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## The Portrayal of Mountains in Nineteenth-Century Slovenian Poetry

### Abstract

Since the Age of Enlightenment, mountains have gradually changed from a predominantly geological category to an aesthetic one. The new, essentially spiritualized and aestheticized experience of the mountain landscape has found increasing appeal in both the visual arts (especially painting) and literature (especially poetry). Moreover, in the course of the long nineteenth century, mountains often became an object of nationalist appropriation. Such a development was also characteristic of Slovenian culture. This article deals with early Slovenian poetry and its relationship to mountains. It shows that Baron Sigmund Zois and the poet Valentin Vodnik already recognized the national and poetic potential of Mount Triglav with Lake Bohinj and Savica Falls. Their ideas found an echo in the Slovenian poetry of the period before 1848, but it was the great Romantic poet France Prešeren that added a historical-mythological layer to them in his *Baptism on the Savica* (1836). A brief overview demonstrates that Slovenian poetry from Valentin Vodnik to Simon Gregorčič manifestly contributed to making the mountains a sacred and mythical national place.

**Keywords:** Slovenian poetry, Mount Triglav, Bohinj, Valentin Vodnik, France Prešeren, Simon Gregorčič

Mountains have captured human imagination since time immemorial.<sup>1</sup> The ancient Greeks populated their highest peak with a playful grouping of twelve immortal Olympian gods (the *dōdekátheon*), and many other

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cultures also filled their inaccessible and slightly frightening mountainous areas with a multitude of mythical creatures. However, mountains were definitely not excursion (or mountaineering) destinations, the subject of visits aimed at enjoying the spectacular views, or the object of aesthetic contemplation: this required a profound shift in perspective. The early harbingers of such a shift include Petrarch's legendary ascent of Mount Ventoux (1,912 m) in Provence back in 1336. Even though the climb itself remains wrapped in a veil of mystification, an unmistakable spirit of the Renaissance radiates from the poet's account of the climb: its core reveals an aesthetic (a fascinating view) and a spiritual experience (philosophical contemplation), which the autonomous subject converts into artistic representation (Hansen 2013: 12–22). Petrarch's account is one of the first signals of a process that in fact gradually took place later: it could be referred to as the conversion of mountains from a predominantly geological category into a distinctly aesthetic one. In the new paradigm, the individualized experience of the mountains, the picturesque and sometimes merciless natural environment, the climb, and the view transforms into an artistic portrayal (i.e., a visual, mimetic representation drawn by the skilled hand of a painter) or a literary work (preferably poetry) as a description or a sort of verbal ekphrasis of a seen image.

European art only began to discover mountains thoroughly from this reformed perspective in the second half of the eighteenth century. With their poetic descriptions of nature, the German and English Enlightenment poets (e.g., Thomson, Brock, Haller, and Ewald von Kleist), followed even more intensively by the pre-Romantic and Romantic poets (e.g., Goethe, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Byron), experienced and verbally depicted the mountains in a distinctly aestheticized manner (cf. Felsch 2009). Just like in literature, mountainous landscapes—often expressing the relationship between man and magnificent, even frightening, nature—also obtained a visible place in painting (e.g., in the works of J. M. W. Turner, Caspar David Friedrich, and Philip James de Loutherbourg, as well as the Slovenian painters Markus Pernhart and Anton Karinger in the second half of the nineteenth century). However, along with such aestheticization, depictions of mountains in the period of growing cultural nationalisms (either in the form of the visual arts or, even more distinctively, in literary form) increasingly experienced “nationalization”: in the poetic imagination, the mountainous region transformed into a symbol, a shelter, or even a sacred place that was most closely bound to the identity of a specific emerging national community.

How did this process take place in Slovenian culture? This article dis-

cusses early Slovenian secular poetry and its portrayal of mountains, especially the central complex of the Julian Alps that continues to be of special importance to Slovenians today: Mount Triglav (2,864 m), the highest peak in what is now Slovenia, and Lake Bohinj with Savica Falls. It presents how the national and poetic potential of this area, already perceived by Sigmund Zois and Valentin Vodnik, were enhanced by the poets of the “Vormärz” period (i. e. the period before the March Revolution in 1848), especially France Prešeren, and how by the end of the nineteenth century Slovenian mountains (largely “born” from the spirit of poetry) became firmly anchored in Slovenian national consciousness as mythical or sacred place of “Slovenianness.”<sup>2</sup>

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In Carniola, the Habsburg hereditary land with the greatest concentration of ethnic Slovenians, interest in the mountains was kindled in the Enlightenment circle gathered around Baron Sigmund Zois (1747–1819), a renowned Ljubljana nobleman, who is considered one of the earliest figures of the Slovenian national revival. The first serious research on Slovenian mountains was conducted at the end of the 1770s by Belsazar Hacquet (c. 1739–1815), drawing from the work of his predecessor Giovanni Antonio Scopoli. At the beginning of his *Oryctographia Carniolica* (Carniolan Mineralogy, 1778), he published a monumental copperplate engraving of Mount Triglav in a prominent place, and a little later (on August 8th, 1779) he actually climbed the mountain. The motivator and main sponsor of Hacquet’s research and expeditions to Mount Triglav in general, including the first successful ascent made by “four brave men” on August 26th, 1778, was Baron Zois (cf. Mikša & Ajlec 2015: 13–15, Mikša & Vehar 2019). Zois was interested in the Triglav mountain range for various rea-

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<sup>2</sup> A similar development can be observed in Bulgarian literature. Folk poetry in various regions already testifies to the fact that the mountains have always been a sacred place for the Bulgarians. Even in the poetry of the Bulgarian revival before the 1878 liberation from Ottoman rule, mountains—filled with *hajduks*, fearless and rebellious guerilla fighters—retained an exceptionally important place. Especially significant are the Balkan Mountains, which were glorified by the poets Petko Slaveykov and Lyuben Karavelov, and which Hristo Botev selected as the setting for his poem “Hadzhi Dimitar.” The experience of the mountains, closely connected with nationalism, also left a fundamental mark on the poetry and prose of the mountaineering enthusiast Ivan Vazov (1850–1921), one of the most important Bulgarian men of letters after Botev. Hence, it comes as no surprise that since the mid-twentieth century the highest peak in the Balkan Mountains (i.e., Botev Peak, 2,376 m) has been named after the Bulgarian national poet. (Thanks to my colleague Kalina Zahova for details.)

sons, among which those related to natural science were at the forefront: thanks to him, the rocks found on Mount Triglav ended up at the center of international theoretical discussion on geology. As an enthusiastic geographer, who was far ahead of his time, he was clearly also interested in mountaineering: from 1775 to 1795, he marked all the successful ascents of Mount Triglav on a map (cf. Zois 1859; Orožen 1895).

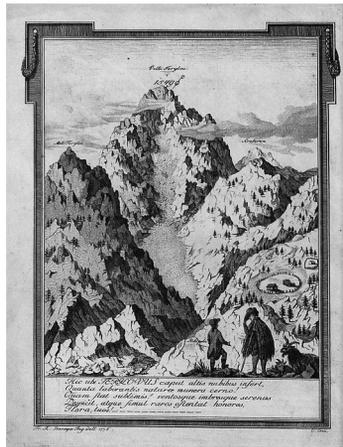


Figure 1. Mount Triglav in Hacquet’s *Oryctographia Carniolica*, 1778. Source: dLib.

However, Zois was most likely also driven by a third impulse associated with the new understanding of mountains. This erudite nobleman already recognized the Bohinj–Triglav complex with the source of the Savica River, which comes to the surface from the heart of the picturesque Triglav Lakes Valley in the form of a spectacular waterfall (and later flows into the Sava River) as a special aesthetic and national asset (that is, “national” from the former Carniolan and Slavic perspective, and not yet in the modern sense). This can be seen from several passages in his letters to the Koprivnica priest and poet Valentin Vodnik (1758–1819), whom the baron succeeded in engaging closely with his Triglav research at the end of the eighteenth century. In his letters, Zois mentions the “intoxication” from the mountains’ grandeur, the idea that “a poet under Mount Triglav” must write his poems in Carniolan (Slovenian), and he refers to the “Triglav muse” and the demanding pilgrimage to the “Great God.” Zois’ usage of the Slovenian expression *Velki Bog* (“Great God”) in a German letter suggests that he was also interested in the mythological layers of the tradition surrounding Mount Triglav (cf. Zois 1859).

Already an enthusiastic mountain climber from before, Valentin Vodnik was thrilled by his Julian Alps expedition in August 1795, which also in-

spired him as a poet (Orožen 1895: 100–103). “The first Slovenian tourist” not only admired the beauty of the mountains, but also shared his enthusiasm with compatriots in his mountain poetry, in which Mount Triglav, Savica Falls, and the Bohinj Valley began to symbolize Slovenian identity. His poetry collection *Pesmi za pokušino* (Poems for Sampling, 1806) may have been created with a time distance, but the intensity of the original experience can still be sensed in them.<sup>3</sup> The importance of mountains in Vodnik’s poetry is already unveiled in the short poem “Na sebe” (To Myself):

Grem visoko pit Savico  
Lepih pesmi hladni vir,  
Mojstra pevcov na zdravico  
Naj mi teče ta požir.  
(Vodnik 1988: 50)

Off to drink from the high Savica,  
The cool source of pretty poems,  
Let me take this sip  
To raise a toast to the master poet.<sup>4</sup>

The poem “Veršac” (Peak) embraces the (Slovenian) homeland with a panoramic view from the magnificent Julian Alps, presenting at its core a sublime experience of the beauty of the Bohinj landscape with Mount Triglav and the Sava River (sixth and seventh stanzas):<sup>5</sup>

Tukaj bistra Sava zvira  
Mati pevske umnosti,  
Jezér dvanajst kup nabira  
šola zdrave treznosti.

Tje pogledaj na višáve,  
Kir Triglav kupí v' nebó;  
Štej snežníkov goličáve  
Kar derží nardalj okó.  
(Vodnik 1988: 61)

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<sup>3</sup> Vodnik still models his mountain poetry on the poetry of the Enlightenment, partly on the paradigmatic poem “Die Alpen” (The Alps) by Albrecht von Haller and “Der Frühling” (The Spring) by Ewald von Kleist (Kos 1973: 396–401).

<sup>4</sup> If not stated otherwise, the Slovenian poetry was translated by Simona Lapanja Debevc. The translations are literal and do not exactly reproduce the poetic features (rhyme, meter) of the original.

<sup>5</sup> Despite some initial doubts, it has been established that Vodnik is referring to the 2,194 m summit near Mount Kanjavec, now called *Vodnikov vršac* ‘Vodnik Peak’ (for more on the problems associated with determining the site, cf. Kos 1973: 392).

Here the clear Sava has its source,  
The mother of poetic skill,  
It feeds from twelve lakes,  
The school of healthy prudence.

Look there into the heights,  
Where Mount Triglav rises into the sky,  
Count the barren snowcapped mountains  
As far as the eye can reach.

Vodnik, the indisputable founder of Slovenian mountain poetry, did not even put his name under his first poetry collection. This becomes even more interesting knowing that, on the very recommendation from Zois, he had removed his completed portrait from the collection and replaced it with Dorfmeister's drawing of Savica Falls and Mount Triglav (Kidrič 1938: 434–435). Thus, according to Zois—who must have been the only one capable of covering the costs of printing the collection—Slovenian poems were not written by individual poets represented by their full names, but were created in and of themselves—or, more accurately, they were inspired by the mountainous landscape, or even the “Great God” himself.

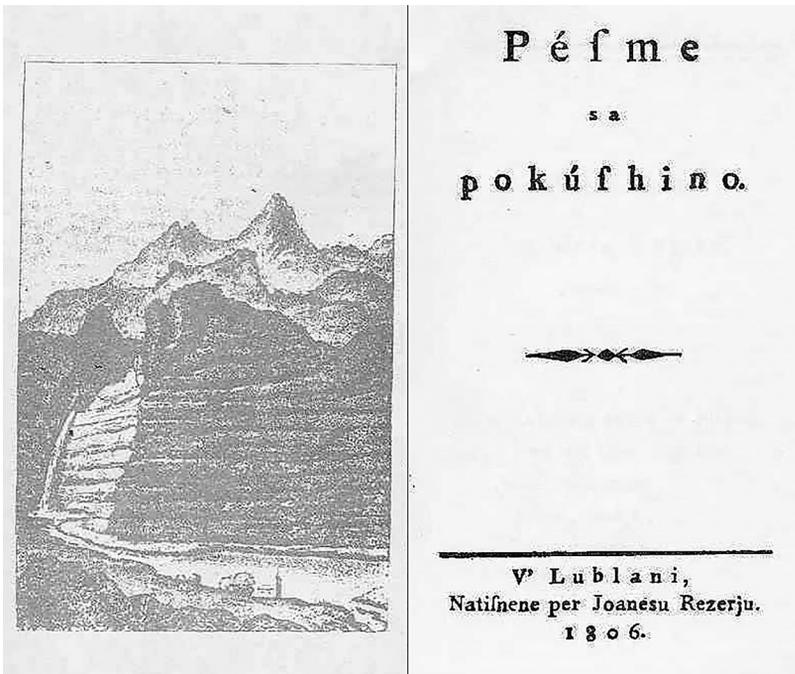


Figure 2. The Bohinj Valley with Savica Falls and Mount Triglav depicted in Vodnik's *Pesmi za pokušino*, 1806. Source: dLib.

Vodnik's fascination with mountains is also visible in his poem "Klek" (Mount Klek), which he wrote in his younger years, and mountains also appear as stimulators of the poetic muse in his manuscript poem "Bohinska Bistrica" (Vodnik 1988: 139–140), as well as his later, also manuscript, poem "Moj spominik" (My Monument; fourth stanza):

Redila me Sava,  
Ljubljansko poljé,  
navdale Trigláva  
me snéžne kopé.  
(Vodnik 1988: 128)

'Twas Sava that bred me,  
And the Ljubljana Plain,  
Snow slopes on Mount Triglav  
Impressed me no end.  
(translated by Henry R. Cooper, Jr. and Jana Kobav; 1998–1999 [2003]: 29)

Vodnik was not the only mountain climber among early Slovenian poets. His contemporary Valentin Stanič (1774–1847), another Slovenian priest and man of letters, a little younger than Vodnik, was among the pioneers of modern European alpinism. Around 1800, he made several impressive ascents in the Austrian Alps (including the magnificent Grossglockner), he measured the height of Mount Triglav in 1808, and he reported on his endeavors in German articles. However, somewhat surprisingly, in his didactic Slovenian poetry (mostly translations and adaptations) Stanič says nothing about the mountains.

In turn, Vodnik's thematization of Savica Falls was responded to by the Carinthian poet Urban Jarnik (1784–1844). In his poem "Moj sedanji kraj" (My Current Place, 1809), he poetically transforms idyllic Gurnitz, the new place he was assigned to as a priest, into Mount Parnassus with a spring that serves as a source of poetic inspiration (second stanza):

Spodaj 'zvira Hipokrene  
Čisti zvirka za pevce vse,  
Belkaste on pluje pene,  
Umnost pev'c iz njega p'je.  
(Jarnik 2002: 44)

There rises below the Hippocrene,  
A clear spring for all the poets,  
Spilling out white foam,  
The poet drinking artistry from it.

The Carinthian mountains, which were masterfully portrayed by the mountain landscape painter and mountain climber Markus Pernhart a few decades later, were thus not significantly represented in early Slovenian poetry. In turn, a more emotional view of the Sava and Mount Triglav was cultivated by the poets gathered around the literary journal *Slavinja*, which was never issued. They wanted to publish it in Ljubljana in the mid-1820s, but the supreme head of the imperial censorship office, Josef von Sedlnitzky, would not allow it. Therefore, these poets' production mainly remained in manuscript form. As Ignac Holzapfel (1799–1866) reflects in his unpublished poem “Slavinja” (1824), it may well be that nature will finally bring to life an allegorical figure that will compel his Carniolan compatriots to write poems in Slovenian:

Če te ne ginijo brajde dolenske,  
 Sava prebistra ne bístri duha  
 al ne bogátjo te rude gorenske,  
 krasnost Triglava ne vnema srca?  
 (Gspan 1979: 84)

If the Lower Carniolan vineyards don't touch you,  
 The crystal Sava doesn't sharpen your mind  
 Or the Upper Carniolan ore doesn't enrich you,  
 Mount Triglav's beauty doesn't ignite your heart?

A similar tendency can be observed with the poets contributing to *Krajska čbelica* (The Carniolan Bee), a literary almanac that managed to evade the restrictive pre-March censorship in the early 1830s. Blaž Počtnik (1799–1872), another Slovenian priest with a talent for poetry, mentions the Sava and Mount Triglav in his poem “Dolenska” (Lower Carniola), and Savica Falls in the quatrain “Vodniku per Savici 1829” (To Vodnik at Savica Falls, 1829):

Mojstra pevcov si učila –  
 V' grobu glas njegov molči –  
 Ga, Savica! boš slavila,  
 Njemu naj tvoj grom doni!  
 (*Krajska čbelica* I/1830: 31)

Thou hast taught the master poet,  
 His voice is silent in the grave –  
 Thou, Savica Falls, shalt celebrate him,  
 To him thy thunder may resonate!

Among the *Krajska čbelica* poets, the area covering Mount Triglav and

the Bohinj Valley was also lyricized by the priests Ignac Holzapfel, Jakob Zupan (1785–1852), and Jožef Žemlja (1805–1843). Žemlja published the poem “28. jutro velciga travna 1828” (The Morning of May 28th, 1828) in the fourth volume of *Krajnska čbelica*, which glorifies the beauty of Lake Bled and includes the following quatrain dedicated to Mount Triglav:

Tam prevzétno uzdiguje,  
Gór Ilirskih se malík,  
Néba skor se dotikuje,  
Pléšasti tréh glav snežník.  
(*Krajnska čbelica* 4/1833: 30)

There rises vainly  
The Illyrian idol,  
Nearly touching the sky,  
The bald three-headed snowy peak.

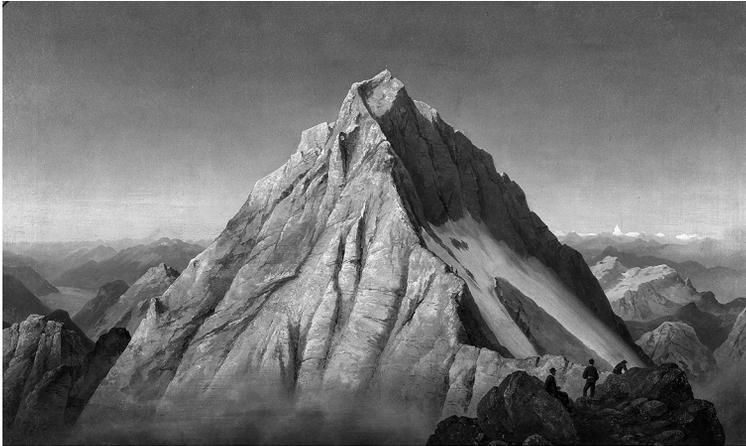


Figure 3. Markus Pernhart, *Mount Triglav*, mid-nineteenth century. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Symptomatically, the second volume of *Krajnska čbelica* opens with Vodnik’s hitherto unpublished poem “Moj spominik”: the contributors to the almanac were thus the first to reveal how Vodnik “was inspired by snowcapped Mount Triglav” (*Krajnska čbelica* 2/1831: 1).<sup>6</sup>

It could be said that most *Krajnska čbelica* poets used variations of the pattern developed by Zois and Vodnik. However, that did not apply

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<sup>6</sup> The Sava River and Mount Triglav occupied an important place in the early Vodnik cult (Dović 2019: 209–213).

to their most talented representative: France Prešeren (1800–1849), who was indisputably canonized as a Slovenian national poet after his death, introduced a new dimension to the Slovenian mountains. This is the more surprising considering the fact that in his works this enamored poet largely ignored the mountains and nature in general. He grew up under the magnificent panorama of the Karawanks, a mountain range in northern Slovenia, but that experience is not reflected in his lyric poetry: mountains cannot even be found in the ode to his home village, the sonnet “O Vrba” (Oh, Vrba). Such disregard was far from typical of a romantic poet, but he compensated for it in his first printed book, the epic *Krst pri Savici* (The Baptism on the Savica, 1836).

Prešeren drank different kinds of potions from Savica Falls than his predecessor Vodnik. Whereas Vodnik mainly drew inspiration for his rationalist poetry, Prešeren introduced a new layer into the Bohinj landscape: the mountains in his poems are not only romantically beautiful, but also densely strewn with fatal historical and mythological symbolism, distinctly charged with emotions. The first stanza of *Baptism*, which follows the epic introductory description of Črtomir’s last fight for the Heathen Fort (*Ajdovski gradec*), provides a lyric description of Lake Bohinj and Mount Triglav rising above it:

Mož in oblakov vojsko je obojno  
končala temna noč, kar svetla zarja  
zlatí z rumen‘mi žarki glavo trojno  
snežnikov kranjskih siv‘ga poglavarja,  
Bohinjsko jezero stoji pokojno,  
sledu ni več vunanjega viharja;  
al somov vojska pod vodó ne mine,  
in drugih roparjov v dnu globočine.  
(Prešeren 1965: 179)

The matching violence of man and cloud  
By darkling night is ended now, and bright  
Sunrise now gilds the threefold peaks unbowed  
Of Carniola’s grey and snowbound height.  
All tranquil lie Lake Bohinj’s waters proud,  
Of battle now no trace remains in sight.  
But armies of fierce pike beneath the waves  
Fight other denizens of th’ watery caves.  
(translated by Henry Cooper and Tom Priestly; 2001: 119)



Figure 4. Anton Karinger, *Lake Bohinj*, 1962. National Gallery, Ljubljana. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

However, for Prešeren landscape poetry was never an end in itself: here, the description of day breaking on the shore of the lake serves as a psychological contrast to Črtomir's extreme inner torment. Prešeren's idyllic muse only slightly livens up in the description of Lake Bled, where the young lovers Črtomir and Bogomila once spent a brief year happily in love:

Tje na otòk z valovami obdani,  
v današnjih dnevih božjo pot Marije;  
v dnu zad stojé snežnikov velikani,  
poljá, ki spred se sprósti, lepotije  
ti kaže Bléški grad na levi strani,  
na desni griček se za gričam skrije.  
Dežela kranjska nima lepš'ga kraja,  
ko je z okolšno ta, podoba raja. (ibid.: 180)

Here to this isle with lake encircling round  
Which nowadays is Mary's holy shrine:  
Against the sky stand tow'ring peaks snowbound,  
Before them spread the fields; the fair outline  
Of Castle Bled perfects the left foreground,  
While rolling hills the right hand side define.  
No, Carniola has no prettier scene  
Than this, resembling paradise serene.  
(translated by Henry Cooper and Tom Priestly; 2001: 121)



Figure 5. Markus Pernhart, *Lake Bled*, mid-nineteenth century. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Even as the poem continues in the Bohinj Valley, where Črtomir is picked up by a friendly fisherman in a boat and they then row together toward Savica Falls, the magnificent mountainous landscape primarily remains a backdrop for the intense inner life. Thus, the first description of the thundering falls, where Črtomir is eagerly waiting for news of Bogomila the next morning, again merely serves as a cue for comparison:

Slap drugo jutro mu grmi v ušesa;  
 junak preišlja, kak bolj spodej lena  
 vodà razgraja, kak bregove stresa,  
 in kak pred njo se gòre ziblje stena,  
 kak skale podkopuje in drevesa,  
 kak do nebes leti nje jeze pena! –  
 Tak se zažene, se pozneje ustavi  
 mladenič, Črtomír pri sebi pravi. (ibid.: 185)

Our hero listens to the thund'ring falls  
 Next morning, thinking as the banks below  
 Are shaken by the water as it brawls  
 And roars, while undermining in its flow  
 The trees and cliffs and tow'ring mountain walls  
 And in its wrath its foamclouds skywards blow!  
 Thus hast'ning youth its pace bur first corrects  
 In later life—so Črtomir reflects.  
 (translated by Henry Cooper and Tom Priestly; 2001: 129)

The power of Prešeren's mountains thus does not arise from nature alone, but from the story set in it: the story of a tragic war in which the Slovenians experience a political and religious transformation, and within it the individual stories of the two doomed lovers. Prešeren suggestively placed Siwa, the pagan goddess of the extinct Polabian Slavs, on Bled Island, in the middle of the idyllic alpine paradise (cf. Marinčič 2011), and he turned Lake Bohinj and Savica Falls into a setting where Bogomila's conversion is revealed dramatically to defeated Črtomir and where the fatal baptism of the pagan warlord ultimately takes place—which may be the most controversial story in the history of Slovenian literature.



Figure 6. Jurij Šubic, *The Baptism on the Savica*, the first artistic depiction of *The Baptism*. Source: *Zvon* 1878, no. 23, p. 369.

It would be an exaggeration to claim that mountains, which already showed their national symbolism in the Zois and Vodnik circle, would not have become anchored in the Slovenian national imagery without Prešeren. However, Prešeren's ingenious combination of the magnificent backdrop of the mountains and the story of lost national independence definitely turned out to be an effective means of national identification in the coming era of rising national movements.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For example, this is testified to by the novella *Nagelj s pesnikovega groba* (A Carnation from the Poet's Grave, 1878) by the Croatian writer August Šenoa, which also met with a wide response in Slovenia. In it, Šenoa, on a reverent pilgrimage along Prešeren's routes, again invokes Savica Falls, the source of "the Slavic Sava," as a sacred place of all Slavs (cf. Dovič 2021).

The mountain theme again became more prominent in poetry around the time of the March 1848 Revolution. Set to music, the poem “Planinar” (Mountain Climber, 1847) by the poet and priest Blaž Potočnik (1799–1872), which invites Slovenians into the mountain paradise, became a hit among singers soon after that: it heralded a type of cheerful mountain poetry, which has continued to be reflected in Slovenian folk-pop music to this very day (first stanza):

Visoko vrh planin stojim,  
v veselju rajskim tu živim;  
tam dol ljudje prebivajo,  
veselje redko uživajo.  
Prid vrh planin,  
nižave sin!  
(Gspan 1979: 76)

I stand high on the mountain tops,  
Live here in a joyful paradise;  
People residing down below  
Rarely experience joy.  
Come to the mountain tops,  
Thou son of the lowlands!

Increasingly more examples of mountain poetry can be found after the March Revolution. The poem “Savica” (Savica Falls, 1849) by Lovro Tomjan (1827–1870), one of the most important Slovenian nationalist politicians and leaders after the revolution, already announces new confidence of the national movement (third stanza):

Kar oblaki gor se pripodijo,  
in dolino mirno zatemnijo,  
hudo vreme krog in krog vrši;  
in Savica, hči kraljeva,  
pribobni in pesem peva,  
*de zmagvalca čez Slovence ni.*  
(Gspan 1979: 202, emphasis in the original)

As the clouds come rolling up,  
Darkening the peaceful valley,  
Bad weather sweeping round and round;  
Savica Falls, the royal daughter,  
Comes thundering up, singing that  
*No one can defeat the Slovenians.*

The young patriot Martin Semrajc (1825–1849) wrote another exhila-

rating ode to Slovenia's highest mountain. His "Triglav" has survived up to the present in the form of a choir adaptation by Jurij Flajšman (first stanza):

V Gorenško oziram se skalnato stran,  
Triglava bliše se vrhovi,  
prot jasnemu nebu kupí velikan,  
kaj delajo, gleda, sinovi.  
On vidil je zgodbo Slovenje otrok,  
je slišal njih petje in vrisk in njih jok.  
Vse je vihar razdjal,  
narod je zmirej stal,  
gledal nad Triglavam neba obok.  
(Gspan 1979: 204)

I look toward rocky Upper Carniola,  
The peaks of Mount Triglav shining,  
The giant rising toward the clear sky,  
Looking down at what his sons are doing.  
He saw the story of Slovenia's children,  
Heard their singing, shouts, and cries.  
A storm has devastated everything,  
The nation has always survived,  
Looking at the sky arching above Mount Triglav.

Another ode to Mount Triglav can be found among the manuscripts of the poet and priest Anton Žakelj (pen name *Rodoljub Ledinski* 'the Ledine patriot', 1816–1868). His poem with an apt metaphor of a frozen ocean was created in the decade following the revolution, but it was never published (first stanza):

Lej, gôri, ves pokrit z meglami,  
Stojí Trigláv, naš velikan  
Goré bledijo nad gorami,  
Ko de bi z divjimi vodami  
Bil naglo zmerznil ocean.  
(Gspan 1979: 217–218)

See up there, all shrouded in mist,  
There stands Mount Triglav, our giant.  
Mountains are fading above the mountains,  
As though the rough waters  
Of an ocean suddenly froze.

Slovenian poetry certainly incorporated mountains much faster and more decisively than prose and other genres (cf. Hladnik 1987; Munda

et al. 1965). Mountains do not have a visible place in Fran Levstik's poetry, but they do play an important role in the collection *Poezije* (Poems, 1865) by another classic Slovenian poet, Simon Jenko (1835–1869). The poetry of Simon Gregorčič (1844–1906) is even more profoundly tied to mountains, especially his debut poetry collection *Poezije* (Poems, 1882). In his poem “Veseli pastir” (The Merry Shepherd), Gregorčič depicts an idyllic image of the mountains where the lyric subject seeks his peace of mind in solitude and, “like a king on a high mountain pasture,” nourishes himself on pure joy, away from the valley, people, and the glitter and grime of the world. In his poem “Nazaj v planinski raj!” (Back to the Mountain Paradise!), Gregorčič looks up toward the mountains with nostalgia: even though he is in the valley, in a sweet heavenly land, his heart draws him to the mountains, being the “son of the mountains.” Along similar lines, in his poem “Oj zbogom, ti planinski svet!” (Alas, Farewell, Ye Mountains!) he finds it very difficult to bid farewell to the places where he experienced so much happiness and where unspoiled people still reside:

Tu národ biva še krepák  
 Tu biva národ-poštenják,  
 Ki svét ga še okúžil ní,  
 ki čas ga omehkúžil ní.  
 (Gregorčič 1882: 21)

Here strong people still live,  
 Here honest people live,  
 Whom the world has not yet corrupted,  
 Whom time has not made soft.

Just like Vodnik and Prešeren nationalized the iconography of the Bohinj Valley and Mount Triglav, Gregorčič—a poet born in Vrsno near Kobarid and frequently dubbed “the nightingale of the Gorizia region”—did the same with the region along the Soča River. In his ode “Soči” (To the Soča), he depicted this wonderful mountain river, the “daughter of the mountains”—which is as limpid, splendid, and clear “as the mountain air,” and as loud “as a vigorous chant,” but can also be menacing and horrifying—as a Slovenian river: he concluded the poem by rhetorically addressing the river to drown in its mighty waves the foreigners that are trying to get their hands on the (Slovenian) land:

Ne stískaj v meje se bregóv,  
 srdíta čez branove stópi  
 ter tujce, zêmlje-lačne, vtôpi  
 na dnò razpénjenih valov!  
 (Gregorčič 1882: 88)

Do not confine yourself to the banks,  
Rise over the defenses seething with wrath,  
And drown the land-hungry foreigners  
To the bottom of your frothing waves!

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Nineteenth-century Slovenian secular poetry recognized and systematically established Slovenian mountains as an aesthetic category as well as a national holy place. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, mountain climbing became increasingly popular in Carniola, with people flocking to the mountains, and the production of patriotic odes to the mountains became routine and plentiful. However, the fascination with the mountains was not only a Slovenian trait: the German poet and mountaineer Rudolf Baumbach (1840–1905) may have even been more successful in spreading the glory of the Julian Alps around the world than the contemporary Slovenian poets. His 1876 epic *Zlatorog: eine Alpensage* (Goldhorn: An Alpine Saga) was a bestseller. His “saga” begins with a sonnet, starting with the following quatrain:

Dir, mächt’ger Triglav, gilt mein Lied, mein Grüßen!  
Drei Häupter hebst du trotzig in die Höh’  
Wie jener Gott, nach dem sie einst dich hiessen,  
Und jedes trägt ein Diadem von Schnee.  
(Baumbach 1877: 1)

My song, my greetings go to you, mighty Mount Triglav!  
You raise three heads defiantly into the sky  
Like the god they once named you after,  
Each wearing a diadem of snow.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, mountaineering in Carniola was increasingly marked by a struggle for predominance between Slovenian and German factions. The Slovenian side achieved an important stage victory in the summer of 1895, when the Slovenian Alpine Club opened the Vodnik Lodge at Big Field Pasture (*Velo Polje*) to great pomp, revealingly naming it after the first poet that praised the beauty of the mountains in Slovenian language. That same summer, a priest from the nearby village of Dovje, Jakob Aljaž (1845–1927), who became heavily involved in the “battle” for the Julian Alps during the 1890s, celebrated the erection of a storm shelter at the top of Mount Triglav, which has remained a symbol of Slovenian identity to this very day: the Aljaž Tower.

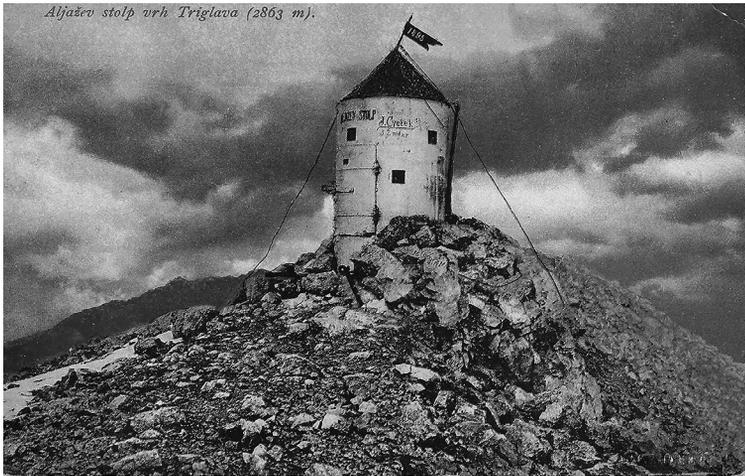


Figure 7. The Aljaž Tower at the top of Mount Triglav, postcard from 1911, photo: Fran Pavlin.

On this occasion, the song “Oj Triglav moj dom!” (Oh, Triglav, My Home)—a composition for men’s choir still highly popular today—resonated at the top of the “Great God” for the first time on August 22nd, 1895. Unlike in Zois’s time, Slovenians were now firmly consolidated as an imagined community: this is evocatively illustrated by the fact that the lyrics of this song, which was set to music by Aljaž, were written by the young Maribor priest Matija Zemljčič (1873–1934), who could not have seen the beauties of Mount Triglav from any of his Styrian parishes, not even with binoculars.<sup>8</sup> The first stanza reads as follows:

Oj Triglav, moj dom, kako si krasan!  
 Kako me izvabljaš iz nizkih ravan  
 V poletni vročini na svoje vrhè  
 Da tam si v samoti spočije srcè,  
 Kjer potok izvira v skalovju hladan:  
 Oj Triglav, moj dom, kako si krasan!  
 (Zemljčič 1895: 53)

Oh, Triglav, my home, how beautiful you are!  
 How you lure me from the low plains  
 To your peaks in the summer heat,  
 So that my heart can rest there in solitude,  
 Where the cool creek springs from the rocks:  
 Oh, Triglav, my home, how beautiful you are!

<sup>8</sup> Experts only established and confirmed the identity of the lyrics’ author, the mysterious “Slavin,” as late as the early 1990s.

# Triglav.

Con moto. Zložil Jakob Aljaž.  
Besede Slavino ve.



Oj Triglav, moj dom, ka-ko si kra-san! Ka-ko me iz-va-bljaš iz  
Oj Triglav, moj dom, če-tu-di je svet Za-ča-raj s ču-de-si mi  
Oj Triglav, vapo-mi-nu mi je tvoj car, Za-to pa te lju-bim in

Figure 8. Introductory measures of Zemljič's "Triglav" set as a four-part ode for men's choir by Jakob Aljaž, supplement to *Planinski vestnik* no. 8, 1896.

Exactly one hundred years after Vodnik's famous 1795 expedition, the mountains thus became "home" for the Slovenians, and they have remained so until today. In the twentieth century, Mount Triglav was turned into a unique national symbol, occupying a central place in Slovenia's coat of arms (in 1947 as a Yugoslav republic and then in 1991 as an independent state). As can be seen from this brief overview, nineteenth-century Slovenian poetry—written by canonized poets such as Vodnik, Prešeren, or Gregorčič, but also by countless minor poets—contributed significantly to making the mountains a sacred national place.

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