaptations of ancient mythological matrixes, but I do argue that the fictional versions of these adaptations, such as fairy tales, folktales and other tales that reflect the

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social and political contexts in which they are both written and received, should not be underestimated in terms of their social and political functionality. On the contrary, as a rule they perform vital social, even political functions. The story of Peter Klepec, a very popular folktale in the nineteenth century that Kelemina mentioned precisely as such an example of the social "degradation" of the myth, in fact played an important political role in Slovenia.

This article deals with stories about Slovene national heroes which appeared in folklore and literary tales. They are all similarly structured and include the motif of a protagonist who defeats a dangerous antagonist in order to liberate the empire—a structure that might be interpreted as a variant of an Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index (ATU) 300[1] folktale type about a dragon slayer. An early version appears in reference to a historical person, the fifteenth-century Carniolan Knight Gašper or Krištof Lambergar. In folklore, his enemy is sometimes represented as a dragon. In the nineteenth century, the mythologizing of national heroes flourished with numerous editions of the tale of Peter Klepec being published. In 1858, Fran Levstik's short tale of Martin Krpan appeared that was inspired by characters such as Peter Klepec and Gašper Lambergar and that established the ultimate *sui generis* version of the Slovene national hero with whom Slovenes still often identify.[2] The heroes Peter Klepec and Martin Krpan do not fight a dragon. The enemy, which is analogous to the dragon in its fearsomeness, is identified as a political enemy and is linked to the historical circumstances of the Ottoman incursions into Europe. At the same time, Peter Klepec and Martin Krpan are not related to real historical figures, but are characters presented as fictional heroes. Nevertheless, they reach the level of national myths and represent the anchor of national identity.

The central thesis of this article is that until the end of the nineteenth century, the main task of stories about Slovene national heroes was to consolidate the idea of a core European political formation. Each of the Slovene heroes addressed in this article functioned as a representative of the Slovene nation, strongly defending the Habsburg monarchy by defeating an extremely dangerous antagonist, the intruder. Stories about these heroes ultimately emphasized the importance of this small nation located at the periphery of the Central European empire, showing how the discourse of the threat of Turkish invasion had a constitutive role for the Habsburg Empire and how the Slovene nation was framed as the bulwark of Christianity.[3] The article further shows how the functions of the tales of Peter Klepec changed in the twentieth century reflecting shifting

socio-political circumstances and needs from World War I and the events leading to the dissolution of the Habsburg monarchy, to the era of socialism and the establishment of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia where the external threat disappeared and the motif of defense of the country and Christianity was no longer needed.

Toward Political Myths

Myth was a barbaric affair according to the thinkers of the Enlightenment who built their episteme on a departure from mythic consciousness (Cassirer 182). Romanticism, on the contrary, gave impetus to the search for traditions and nationalist ideas and myths. According to Ernst Cassirer, with myth, the Romantics "poeticized" the world but did not politicize it—literary critic and poet Friedrich Schlegel set himself the goal of imbuing all spheres of human life, i.e., religion, history, and even natural science, with a poetic spirit. Cassirer objects to the view that Romanticism produced the totalitarian state and later forms of aggressive imperialism, for in his view, Romantic nationalism was not of the imperialist kind for it sought to preserve and not conquer (183–184).

The search for the "core" of the folk, the national origin and history by collecting folklore was connected to building national self-confidence. It had to do with defining difference and demarcation from other nations to which self-confident and proud nations could feel more valuable or even superior to other nations. These tendencies, which should be understood as contributions to nation building, were also homogenizing. It was the idea of the nation that contributed to connecting peoples to their states (Schulze 100).

During this nation building, intellectuals sought points of reference for the consolidation of national identity and consciousness, engaging in the construction of an "other." The central function of the prose of the second half of the nineteenth century, which drew on folkloric material and was also based on historical references, was to serve the process of forming the Slovene national identity, directly or indirectly related to the political program "United Slovenia."[4] One of the most popular folk tales from that period is the tale of the poor and weak shepherd, Peter Klepec from Lower Carniola, a village called Osilnica located by the river Kolpa; in some versions he originates from Čabar, Croatia (Kunaver), and represents a local hero of Čabar region (Moric and Perinić Lewis 120).

The tale of Martin Krpan was first published in 1858 in the literary journal *Slovenski glasnik* (*Slovenian Herald*) by Fran Levstik. *Martin Krpan z Vrha pri Sveti Trojici* (*Martin Krpan from Vrh pri Sveti Trojici*), short: *Martin Krpan z Vrha* (*Martin Krpan from Vrh*) was written in a genre of a short story, supposedly based on the Inner Carniolan oral tradition. In the story, Martin Krpan is a smuggler of sea salt from the Inner Carniola who is summoned by the Emperor from Vienna, to rescue the country from the giant Brdavs, a brutal Saracen warrior, and saves the empire. With the publication of this story, Martin Krpan at once became a great Slovenian hero.

Martin Krpan, a Slovene Mythological Hero Promoting the Equality of Nations

Martin Krpan from Vrh (Levstik, *Martin Krpan*) was the first significant Slovene literary work of art in prose (Paternu, *Slovenska proza* 13), and is still included in the school curriculum as obligatory reading (Ministrstvo za izobraževanje 47). The work was not produced by chance, but as part of a political project conceptualized by young writers of peasant origins, Fran Levstik in particular. In his travelogue "Journey from Litija to Čatež," published in 1858, Levstik observed the local population and expressed his political idea: literary works are needed to realize the national interests. The writer has to understand how people think, talk, and write in the mother tongue and in mother thoughts based on domestic life, so that the Slovene can see a Slovene in the book as clearly as he can see his own face in the mirror (Levstik, "Popotovanje iz Litije" 71). Writers should write in prose and prose should originate from folklore. The high language of poetry, which was the prevailing artistic literary genre in the first half of the nineteenth century, was too distant from ordinary folk and could not properly address them. Levstik considered prose a more objective genre that corresponded better to the age and could more easily penetrate the broader layers of the nation than poetry. In folklore, Levstik searched for confirmation that the Slovene nation lives *sui generis*, which inspired his work (Paternu, *Slovenska proza* 17; Slodnjak, "Uvod" 24).

Why did the question of literary prose become such a pressing political problem in the second half of the nineteenth century? In 1848, the revolution reached the region of Slovenia (see Apih). The revolution abolished Chancellor Metternich's absolutism[5] and launched the national-political strivings of the young

Slovenian middle class. Two days after the resignation of Metternich, the emperor Ferdinand I introduced a constitution, did away with censorship and allowed the formation of national guards. "The Spring of Nations" revolution created a desire in Slovenia to identify and achieve national interests such as more autonomy and recognition of language, but not to create their own state. Before March 1848, the Slovene national program was focused on linguistic issues, and with the revolution came calls for the unification of Slovene national lands. The political program, "United Slovenia" (Zedinjena Slovenija) was first announced by Matija Majar who wrote in the daily newspaper *Novice* on March 29, 1848: everyone should live in their own country, at home, as they like, Germans in the German way, Italians in the Italian way and Slovenes in the Slovene way (paraphrased: in Pančur, "Leto 1848" 24). The program was more precisely formulated by the Slovenes who lived in Vienna and Graz. Signatures were collected for a petition for the program. However, with the victorious march of counter-revolution and the establishment of the new government of Prince Schwarzenberg and the enthronement of Emperor Franz Josef in the winter of 1848, the plans for a United Slovenia were destined to fail. An era of neo-absolutism followed and censorship returned. Newspapers were prohibited from addressing internal political issues and political societies were forbidden. In 1851, Matija Majar thus commented that the times were not favorable for political initiatives, but there was time for well-considered literary work. Accordingly, a rich body of literature was produced in particular religious and professional works (Pančur, "Neoabsolutizem" 26).

The young generation of writers enthusiastically joined the national movement and aimed to increase the output of Slovenian prose (Paternu, *Slovenska proza* 12). *Martin Krpan from Vrh* is a tale with the central motif of a struggle between a simple man and a giant, a reference to the biblical story of David and Goliath, and a popular motif in Slovenian folklore. Martin Krpan is a mighty hero who can beat several enemies at the same time, including the giant Brdavs. This romantic hyperbole originates from the popular imagination of the common folk and was surely attractive to the simple tastes of the readers of that time. Yet as prominent literary theorist and historian Boris Paternu claimed, the artistic value of the work is to be found in the character of Krpan, who can stand at the side of the emperor as an equal, who is "internally a fully free man and who carries into effect this freedom also externally" (Paternu, *Slovenska proza* 23). In its essence, the story of Martin Krpan is an epic expression of great human freedom and human dignity.

There are two points emphasized in the work: freedom and democracy (24). As the 1848 revolution brought about several political and cultural liberties, the emperor promised equality for all Austrian nations including the Slavic ones. Accordingly, among the Slovenian politicians and high school youth, trust in the emperor and state government was high. The Slavic troops saved Vienna from further revolutionary waves. But the re-establishment of the absolutism and abolishment of liberties and revolutionary ideas, strict censorship and cessation of the publication of literary and political newspapers and journals that followed disappointed progressive thinkers and destroyed trust in the Austrian government and in the Viennese court. Some of this political truth is expressed in the tale of Martin Krpan who was subjected to the ingratitude of the court, particularly on the part of the Empress, despite his great achievement that was nothing less than the salvation of the empire.

At the same time *Martin Krpan from Vrh* was written, calls were published in the newspapers to collect folklore. German Romantics regarded religion, customs and particularly language as the touchstone of the nation. Common ideas of the nation that derived from the goals of national identity, unity, and autonomy included "the growth of myths and memories of common ancestry and history of the cultural unit of population" and "the formation of a shared public culture based on an indigenous resource (language, religion, etc.)" (Smith 104). Over the course of the nineteenth century, collecting folklore was politically relevant as it supported the formation of a national identity. However, for the highest political needs, such as contributing to nation building, literature was required which could be looked upon as the highest cultural achievements of the nation. According to the philosophy of the German Romantics, poets and writers had to write in their own language, and yet tales from folklore could not represent the highest cultural achievements as they would be considered as a material in its rudimentary state, while at the same time, the task of poets and writers was to "cultivate" the subject and language (Schlegel 237–238).

Martin Krpan from Vrh represents just such a cultivated literary form that corresponds to the Romantic need for the cultural achievements that contribute to nation building but is built upon the folktale of another Slovene hero with super strength who defeats any antagonist—one that was repeatedly published over the course of the nineteenth century—that of Peter Klepec. Several quite different versions of the tale about Peter Klepec exist, yet all of them begin with him being a weak boy who is mocked by his peers. A small, weak boy from a poor family

who lives in underprivileged circumstances, usually with only his mother, who is despised and mocked by other people, but then with supernatural help becomes strong and stands up to harassment, is a common motif in Slovenian folklore. Such is, for instance, the folktale "Of a Bullock Markec" that tells of a poor shepherd mocked by his peers, who gains superpowers from a fairy (Kühar). The story takes place in an underground world where Markec defeats three demons in tourney in a Christianized ATU type 300 plot of a dragon slayer, and, through which he wins the hand of a princess. Another explicit case of ATU type 300 that also begins with a poor shepherd who eventually defeats a dangerous antagonist (following the instructions of a hermit) is the folktale "Ad lintverna" ("Of the Dragon," Dremelj Resnik). In the White Carniolan folktale "Žgančarica" (a woman who cooks the "*žganci*"[6]), a shepherd gains prodigious strength by eating a traditional Slovene dish made of hard-boiled buckwheat called "žganci" and then uses this strength to work the land (Zupanc). The attestation of power by uprooting trees or trashing enemies also appears in folktales, for instance in "The Three Giants" (Drekonja). The motif of an ordinary man who confronts a powerful antagonist endangering the population is very popular in folklore and very often appears in the form of a dragon slayer. The climax of these tales is that the hero emerges victorious from individual combat and saves the princess, marrying into high estate, but also saves the community. The most prominent adaptation of this type of story in Slovenian folklore is the folktale of Peter Klepec, who successfully defends the community from the extreme danger that threatens to destroy the empire.

In forming the character of Martin Krpan, Fran Levstik was inspired by folktale heroes, such as Peter Klepec, Kljukec the Terrible (Hudi Kljukec), Štempihar and Lambergar, as well as by the Serbian folkloric hero King Marko from the epic "King Marko and the Arab" that supposedly tells of the historical person Marko Mrnjavčević from the thirteenth century who has become a Serbian national mythological hero (Slodnjak, "Uvod. Martin Krpan" 6–9; Paternu, "Levstikov Martin Krpan" 238). According to Paternu, in Martin Krpan, there are the remains of an ancient belief in a supernatural power that can elevate a small man into an unbeatable hero or the remains of the mythical consciousness which does not reflect reality, but people's imagination, and considers symbolism to be an inseparable part of reality (Paternu, "Levstikov Martin Krpan" 236–237). Levstik was struck by France Cegnar's publication of "Pegam and Lambergar" in *Slovenski glasnik* in June 1858 (Cegnar, 1860). In his review, he critically rejected the quality of the work and the "uncast" folk hyperbole, as well as the immoderate rhetoric,

as expressed in the hollow depiction of Pegam as a "doghead" with three heads vomiting fire like a dragon. In Levstik's view, the task of a poet or a writer is to *elevate* the material—the motif, the plot, the expressions—into higher linguistic and aesthetic forms, and he believed that Cegnar failed in this mission, as he was not elevating the folklore material enough (Levstik, "Pegam in Lambergar"). Cegnar's "literary monster" thus additionally stimulated Levstik to write a tale about Martin Krpan in a way that corresponded with his critical ideas expressed in the "Journey from Litija to Čatež" (in Slodnjak, "Opombe" 495). Fran Levstik created a national myth with the character of Martin Krpan "as an argument for the historical origin or vocation of a nation (the defense of the civilization, or the demand for political rights), but especially the elevation of the Slovene language to the essential distinguishing and constitutive element of the Slovenian nation-building process" (Darovec 459).

Levstik deliberately created a national hero who would contribute to the awakening of national consciousness. However, the motif of a local hero serving the emperor in the defense of the empire appears earlier, both in a tale of Peter Klepec, as well as in the tale of Gašper Lambergar, a Carniolan knight from the fifteenth century who helps the Holy Roman Emperor defend the empire from the threat of a destructive challenger. Although in this case, the enemy does not come from outside the empire, the story does promote the local population's support for Habsburg rule or participation in the preservation of the Holy Roman Empire.

The Medieval Carniolan Hero Who Saves the Holy Roman Empire

In the fifteenth-century poem "Pegam and Lambergar," that is included in the school curriculum (Ministrstvo za izobraževanje 47),[7] a Carniolan knight Lambergar (alternatively spelled Lamberger or Lamberg) is called by the Holy Roman Emperor to defeat Pegam, who challenges the emperor:

> Pegam says, he speaks:
> 'Where can one find my equal,
> What do I say to you, your highness,
> you don't have underlings
> who would try me!' (Detela, *Pegam in Lambergar*, 2001, 8)

Or in another version of the poem:

> To Vienna Pegam rode,
> to the imperial court rode he.
> He asked of the Caesar bright:
> 'Have you a hero for me to fight,
> to test his strength against mine?' (Terseglav 26).

It is likely that Pegam represents the Czech knight Jan Vitovec of the Hussite armies (named after a Czech religious reformer Jan Hus who was burned at the stake in 1415), who arrived in Carniola and attacked Emperor Frederick IV, the main successor of the Princely County of Celje (Detela, *Pegam in Lambergar*, 2001, 7). Gašper (or Krištof) Lambergar from the Kamen castle who kills Pegam in the poem, was the son of a landgrave, famous for his prowess and skill in tournaments, in which he participated eighty-five times and almost always won. Jan Vitovec (or Pegam-Pehajm-Behaimb) was the commander-in-chief of the army of the Countess Katarina of Celje (Katarina von Cilli) during a period of disputes for the inheritance of the Celje Princely County and was known in Carniola for looting and arson from 1458 (Gruden 370–371). It is not historically correct that Jan Vitovec was killed in the duel with Lambergar, as he lived long after the battle took place (Janša Zorn 190). When the last Count of Celje, Ulrich von Cilli, was killed in 1456, twenty-four people declared themselves heirs of the rich heritage of the Counts of Celje.[8] Among them, according to an inheritance contract from 1443, the main heir was the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III. Ulrich's widow, the Countess Katarina, also claimed the inheritance and at that time, Vitovec was chosen as the commander of the Celje County (Janša Zorn 273). Placed within the context of struggles for the inheritance of Celje Princely County, the poem promotes the reign of the Habsburg Empire. The prosaic tale written by Fran Detela in 1891 on the same subject (Detela, 1910) addresses the rivalry between the Counts of Celje (Counts of Cilli) and the House of Habsburg. The death of Ulrich II von Cilli forced the aristocracy of Celje to take sides. Vitovec (Pegam) is set on the side of the County of Celje (Cilli), while Krištof and his father Žiga (Sigismund) Lambergar support the Habsburg Emperor.

In some folkloric versions of the poem, Pegam has three heads and Lambergar cuts off the middle head, impales it on his sword, and rides with it along the streets of Vienna (Detela, *Pegam in Lambergar*, 2001, 11). This links Pegam to a dragon and

FIGURE 1. Decorated beehive panel from the year 1884 with the motif of the duel between Pegam and Lambergar, oil on wood, dim. 25 x 13.5 cm (inv. Nr. ČM 1173). Reproduced with permission, Radovljica Municipality Museums, Apicultural Museum, Slovenia. Photo: Miran Kambič.

Lambergar to a dragon slayer or Pegam with Veles, the god of the underground (chthonic) waters or the afterlife, and Lambergar with Perun, the god of thunder from Slavic mythology or the mythopoetic folklore deity Kresnik. The motif of the battle between Pagam and Lambergar is often depicted in folklore, especially on colorful paintings found on panels of the beehives.[9]

The poem "Pegam and Lambergar" tells of the medieval activities of knights and by putting them in service of the political leaders of the time, it promotes the Habsburg monarchy. Having been re-published in different versions, the poem features Lambergar as a local hero. His example is formed in such a way as to encourage people to emulate him in a similar manner as the lives of the saints were to be imitable, Latin: *imitabile* (Jolles 29). This technique was also used with Martin Krpan and Peter Klepec. All three characters are local heroes with whom people can identify and whose behavior they are encouraged to emulate.

Self-Reflection of a Nation: The Bulwark of the Christian Empire

The characters of Martin Krpan and Peter Klepec speak to how an ordinary representative of the rural Slovene population defends a large political formation such as the empire from Ottoman invasion, and at the same time protects Christianity. Klepec and Krpan are heroes who represent this political formation, the

Christian empire, but they come from its periphery, the countryside, not from the political center of power. In this way, they carry a message about the importance of a "small," peripheral nation to the existence of the entire political formation. They represent the Slovene nation as the bulwark against political threat, *Antemurale Christianitatis,* the bulwark of Christianity (Darovec 460). Božidar Jezernik argues that Slovenes and other ex-Yugoslav nations, Albanians, Hungarians and Poles, each believe that their nation was the one assigned the historical mission to protect Christianity and Western civilization against the bloodthirsty enemies (21). At the same time, stories about Martin Krpan and Peter Klepec also build national consciousness for the Slovene population from the countryside who live a simple rural life, and who identify with Krpan and/or Klepec as characters with dignity and pride that are also politically relevant figures and even the bearers of power for the existence of the entire empire. In the end of the tale about Martin Krpan, the Viennese court society believing themselves to be culturally superior, continued to mock Krpan while he preserved his dignity and pride and chose to return to his rural homeland.

When the empire is threatened by the Ottomans, called the Turks (Krpan's antagonist is a dangerous Turk, a giant), the emperor calls Martin Krpan for help, who then kills the Turk and as a reward, the emperor offers him his daughter's hand in marriage as is common in fairy tales of the dragon slayer. Krpan, however, refuses this offer as her Highness is culturally alien to him and he prefers the simple Slovenian rural life to which he returns after the battle with Brdavs. At the same time, the Empress objects to giving her daughter to him as his wife. Martin Krpan uses an ax with which to attack and a mighty club for self-defense in the battle with Brdavs. This club is symbolically significant as Krpan made it from a linden tree he cut from the emperor's yard. This enrages the Empress. She considers Krpan a barbarian.

The linden tree is a symbol that the majority of the Slovene population would consider a national symbol.[10] As states do not have a physical "bodily" memory, they create political memory for themselves and mediate it through symbols, texts, images, rituals, ceremonies, cities, and monuments (Assmann 55). The linden tree in *Martin Krpan from Vrh* is used as a symbol to contribute to the political memory, in particular the notion of the Slovene nation that "grows in the courtyard" (i.e., next to the heart of the empire) and is used when needed (i.e., mobilized) in the defense of the empire. Krpan's linden club then plays a crucial role in the duel with Brdavs, who thrusts his sword so deeply into the club that he cannot take it

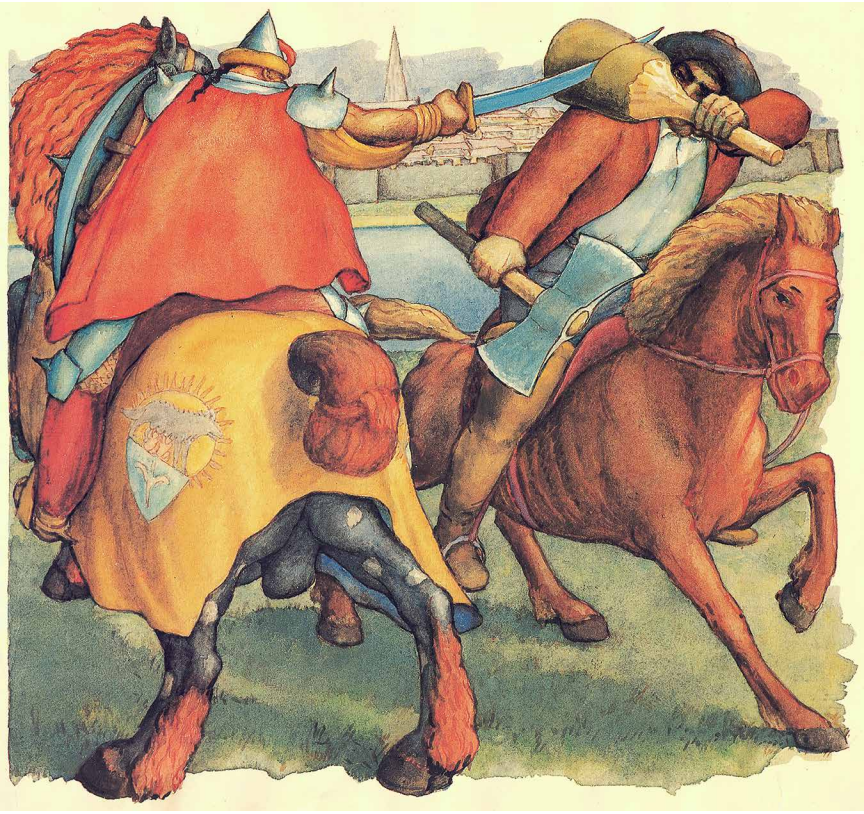

FIGURE 2. Tone Kralj, illustration of the combat between Martin Krpan and Brdavs for Fran Levstik's tale *Martin Krpan from Vrh*. Krpan uses a club made from a linden tree that symbolizes a Slovenian nation, for a defense (Levstik, *Martin Krpan* 25).

out, causing him to lose the battle. This was perfectly depicted by painter Tone Kralj in his master illustration of the fight between Krpan and Brdavs.

In the nineteenth century, Slovenes looked at the past with the desire to build the Slovene national community as a political body, thus myths were formed around this desire. There was a revival of the collective memory of the "Turkish" or Ottoman invasions, massacres, kidnappings, and persecution from between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries that greatly devastated the Slovene population (Simoniti 70–75). Literature, too, was used to strengthen political memory. The variations of the tales of Peter Klepec from the nineteenth century show that resistance against the "Turks" was gaining increasing relevance. The earliest known

version of the tale was written before 1839 by Janez Zima (Moric and Perinić Lewis 114). The first tale published in 1846 in *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice* (*Agricultural and Artisan News*) emphasizes Klepec as a mighty Slovene hero. The next version from the same year speaks of thirteenth century Mongolian invasions and Hungarian King Bela IV. In the version from 1847, Klepec drives the Turks from the country. In 1860, the Turk is haughty and bloodthirsty. Twenty years later, the evil Turk is a giant (Moric 214–215). When Levstik wrote the story of Martin Krpan in 1858, a terrible enemy named Brdavs was also understood in this context to be a dangerous "Turk." Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, Krpan's antagonist was understood in this way, as shown by Tone Kralj's illustrations. The motive of a bulwark of the Christian empire also appears in the concluding words of the prosaic work on Pegam and Lambergar by Fran Detela that does not end with the death of Pegam (Vitovec), but with his subordination to the emperor; when the emperor became involved in bloody battles with the Hungarians and Turks, it was Vitovec who defended the southern border for him (Detela, *Pegam in Lambergar*, 1910, 191). Fran Detela commented that the battling of Pegam "has etched into the peasant memory so profoundly [. . .] as the wars with the Turks" (Detela, *Pegam in Lambergar*, 1910, 6).

According to the interpretation of historian Vasko Simoniti, in the nineteenth century Slovenes relied upon fictional figures around which they built myths as they did not have great military leaders or other important historical figures. Mythological heroes of this time were King Matjaž,[11] Peter Klepec, and Martin Krpan. Simoniti argues that all these myths speak of a national failure. King Matjaž is a king without a kingdom, he has no country, and the people cannot create one because they have no leader. Together, they are caught in a vicious cycle of inactivity which indicates an inability to self-organize and self-realize. Martin Krpan, the key hero of Slovenian national self-confidence, is the character of an unambitious, false hero who exemplifies political passivity by serving to perform the duel for the emperor, only to sink back into anonymity and unpretentiousness. Peter Klepec wants to show his strength to his peers above all, which figuratively means that the nation convinces itself of its strength, which it demonstrates as a loyal subject (Simoniti 76–78). Or, as Anja Moric interprets the twentieth century version of Peter Klepec as depicted by Ivan Cankar, who is a parable of the nation's weakness: "a weakling who, on the one hand, longs for power, while on the other he is afraid of it, therefore, instead of using his strength and freeing himself from the yoke of his masters, he prefers to remain a servant" (Moric 216).

Peter Klepec in the Twentieth Century: From Despair Over a Servant Nation to a Model Meant to Mobilize the Population

In 1917, Ivan Cankar (1876–1918), a notable representative of Slovenian early Modernism, wrote a short tale about Peter Klepec. In this version, Klepec is the son of a cottager and is given up when young to a rich landlord to be a shepherd. A noticeably weak boy, he is mocked by his peers, but tolerates the humiliation until one day he asks God to give him strength. He is made so strong that he roots out a tree and when his peers come to beat him, he grabs one tree with his left hand, the other with his right hand, lifting them both up off the ground and shaking them. The narrator says:

> "And then—Truly—and then? Then—nothing! [. . .] It seems that he rooted out that old must pear tree and then lived in peace, quietly and faithfully, as he was used to; he loyally obeyed his master, tended his cows, a piece of bread in a bundle, and served the peers and all the people with his strength and according to their commands. If the good Lord would not have sent him just his angel from heaven, but would give him his own infinite power, then Peter Klepec would not know what to do with it; it might even get in his way" (Cankar, "Peter Klepec" 324–325).

This tragic representation of the character of Peter Klepec is close to Simoniti's interpretation of the self-representation of the Slovene nation through national heroes who tend not to become autonomous but remain subordinated to a foreign center of power. The character of Peter Klepec as depicted by Cankar represents the writer's view of the political positioning of the Slovenes of that time. In 1918, the Habsburg Empire dissolved and a short-term state of Slovenians, Croatians, and Serbs that used to reside within the empire was formed, but then in the same year, this entity was joined to the Serbian monarchy into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croatians, and Slovenians. In his lecture from April 12, 1913, titled "Slovenians and the Yugoslavians," Ivan Cankar advocated for the unification of all southern Slavs into a common state, but strongly opposed any cultural or linguistic fusion: "We are brothers by blood, at least cousins by language, but by culture, which is the result of several centuries of separate upbringing, we are much more alien to each other than our Upper Carniolan farmer is to a Tyrolean or a Gorizian winegrower

FIGURE 3. Maksim Gaspari, illustration of Peter Klepec confronting his antagonist, the giant Tatar. Reproduced with permission, Bevk, "Peter Klepec" 285.

to a Friulian" (Cankar, "Slovenci in Jugoslovani"). He was sentenced to one week in prison due to his offense against public order because in this lecture he also uttered "let's leave Austria to wallow in its own shit." This lecture was the peak of everything that anybody had said concerning the Yugoslav question and its solution before the beginning of World War I.

Two or three years before the outbreak of World War II, another reputable Slovenian writer, France Bevk (1890–1970), wrote a tale about Peter Klepec. In this story, the Tatars, called "Dogheads" (Slovene Psoglavci), seize the Hungarian

kingdom. The king calls Peter Klepec for help as he has heard about his immense physical strength. Klepec confronts the giant Tatar on foot, unarmed, with his bare hands, while the giant rides on a strong, sparkling horse.

The antagonist is ugly and broad shouldered with a large, crooked sword. Klepec confronts him as if it was all a joke, throwing him in the air and laughing along. He finally takes pity on him and lets him run away. The Tartar is killed by his own countrymen, while Peter Klepec marries a working peasant girl in his hometown of Osilnica, Slovenia. The ending of the story speaks of the conflict between Klepec and the Hungarian center of power as the Hungarians finally aim to kill him. He repels the attack and wins autonomy for his nation. The story ends in the present day, when Peter Klepec is long gone, and the memory of him and his grandchildren lives on showing that these are his successors who have inherited his strength. Bevk himself wrote a commentary to the story after it had been published: "I adapted the story so that I could tell what I thought was important to say at a time when many enemies were already attacking us and many were discouraged" (Bevk, "A commentary").

Published before the beginning of World War II, the story served two important political functions: nation building and mobilizing the Slovene population to defend themselves against the occupier. With reference to the Tatars' invasions into Europe that historically took place in the thirteen century (i.e., before the Ottoman invasions), and which were not so vivid in the collective memory, Bevk achieved picturing the external enemy more universally so to be able to prepare the population against any political and military attack or occupation that was expected to happen. Peter Klepec was no longer defending the Habsburg Empire and was not so much a representative of *Antemurale Christianitatis* as in the nineteenth century versions. Instead, the importance of the defense of Klepec's own homeland is reinforced. The central political power, this time Hungarian, proves to be even more step-motherly than in the case of Martin Krpan and the previous versions of Peter Klepec. Here, the powers that be are directly hostile to the nation, which plays the role of a defender against enemy invasion. Unlike previous versions, this tale ends more ambitiously in terms of the political autonomy of the Slovene nation or the Yugoslav nation as the Slovene and Croatian spaces are presented as connected (Croatia is presented as another country, not the one where Peter Klepec is from, while Hungarian land lies on the other side of the border). The message that the nation will no longer play a servile role to the political center of the kingdom is repeatedly emphasized. When a Venetian merchant wants to

bribe Peter with gold coins, he refuses: "I don't want to be anyone's servant or shepherd anymore" (Bevk, "Peter Klepec" 296). Here the motif of a shepherd diverts from the meaning to be found in mythopoetic heritage where the gods are the shepherds of the people. The shepherd in this case does not represent a guardian of a human "herd" or an oligarchic sovereign. He is rather interpreted as a powerless person in the service of someone with economic, and consequently, political power. In a metaphorical sense, this would place Slovenes in the service of other nations, but Peter Klepec will no longer be anyone's shepherd. Bevk's Peter Klepec becomes empowered, announcing the nation's own political governance, albeit in cooperation with other Yugoslav nations. In his commentary written much later in 1963, the writer says that Klepec's descendants historically managed to repel the invasion of enemy forces in World War II (Bevk, "A commentary"). The myth of Peter Klepec is thus associated with historical context, as it is seen to have instilled the self-confidence and courage in the Slovenian nation that led to real-world victories. The character of Peter Klepec in this case played the role of a "model" (cf. Girard 164) to be emulated, quite literally: to feel strong and rebel against the occupying army forces. Ivan Cankar's character of Peter Klepec, meanwhile, is a rather tragic figure not meant to be emulated as such, but to criticize the national position through a literary work of art.

In the post–World War II era, Slovenia was part of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia.In 1958, France Bevk wrote another version of the tale of Peter Klepec (Bevk, *Peter Klepec*). It was published by Mladinska knjiga, the publishing house of the Youth Association whose goal was to produce literature for young people suitable for the socialist era (Gabrič 903). In this tale, which has become the predominant version still circulating today, Peter Klepec does not defeat any political intruders, but just resists his peers, leaves his job as a shepherd, and returns home to his mother to work the land. This adaptation of the tale encourages young people to dare to reject peer-to-peer violence, promoting non-aggressive living together without rivalry. This time, the tale of Peter Klepec does not convey a political message of foreign intruders and the Slovenes as a peripheral nation saving the Christian empire. The tale does not mobilize the population, but it constructs society in a way that is adjusted to the new political regime as imagined by the socialist political leaders and intellectuals. In this regard, it is interesting that this character of Peter Klepec remains infantile until the end. He does not emerge from the minority. He does not grow up and form his own family but is finally confident in living his simple rural life in a household only with his mother whom he cares for.

Conclusion

All three national heroes, Gašper Lambergar, Peter Klepec, and Martin Krpan responded to the call of the emperor to political-military service without objection. Yet, Levstik's Krpan is critical toward the Viennese court society and culture. Levstik included simple rural characters with which the majority of the Slovene population could identify. Krpan's love of his homeland and *sui generis* Slovene culture is explicit and can be bought by no amount of money nor the hand of a princess. The desire of Gašper Lambergar and Peter Klepec is similarly directed toward their homeland and, moreover, to their mothers, which strengthens the heroes' sense of belonging to their ancestors and home. All three return home after their mission is accomplished in Vienna (the political center of the empire). If the addressees of these narratives mimic the heroes' desire (cf. Girard 164), they should desire to live in their homeland and love it as they do their mother's shelter, their home. The country with its culture is the utmost existential essence of the nation to which its subjects belong as to a family.

The examination of the tales of Slovene national mythological heroes shows how their actual political function changed according to the socio-political needs of the time in which they appeared. The tales that were formed as variations of the folktale type about the dragon slayer contributed to the political movement "Spring of Nations" (also known as The Revolutions of 1848) in the nineteenth century. The narrative about Martin Krpan, both in terms of content, and with the use of language, and aesthetic form, served the political goals expressed by the writer Fran Levstik, as well as in the United Slovenia program. At the same time, folktales about Peter Klepec contributed to national self-awareness, pointed out the importance of the Slovene nation, and called for its equality within the Habsburg monarchy. For these purposes, the historical circumstances of the Ottoman invasions into Europe, in which the Slovene nation played an important defensive role, were revived. In the nineteenth century, the narration of Gašper Lambergar, the Carniolan knight who in the fifteenth century helped the emperor defend the empire from disintegration and thus confirmed the historical importance of the Slovene nation for the existence of the Central European political formation, was also restored. All three national heroes have remained relevant to the present day, as evidenced by the inclusion of narratives speaking about them in the school curriculum.

In the twentieth century, too, the adaptations of the tale about Peter Klepec

show the changing political circumstances and shifts in political functions assigned to narratives. Cankar's version, written just before the disintegration of the Habsburg monarchy, expresses concern that the Slovene nation, even if it is strong and mighty, will again play a servile role to other nations and governments in new political constellations, with which Cankar critically interpreted Klepec's incompetence of the proper use of his own power. Before the beginning of World War II, France Bevk used Peter Klepec as a mobilizing call with a mnemo-historiographic reference to the nation's strength and ability to defend its own homeland.

After the Second World War, Bevk further adapted the tale in response to a new political context. His latest version of Peter Klepec, which is a fairy tale for children, no longer talks about the protection of the European empire, but only about the regulation of peer relations. In the context of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, this could mean equal relations between Yugoslav nations and ethnic groups, as well as satisfaction with a simple working life, embedded in responsible family relationships not only of parents to children, but also of children to parents. Bevk's fairy tale differs from older folk versions in that it does not show the Slovene nation as a defender of European civilization, but instead builds the nation through the discourse with children, namely with the help of values. In this regard, two key Yugoslav values are placed in the center: brotherhood and unity that were such important political values that they served as the slogan for the Yugoslav nation and can be recognized as a political myth.[12] In this way, Bevk's fairy tale shifted the focus of narratives about national heroes away from strengthening national self-confidence and emphasizing the historical importance of the Slovene nation for the larger political community. The myth of the invincible Slovene hero, as it served the political interests of the nineteenth century, as well as those of the first half of the twentieth century, was replaced by another myth that helped build the socialist citizen and the Yugoslav nation, i.e., the myth of the brotherhood and unity of the Yugoslav nations and ethnic communities.

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■ NOTES

1. The type index of folktales or commonly known as the ATU index was drafted by a Finnish folklorist, Antti Aarne in 1910, then it was perfected in 1928 and 1961 by an American, Stith Thompson, and in 2004 by a German, Hans-Jörg Uther. Aarne, Antti (1910): Verzeichnis der Märchentypen, Helsinki: Folklore Fellows Communications (FFC) 3, 1910; 2nd edition: Aarne, Antti and Thompson, Stith (1928): The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography (FFC 74); 3rd edition, AT 1961 (FFC 184); 4th edition, revised by Hans-Jörg Uther in 2004 as The Types of International Folktales (FFC 286, 3 vols.).
2. Bojan Baskar even writes about contemporary *Krpanomania* in Slovenia.
3. Anja Moric writes of the myth of Ottoman invasions as necessary for the existence of the Habsburg myth (215).
4. Paul Crowther discussed the story of the mythical animal *Zlatorog* written by Karel Dežman as an emblem of Slovene cultural identity.
5. During the reign of Emperor Ferdinand I of Austria (1835–1848), the empire was effectively governed by a state conference with Prince Klemens Wenzel von Metternich at its head. He became chancellor in 1821 and effectively ruled Austria from 1835. He adhered to the principles agreed upon at the Congress of Vienna (1815) and stymied political change. He was particularly afraid of national movements, so he introduced censorship, prohibition of assembly, and police control.

The period between 1815 and 1848 is therefore called Metternich's absolutism. In 1848, the March Revolution broke out, resulting in the "Spring of Nations."

6. *Žgancarica* is a term coined to denote a woman who cooks a traditional Slovenian dish called "*žganci*," a sort of compact mush made of hard-boiled buckwheat.
7. Both "Pegam and Lambergar" and *Martin Krpan* were also part of the school curriculum in the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (Lah).
8. In November 1456, the last Princely Count of Celje, Ulrich II (Ulrich von Cilli), was called to Belgrade regarding an urgent crusade defense against the Turkish invasion (Janša Zorn 197–198). According to the Celje chronicle, he was warned there was a conspiracy organized against him in the fortress where he was accommodated (Mlinar 175–177). According to the Austrian chronicle for the years 1453 and 1467, Lamberger was the one to check the fortress for Ulrich to settle in, as the count fully trusted him. In the early morning next day, on November 9, 1456, Ulrich II was killed by a Hungarian conspiracy circle in the Belgrade fortress. Lamberger is supposed to have been corrupted and thus played the role of a kind of a Trojan horse (Krones 55).
9. "Panjska končnica" is Slovenian tradition of colorfully painted beehive panels.
10. The linden leaf was used in a 1980s campaign "Slovenia, my country" that contributed to the process of Slovenia becoming an independent state, as a questionnaire showed 75 % of the population chose it as a Slovenian symbol (Repe 227).
11. The folk poems about King Matjaž, a character supposedly referring to the Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus who fights the Turks, tell of the kidnapping of his wife Alenčica and his rescue from the Turkish jail. Matjaž's army is said to sleep in the Peca mountain and wait for the nation's call in case of need.
12. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia awarded the Order of Brotherhood and Unity medal for extraordinary merits in spreading brotherhood between nations and nationalities in creating and developing the political and moral unity of the (Yugoslav) nation. The Brotherhood and Unity Highway was built that connected several of the Yugoslav republics and ran from Jesenice, Slovenia in the north, through Ljubljana, Slovenia; Zagreb, Croatia; and Belgrade, Serbia to the Macedonian-Greek border in the south.

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