

## Research Article

# The Baptism on the Savica – The Slovene National Epic With a Question Mark

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This article analyzes France Prešeren's 1836 poem *Krst pri Savici* (The Baptism on the Savica) and its status as the Slovene national epic. Although brief and stylistically hybrid, combining classical epic and modern novelistic patterns, *Krst pri Savici* came to occupy the sole "epic slot" in Slovene literature. The article situates the poem within the context of European national epics and nation-building in the 19th century. Drawing on genre theory and the concept of cultural sainthood, it is argued that Prešeren strategically adopted epic conventions to endow the nascent Slovene literature with historical gravitas, while also deconstructing the national epic genre through novelistic subjectivity. Moreover, Prešeren's canonization contributed to the poem's cultural centrality. Intertextual analysis traces how *Krst pri Savici* sparked an enduring imaginary in Slovene literature and society, as its semantic openness and structural ambivalences fueled conflicting interpretations, valuations and rewritings.

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## Introduction

In his seminal work on European national epics, Thomas Taterka posits two central theses. First, it was only after the classical epic, as we know it from Homer and Virgil, was recognized as obsolete and incompatible with modern bourgeois society, with the advent of print media, and with the Industrial Revolution, that nineteenth-century nationalism paradoxically resurrected its dead body, reconfiguring it as a genre in which the nation reflects itself (*Spiegeleffekt*) and shows itself to other

imagined communities (*Schaufenstereffekt*); the ‘national epic’ was thus invented to be the ‘mirror’ and ‘showcase’ of a particular nation.<sup>1</sup> Second, in the long nineteenth century in Europe, every nation was to have its own national epic. If the systemic *Eposstelle* (the epic slot) had yet to be filled, the entire literary field would strive to create one. As a rule, however, each nation could have only one national epic.<sup>2</sup>

Although the national epic is, strictly speaking, a phenomenon associated with the modern, post-1789 Western notion of the nation as collective sovereign and imagined community, as a genre it was able to draw on a much earlier model – the Roman historical epic and, in particular, Virgil’s *Aeneid* as prototype of the national epic. As John B. Hainsworth has shown, Virgil’s literary ‘secondary epic’ took over the Homeric ‘primary epic,’ which had grown out of oral tradition, and drew on the exemplary heroes, plots, motifs, metrics, and tropes of its Greek models (the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*), thus appropriating an important part of Greek mythic history. In this way, the Roman poet created an integral fictional narrative in which he presented to the Romans their mythic origins, the founding of the Roman Empire, and their global civilizing mission.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter,<sup>4</sup> I will use Taterka’s starting points to show why in Slovene literature a rather short Byronic ‘povest v verzih’ (tale in verse) by France Prešeren (1800–1849) occupied the exclusive position of a single national epic, even though it was actually a deconstruction of such an epic, and its canonization was fraught with controversy and a series of allusions, interpretive revisions, and rewritings.

## ***The plot between the epic and the novel***

France Prešeren’s *Krst pri Savici* (The Baptism on the Savica), printed in 1836, is a historical Romantic-Biedermeier narrative poem in 502 hendecasyllables (26 *terzine* and 53 *ottave rime*), cast as a subjective personal confession.<sup>5</sup> The dedicatory sonnet to Prešeren’s deceased friend Matija Čop (1797–1835) interprets the history of the two protagonists Črtomir and Bogomila as an allegory of the poet’s pain in love, and his resignation, and it does this by comparing the speaking persona (the poet) with fictional characters in the narrative that follows, and by associating the entire poem, which was supposed to be epic, with the lyrical genre of elegy (the Slovene archaic word for it is *mila pesem*):

<p>Vam izročim, prijatelja dragi mani!  ki spi v prezgodnjem gróbi, <i>pesem milo</i>;  ločitvi od njega mi je hladilo,  bila je lek ljubezni stari rani.</p> <p>Minljivost sladkih zvez na svet' oznani,  kak kratko je veselih dni število,  de srečen je le ta, kdor z <i>Bogomilo</i>  up sreče unstran groba v prsih hrani.</p> <p>Pokopal misli visokoleteče,  želja nespolnjenih sem bolečine,  ko Črtomir ves up na zemlji sreče;</p> <p>dan jasni, dan oblačni v noči mine,  srce veselo, in bolnó, trpeče  vpokój'le bodo groba globočine.</p>	<p>I give to you, blest spirit of a friend  Who sleeps too soon interred, this poem dear;  When I was chilled by separation drear,  My ancient wounded love it served to mend.</p> <p>Tell all the world sweet ties soon meet their end,  How few our days of happiness appear,  That he, <i>like Bogomila</i>, may find cheer  But only if his hopes the grave transcend.</p> <p>My highest-flying thoughts have I inhumed,  With all the pain of wishes unfulfilled,  <i>Like Črtomir's</i>, all hopes in earth entombed;</p> <p>Days bright and dull are both to night distilled,  And hearts to suffer joy and sadness doomed  Will all in deepest grave at last be stilled.</p> <p>(Prešeren 1999: 110–111, emphases added)</p>
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The poem's historical background, however, draws from the historiography of Carniola, the historical land on the southeastern edge of the Holy Roman Empire. In the endnote to his text, Prešeren cites one of its sources (J. W. Valvasor's polymath work *Die Ehre des Herzogthums Krain* of 1689), but avoids mentioning the other, which might have seemed suspicious to the censors because of its author's Enlightenment perspective (A. T. Linhart's *Versuch einer Geschichte von Krain und der übrigen südlichen Slaven Oesterreichs* of 1788–91). Both histories deal with the last struggles of the pagan Slavic nobility in Carantania and Carniola for religious and state independence, which Valvasor, as a devout Catholic,

condemns without distinguishing between ethnic Slavs and Germans. Gorazd and Hotimir were the first Carantanian princes to convert from Slavic polytheism to Christianity, under pressure from the Franks and Bavarians, who had themselves adopted the new religion. The Carantanian opposition resisted Christianization by missionaries from Aquileia, Salzburg, and Freising, who were supported by military force. The third and last Carantanian uprising took place in 772 and was put down by the Bavarian Duke Tasilo III, whereupon Carantania was ruled by the Christian prince Valtunk.<sup>6</sup>

In the first part of the poem, entitled 'Uvod' (Introduction), Prešeren introduces his hero Črtomir, a young Slavic nobleman who, together with the rest of the rebels, retreats from the onslaught of Valjhun's army (i.e. the historical Valtunk or Valdungus) to the fortress of Ajdovski gradec near Lake Bohinj. Here he and his comrades resist the nine-times stronger besiegers for six months. When they run out of food, Črtomir decides to break out of the fortress on a stormy night, and to take the attackers by surprise. In his speech, he openly points out the critical situation and proclaims – in a narrative metalepsis typical of Prešeren's Byronism – the Romantic ideals of political, religious, legal, and national freedom, as well as Slavic solidarity. Thus he encourages his soldiers, who join him in the risky action:

<p>Dalj Črtomir jim reve ne zakriva, besede te tovaršam reče zbranim: ‘Ne meč, pregnala bo nas sreča kriva.</p> <p>Le malo vam jedila, bratje! hranim, branili smo se dolgo brez pod pore, kdor hoče se podati, mu ne branim;</p> <p>kdor hoče vas dočakat’ temne zore, neproste dni živet’ nočem enake, ne branim mu, al jutra čakati’ more.</p> <p>S seboj povabim druge vas junake, vas, katerih rama se ukloniti noče; temna je noč, in stresa grom oblake;</p> <p>sovražnik se podal bo v svoje koce, le majhen prostor je tje do gošave; to noč nam jo doseči je mogoče.</p> <p><i>Narveč sveta otrokam sliši Slave,</i> tje bomo najdlji pot, kjer nje sinovi si prosti vól’jo vero in postave.</p> <p>Ak pa naklonijo nam smrt bogovi, manj strašna noč je v črne zemlje krili, ko so pod svetlim soncam sužni dnovi!’</p>	<p>Their plight can Črtomir conceal no longer; Thus speaks he to his troops as one collected: ‘We might outlast the sword, but fate is stronger;</p> <p>Too little food have I in store protected, So long have we survived without assistance. I’ll blame not who surrender has selected.</p> <p>To him who now accepts a slave’s existence, To suffer days like nights deprived of morning – But wait till day – I’ll offer no resistance.</p> <p>And you the rest, who shrink from meek conforming, I now invite you all, the non-compliant; The night is dark, the clouds with thunder storming,</p> <p>Our foe will be on shelter too reliant; In darkness to the wood we’ll cross the spaces, The night will shield our sally all-defiant.</p> <p><i>Most of this world belongs to Slavdom’s races;</i> We’ll find a path to where each blood relation His trust in faith and justice freely places.</p> <p>But should the gods decree for us damnation, Less fearful the long night of life’s denial Than living ‘neath the sun in subjugation!’ (Prešeren 1999: 114–115, original emphasis)</p>
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Valjhun, for his part, expects to defeat the besieged as the storm is raging, and a fratricidal battle breaks out in front of the fortress. All warriors of Črtomir are killed, and only he survives; Valjhun cannot find his body among the corpses on the battlefield.

While the shorter part of the epic portrays Črtomir as a perfect epic hero with exemplary virtues such as courage, loyalty, strength, intelligence, openness, and comradeship, the second, longer part of the poem, entitled 'Krst' (Baptism), shows Črtomir in a more subjective and personal light. Accordingly, the condensed omniscient narrative gives way to dialogic scenes of intimacy and privacy. After the defeat, Črtomir stands alone by Lake Bohinj, devastated. The narrator apostrophizes the destroyed hero of the epic, set against the iconic Alpine landscape, and identifies with Črtomir's inner self in a metaleptic digression:

<p>Mož in oblakov vojsko je obojno končala temna noč, kar svetla zarja zlati 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.</p> <p>Al jezero, ki na njega pokrajni stojiš, ni, Črtomir! podoba tvoja? To noč je jenjal vojske sum vunajni, potihnil ti vihar ni v prsih boja; le hujši se je zbudil črv nekdanji, ak prav uči me v revah skušnja moja, bolj grize, bolj po novi krvi vpije, požresniši obupa so harpije.</p>	<p>The matching violence of man and cloud By darkling night are 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.</p> <p>Does not, O Črtomir, this selfsame lake Resemble you, as on its shore you stand? War's outward noise was calmed before daybreak, But by the storm within you are unmanned. That ancient worm, much worse now, is awake – As I the trials of life well understand – It cries for still more blood from out its lair, Yet hungrier are the harpies of despair.</p> <p>(Prešeren 1999: 118–119)</p>
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Tormented by the catastrophic decline of the Alpine Slavic principality, culture, and religion, Črtomir wants to commit suicide, but a flood of memories of his beloved Bogomila, a former priestess of the Slavic goddess Živa on the island in Lake Bled, stops him. They were in love, but had to part when Črtomir went off to war. Worried about her, he longs to find out if she is still alive. A passing fisherman takes him to a safe hiding place near the Savica waterfall, and returns to Bled to tell Bogomila that Črtomir has survived. Bogomila reaches Črtomir's hiding place under the waterfall accompanied by a priest – a Christian missionary, a former Irish druid. As Črtomir embraces her, fervent emotions temporarily wash away his despair over the enslavement of his homeland. Bogomila's retrospective

self-accounting, however, reveals that she converted to Christianity out of fear for Črtomir's survival, and because the Irish priest convinced her that Christianity was indeed the religion of love; moreover, she swore eternal virginity to the Christian god if he would save Črtomir from death in war:

BOGOMILA	BOGOMILA:
<p>‘Odločeni so roži kratki dnóvi,  ki pride nanjo pomladanska slana,  al v cvetji jo zapadejo snegovi!  Tak mladi deklici, ki zgodnja rana  srce ji gloda, vsmrti mir njegovi,  le kratka pot je skoz življenje dana;  al je za majhen čas se združiti' vredno,  de bi ločitve spet se bala vedno?</p> <p>De bi od smrti rešil te nesrečne,  in tamkej mili Bog v nebeškem raji  z menoj te, dragi! sklenil čase večne,  pustila vnemar sem zelje narslaji,  pustila vnemar dni na sveti srečne,  sem od povedala se zvezi naji;-  je uslišana bila molitev moja. –  Ne smem postati jaz nevesta tvoja.’</p>	<p>‘Tis foreordained: a flower will be brought low  If lethal frost should cover it in spring,  Or if its blooms are overlaid by snow;  So too a girl whose heart receives a sting  Too young, replaces inner peace with woe  And never apprehends what life may bring;  What worth is wedlock for a moment mere  If she of parting always lives in fear?</p> <p>So that you should be rescued from the grave  By the good Lord, who then in paradise  A union for us both, my dear, will save,  I gave up happiness beyond all price,  I forfeited the sweetest joys I crave  Making our union my great sacrifice;  My prayer to God was heard and not denied. –  I cannot now become your earthly bride.”</p> <p>(Prešeren 1999: 138-139)</p>

With Bogomila's speech Črtomir experiences a new blow: after the military defeat and the massacre of his comrades he has to give up his hope for a private life with the beloved. When the priest explains to him that true Christianity is to be spread by love, and not by the sword, and when a sublime rainbow surrounds Bogomila under the waterfall, Črtomir silently accepts baptism himself. He and Bogomila



part forever: she returns home to her father, while he goes to Aquileia, where he becomes a priest and missionary. They never see each other again in this world.

With such mixture of personal narrative and dialogues, the idyllic setting in the Slovene Lake District of Bled and Bohinj, the denouement of action in the private sphere, and the focus on emotional and existential aspects of the motifs of unfulfilled love and renunciation, the second part of *The Baptism on the Savica* leaves the world of the epic and approaches the modern genre of the novel.

### ***The historical narrative as baptism of the nation***

Prešeren's poetic narrative is written in the spirit of romantic historicism and cultural nationalism, which – as argued by Joep Leerssen, among others – bases the existence of a national community on language, the past, folklore, oral tradition, and epic poetry: 'One of the features of romanticism is its belief that the cultural and literary history of nations began with the epic'.<sup>7</sup> As will be shown below, many literatures of this period tended to reconstruct or even falsify their national epic by collecting, editing, or imitating the orality of presumably primitive and authentic epic folk songs and cycles. In response to this ideology, Prešeren did not choose to imitate the oral epic tradition in the Slovene language, where heroic songs did not actually exist, but rather filled the national 'epic slot' (*Eposstelle*) with a secondary, literary epic that served the same function of anchoring the nascent national literature in the conditions of post-Enlightenment modernity. Prešeren's *Krst pri Savici* is thus among the earliest narrative-historical expressions of the frustrating sense of being subject to a foreign power – with which Slovenes lived in Prešeren's time, and for many generations after. Even before *Baptism*, Prešeren had introduced this pattern of interpretation in his *Sonetni venec* (Wreath of Sonnets, 1834). Here he diagnoses in a historicizing way the externally-dictated dependency of his country, which has suppressed poetic creativity:

<p>Viharjov jeznih mrzle domačije bile pokrajine naše so, kar, Samo! tvoj duh je zginil, kar nad tvojo jamo pozabljeno od vnukov veter brije</p> <p>Oblóžile očetov razprtije s Pipínovim so jarmom sužno ramo od tod samó krvavi punt poznamo, boj Vitovca in ropanje Turčije.</p> <p>Minuli sreče so in slave časi, ker vredne dela niso jih budile, obmólnili so pesmi sladki glási.</p> <p>Kar niso jih zatrle časov sile, kar raste rož na mladem nam Parnasi, izdíhljeji, solzé so jih redile.</p>	<p>Inclement home where icy storms chastise Has been our land e'er since your spirit brave, O Samo, vanished; your forgotten grave Beswept by bitter winds since your demise.</p> <p>From when our fathers, rent by conflicts' cries, Knew how the yoke of Pippin did enslave, The Turks' attacks, revolt with sword and stave, Vitovec' battle – these our times comprise.</p> <p>The joyful years of glory long ago Through valiant labours never were regained, And songs' sweet voices we no longer know.</p> <p>Yet by the force of time still unconstrained On young Parnassus for us flowers grow; Commingle sighs and tears these blooms sustained.</p> <p>(Prešeren 1999: 94–95)</p>
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This lyrical narrative understands the subaltern 'slavery' of nascent Slovene literature – which emerged on the periphery of the predominantly German-speaking Austrian Empire – as repercussion of the Carantanian loss of sovereignty in the Middle Ages. Thus, it is Prešeren, a poet, and not some historian, who first proposed the construction of the past through a coherent narrative about his ethnic group. For Alexander Beecroft, such narrative shaping of the past in terms of the millennial continuity of a particular ethnic community is constitutive of what he calls national literary ecology (i.e., a nationalized literary field that upgrades vernacular literature).<sup>8</sup> Such a narrative, however, is

not exclusively the product of nineteenth-century national histories, as Beecroft seems to believe. Romantic literature did indeed pave the way for literary history with genres such as the historical novel, tragedy, and the national epic. Prešeren did the same with his *Baptism*.

For this reason, *Krst pri Savici* – despite the subjective, confessional, and intimate character of Črtomir's love story – has acquired the status of a founding myth of the Slovenes, embodying the perennial problem of dependency, subjugation, and internal ideological-religious division. The Slovenes, subjected to the Habsburg Empire as a so-called non-historical nation, were virtually baptized by Prešeren in *Krst* and brought back onto the stage of world history. Using the fate of Črtomir, Prešeren poetically recalled the decline of the heroic age and, in elegiac perspective, presented the cultural formation of a national identity through integration into the more powerful, universal civilization of Christianity. The military-political foundation of the nation had to give way to the cultural one. Such a *modus operandi* for creating a collective identity of Slovenes may run counter to the typical aspirations of European national movements.

At the same time, however, the scheme of the plot seems to correspond to Herder's idea of the three stages of development of the epic genre, as expounded by Hans Graubner.<sup>9</sup> A religious dimension is innate to the epic, linked to its oral and mythological origins and traceable from the Greco-Roman gods and divine heroes of antiquity to the Christian imaginings of Dante, Tasso, and Milton. Based on this heritage of the sacred in the epic, Herder invoked the replacement of the national epic by the epic of humanity (*Menschheitsepos*), in which the ethics of Christianity, embodied in the figure of the Redeemer, represents the ultimate horizon and *telos* of epic action and history. Against this background, Črtomir develops from a hero of the national epic to a Christianized hero of the epic of humanity. Unlike Herder, however, Prešeren is far from celebrating such a transformation of his hero: he places it at the end of the narrative and colors it with resignation.

### ***A romantic-classical verse tale***

As counterbalance to his narrative of how the predecessors of the imagined community of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Slovenes were forced to abandon their particularity and submit to the universal Christianity that had triumphed over European culture since late antiquity, Prešeren developed a form of representation that shows how he, as a writer from a subjugated periphery of the Austrian Empire, was able to master what was then considered the universality of the European literary tradition. Following in the footsteps of his great international predecessors, Prešeren performed a gesture

characteristic of what Hainsworth calls the cumulative ‘idea of the epic’: ‘There is no epic poem that does not confront its predecessors; the themes that recur in the epic – heroism, the nation, the faith – are evolving ideas; and the idea itself is cumulative, though to the end the Homeric foundation was never obscured.’<sup>10</sup> Just as Virgil did with Homer, so Prešeren appropriated canonical models of the genre and modernized them intertextually, adopting their meter. Through a range of allusions, borrowings, and narrative analogies, his *Krst* refers to the epic tradition from Homer and Virgil to Dante and Tasso. The poem recalls classical motifs of the epic hero, siege, bloody battle, devastation of the homeland, idyllic and spiritual love, and renunciation of earthly emotional bonds, and it uses Dante’s and Tasso’s metrical form (26 *terzine* for the Introduction and 53 *ottave rime* for the *Baptism* proper), epic tropes, and classical figures of speech. For example, an abbreviated Homeric simile here underlies an image of nature that Črtomir sensually experiences in a lyrical moment of psychological self-reflection:

<p>Slap drugo jutro mu grmi v ušesa;  junak premišlja, kak bolj spodej lena  voda razgraja, kak bregove stresa,  in kak pred njo se gore ziblje stena,  kak skale podkopuje in drevesa,  kak do nebes leti nje jeze pena! –  Tak se zažene, se pozneje ustavi  mladenič, Črtomir pri sebi pravi.</p>	<p>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 but first corrects  In later life – so Črtomir reflects.  (Prešeren 1999: 128–129)</p>
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Considering the fact that Prešeren, instructed by the extensive esthetic, literary, and philological knowledge of his friend Matija Čop, was well aware that the epic had long been considered obsolete, it is not surprising that he – like many other Romantic poets – should mix the classical, medieval, and early modern epic tradition with genres and forms much closer to the taste of modern bourgeois society than to the aristocratic ethics of the classical epic. Thus, his short epic features motifs of the

tragic separation of a pair of lovers against a historical background of religious, cultural, and political conflict (as with Voltaire's tragedy *Alzire ou les Américains*, Schiller's 'romantic tragedy' *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*, Scott's historical novel *Waverley*, Manzoni's novel *I promessi sposi*), while its individualistic re-semanticization of thematic remnants of heroic epic recalls Byronic narrative poems such as Byron's *The Siege of Corinth* and Mickiewicz's *Konrad Wallenrod*.<sup>11</sup>

What is special about the work *Krst pri Savici*, which is by no means isolated in terms of genre, is that Prešeren mixes the pattern of a Romantic historical verse tale, in which the binary oppositions typical of cultural nationalism (national vs. foreign, freedom vs. slavery, autonomy vs. hegemony) resonate, with the *classical* tradition of the epic.<sup>12</sup> He does this through complex use of the intertextual strategies mentioned above: the use of stanzaic forms, proportionality of structure, and the citational use of epic topoi.<sup>13</sup> Thus, his poem stands in an original way – one might call it classical Romanticism – at the interface between archaizing and modernizing tendencies that characterize Romantic poetry in general.<sup>14</sup> In Prešeren's work, the dichotomy of epic and novelistic worlds ('Introduction' vs. *Baptism*) is particularly striking: the change of poetic form (from the more dynamic *terza rima* to the appeasing *ottava rima*) marks the difference between the public world, in which the hero acts as exemplary representative of the community, and the private sphere, in which the main character becomes the emotional image of the Romantic poet himself.

As Viktor Zhirmunsky observes, in Byronic narrative poems, which usually range from 500 to 1,500 verses, the protagonist plays the central structural role: the entire plot, usually a love story (with variations of the triangle motif), serves primarily to portray the personality, perspective, and problems of the main character. The latter is typically a Byronic hero who exhibits extraordinary, ambivalent, highly individual traits and whose psyche is split. He is haunted by a deep and tragic conflict with himself or with his environment, which is reflected in motifs such as exile, escape, journeying, and revenge. The narrator of the story – which, as in the classic novella, is condensed, romantic, dramatic, and elliptical – often adopts the hero or heroine's point of view and shares their value perspective. Another way the poet approaches his heroes is through first-person narration so that the narrative becomes a confession (e.g., Byron's *The Prisoner of Chillon* or Lermontov's *Mciri*), or is filled with long monologues and dialogues by the protagonists, conveying the story from their point of view (e.g. Mickiewicz's *Konrad Wallenrod*, or Prešeren's *Baptism on the Savica*). The narrative is thus intensely subjectivized, and the epic distance between author and hero disappears. The heroes with their stories strongly resemble their authors.<sup>15</sup> Although the narrative perspective, the presentation of

the hero, and the discourse of these poems are clearly set in dialogue with political, ethical, national, and philosophical issues of their time (e.g., with the ideas of radical liberalism or national revival), their plots are often displaced, in part because of censorship. Their settings commonly favour the medieval or early modern past, the picturesque landscapes of the Mediterranean, and Oriental exoticism.

### ***Epos wanted – dead or alive!***

Romantic narrative poems such as verse tales in the Byronic style, however, could hardly fulfill the expectations for the national epic. As stated earlier, the obsession with epic poetry erupted with the national revivals toward the end of the eighteenth century, and did not ebb away in the nineteenth.<sup>16</sup> Greek and medieval epics and epic song cycles, in the tradition of folk epics, were the subject of extensive philological and historical research, collections, reconstructions, and critical editions, and inspired numerous efforts to create something equivalent to native folk songs and sagas in any language.

Translations and free adaptations of *Nibelungenlied* (The Song of the Nibelungs) and other medieval narrative poems proliferated in Germany. Folk sagas and fairy tales were collected and rewritten throughout Europe and presented as national epics. In a number of European literatures, the cultural nationalism of their protagonists pinned its hopes on epic as the most prestigious and monumental form, expected to testify to the millennial continuity and the irreplaceable individuality of the national spirit. Johann Gottfried von Herder, whose philosophy of history inspired the European national movements with the idea of the linguistic-cultural identity of peoples and their equality under the aegis of a universal pluralistic humanism, distinguished three epochs and developmental variants of epic poetry, as Hans Graubner shows:<sup>17</sup> the oral epic, created, remembered, and recited in the childhood of the people by ordinary, uneducated clans; the folk or national epic (*Volksepos*), composed and written down in the youth of the people by a genial individual who builds on the tradition of the oral epic to represent the history, customs, and spirit of his people; and the humanity epic (*Menschheitsepos*), by which people at the mature stage of development transcend their ethnic affiliation and, following the ethical ideal of Christianity, strive for the universally human. In Herder's understanding, then, the national epic has a different meaning than the notion of this genre as an ideological instrument for establishing a nation-state.<sup>18</sup>

Under the influence of Friedrich August Wolff's *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795), the Homeric epics were considered to be the crown woven from epic songs and cycles of anonymous singers, originally transmitted orally,<sup>19</sup> and thus the earliest expression of the folk spirit. Friedrich von Schlegel, in his 1812 Vienna lectures on the history of old and new literature (*Geschichte der alten und neuen Literatur*), treated epic poetry as the primary form through which a particular nation establishes the memory of its origins, its mythology, and its paradigmatic heroes, and as the one that, together with the historically younger genre of drama, earns normative status for a particular linguistic and cultural tradition.<sup>20</sup> He called the heroic epics from the *Aeneid* to the *Cid* 'national poems' (*Nationalgedicht*).<sup>21</sup>

The national role of the epic became one of the guiding ideas of the early nineteenth century. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe declared in 1812, in the second volume of his autobiography *Aus meinem Leben*, that 'every nation, if it would be worth anything at all, must possess an epopee, to which the precise form of the epic poem is not necessary'.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, in his 1835 *Lectures on Esthetics*, Georg W. F. Hegel regarded the epic as 'the Saga, the Book, the Bible of a people', and continued: 'Every great and important people has such absolutely earliest books which express for it its own original spirit. To this extent these memorials are nothing less than the proper foundations of a national consciousness'.<sup>23</sup> Hegel discussed epic poetry, and in particular 'the national epic' (*ein nationales Epos*),<sup>24</sup> in the context of the arts that symbolically unite and represent nations, such as monumental architecture and sculpture, patriotic music, and historical painting. For him, 'the content and form of epic proper is the entire world-outlook and objective manifestation of a national spirit presented in its self-objectifying shape as an actual event'.<sup>25</sup> The monumental form of the epic encompasses in an encyclopedic manner the totality of an individual nation, its beliefs, character, habits, and space.

In modern times, however, the epic itself becomes questionable and the novel takes its place. Hegel calls the novel 'the modern bourgeois epic' (*moderne bürgerliche Epopöe*), which – compared to its great predecessor – still possesses 'the wide background of a whole world', but which lacks 'the original poetic situation of the world' (*der ursprünglich poetische Weltzustand*) because it presupposes 'a world already prosaically ordered' (*setzt eine bereits zur Prosa geordnete Wirklichkeit voraus*).<sup>26</sup> Arguing that a particular art form such as the epic can only be produced in a particular phase of social development, Karl Marx famously asked: 'Is Achilles possible with powder and lead? Or the *Iliad* with the printing press, not to mention the printing machine? Do not the song and the saga and the muse necessarily come to an end with the printer's bar, hence do not the necessary conditions of epic poetry vanish?'<sup>27</sup> The crux of the problem, however, according to Marx, was how it was possible for Homer as

a classic to appeal even to Marx's contemporaries long after the Greek mythology that had been its source had lost its believers: 'The difficulty is that they still afford us artistic pleasure and that in a certain respect they count as a norm and as an unattainable model.'<sup>28</sup>

It seems, then, that the ancient genre, declared dead or impossible in modernity, was resurrected in the nineteenth century to fulfill equivalent needs under completely different historical and social conditions. In antiquity, the epic genre compressed the mythic and historical past into a story structured around an exemplary hero in order to define what were considered constitutive events for a given community, and which figures embodied its ethos.<sup>29</sup> In parallel, the imaginary representation of the past in nineteenth-century national epics also served to give historical meaning and legitimacy to the present condition and political aspirations of a particular modern imagined community, which often saw itself as part of a larger linguistic-cultural group with roots in antiquity (e.g., Germanic, Romance, Slavic). Thus, in addition to editions and adaptations of medieval epic cycles and heroic songs, original literary epics were created to sing of the nation's lethal battles, its religious and ethnic conflicts., e.g., the epic *Svatopluk* (1833), written as the Slovak equivalent of the *Aeneid* – Ján Hollý, the translator of Vergil, composed it in hexameters to honor the memory of the ninth-century Great Moravian ruler Svatopluk the Great. Dramatic poems (Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* [Forefathers' Eve], 1823–32; Petar P. Njegoš's *Gorski vijenac* [The Mountain Wreath], 1847), and verse tales, e.g., Mickiewicz's *Konrad Wallenrod* (1828), Alexander S. Pushkin's *Poltava* (1829), Mikhail Yu. Lermontov's *Posledny syn volnosti* (The Last Son of Freedom, 1831–32), and Prešeren's *Baptism on the Savica*, were all burdened with the tasks of a national epic, even if their individualism was incompatible with such a function.<sup>30</sup> This is where the centuries-old problems of the Poles with 'Wallenrodism' and of the Slovenes with 'Črtomirism' originated: both main characters, in their novelistic ambivalence, collided with the image of an exemplary 'national hero' as demanded by the nationalist idea at the time of their creation, and for decades later.

## ***Epomania in the Slovene lands***

Nineteenth-century Slovene literature proved no exception in considering the epic as the preeminent literary argument for the nation's historicity. The ZRC SAZU catalog of literary terms in periodicals on the territory of present-day Slovenia between 1870 and 1970 is significant in this regard.<sup>31</sup> From 1839, when the term *Epos* first appeared in a German-language newspaper, the Slovene words *ep* or *epos* were used fifty-five times until 1970, but the term was first defined in Slovene only in 1929 by the



classical philologist Anton Sovrè. The competing term *epopeja* (German *Epopöe*), first mentioned in 1813, occurs forty-eight times by 1969. In addition, the noun *ep(os)* is usually used with various adjectives or predicates (e.g., allegorical, heroic, heroic-comic, Homeric, religious, ancient, biblical, Czech, dramatized, idyllic, classical, exotic, lyrical, Christian, amorous, mythical, modern, satirical, medieval). Among these predicates, several remind us of the concept of national epic: *narodni* (national) appeared for the first time in 1854 and four more times up to 1946, *nacionalni* (national) twice in the period 1940–60, *slovenski* (Slovene) twice in the period 1925–68. The singular variant *narodna epopeja* (Slovenec) appeared in 1850, while the term *narodna/narodska epopeja* was used five times between 1850 and 1949. Even if these relatively modest numbers do not in themselves testify to massive obsession with epic, let alone the national epic, there are nonetheless indications that the leading figures of the emerging literary field in Slovene longed for a Slovene Homer, or for the epic that would bring their nation, considered non-historical, onto the stage of world history.

In a letter of November 1795, Baron Sigismund (Žiga) Zois, a wealthy Carniolan entrepreneur, enlightened polymath, and patron of the early philological phase of the Slovene national movement, discussed with Valentin Vodnik, later canonized as the first Slovene poet, his plan for an epic with themes drawn from Slavic history. In keeping with prevailing classicist and Enlightenment notions of the genre, Zois advised the poet to condense the narrative to achieve unity of setting and action, to introduce an amorous plot, respect the historical background and mores of feudal society, avoid Greek and Roman mythology, and instrumentalize Slavic parallels to the deities of antiquity for moral instruction and the struggle against prejudice and superstition. According to Zois, *epopee* requires a noble, sublime tone, which Vodnik, as a budding Slavic poet, must first invent, taking care not to exaggerate.<sup>32</sup> Vodnik, a quite prolific poet, grammarian, historian, journalist, and high school professor of the post-Enlightenment period, dabbled in elevated genres such as the ode, but never wrote a single page of epic. The epic slot remained vacant. So the next, Romantic generation faced the same challenge – to create a national epic. However, the librarian, literary scholar, and philologist Matija Čop, the central intellectual figure of his generation, was already familiar with the great skepticism of the German classics and romantics regarding the possibility of an epic in a modern bourgeois society. Accordingly, Matija Čop, as a connoisseur of classical, medieval, and modern epics, and, at the same time, of contemporary literary trends in Europe, argued in a letter of August 1828 that it is ‘very naïve for anyone [today, note M.J.] simply to willy-nilly sit down and undertake to make an epic,’ since ‘an *epopee* that wants to become a true national work’ cannot be produced arbitrarily, in

any epoch.<sup>33</sup> Čop shared with Hegel and other thinkers of his time the conviction that the novel and contemporary genres of narrative poetry such as Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea*, Byron's *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan*, or Mickiewicz's *Konrad Wallenrod* or *Pan Tadeusz* came much closer to modern sensibilities than to the old-fashioned epic. Čop praised *Pan Tadeusz* as 'a true epopee of our time' (*eine wahre Epopöe unserer Zeit*) because the poem – like Goethe's idyll – had 'a world-historical background that elevates the plot'.<sup>34</sup>

According to Boris Paternu, in the nineteenth century it was claimed from time to time that Slovene poetry had no real epic; Prešeren's *Baptism* did not fulfill these expectations, either. In the European Peoples' Spring of 1848, 'the problem of the "Slovene Homer"' and 'the idea of the heroic epic virtually obsessed Slovene literature', and by 1850 the newspapers in Ljubljana were 'full of desires for a heroic national epic'.<sup>35</sup> In the following years, many tried to satisfy this need, which gained momentum under the new conditions in which Slovene national thought could spread more freely in the Austrian Empire. As a kind of substitute for the epic, folkloric narrative poems emerged to expand or adapt the newly-recorded heroic folk songs and stories (Luka Svetec's *Klepec*, 1853, Franc Cegnar's *Pegam in Lambergar*, 1858). Signs of *epomania* also included the publication of real or fake Old Slavic monuments (Fran Levstik published his translation of Hanka's mystification *Kraljedvorski rokopis* in 1856; Maks Pleteršnik translated the Russian prose saga *Song of Igor's Army* in 1866). Janez Trdina published his *Pripovedka od Glasan-Boga* (A Tale of Glasan-Bog) in 1850 in the *Ljubljanski časnik* with the modest subtitle 'Attempt at a national epic of the Slovenes,' but in reality the work is a prosaic hodgepodge of folk tales and heroic ballads connected with the theme of the Turkish invasions of the Habsburg Empire. It seems, then, that even in the second half of the century the Slovenes did not receive a text that met the need for a national epic.

## ***Why Baptism on the Savica?***

How then could it happen that Prešeren's *Baptism on the Savica*, though a highly individualized Byronic verse tale, came to occupy the single epic slot in the national literary system, whereas all other epic poems, even if longer and less subjective, were assigned to oblivion? The first reason is that *Krst pri Savici* is the earliest printed Slovenian literary epic, and its theme and classical structure indeed come close to the ideal of the national epic. Prešeren's romantic narrative sheds light on medieval events, which he recognizes as the historical origin of his nation's dependent and underdeveloped state in the pre-March period. At the same time, the Christianization of Carantanians and Carniolians

along with the loss of their cultural, religious, and political sovereignty form the world-historical background that places the Slovene special case on the scale of universality. In addition to this object of representation, it is the *form* of representation, with its intertextual adoption of the classical, medieval, and early modern epic tradition, that qualifies Prešeren's *Baptism* as a national epic.

Secondly, and more importantly, *The Baptism on the Savica* was placed at the head of Prešeren's canon, while Prešeren himself was canonized as the Slovene national poet. The figure of the national poet as cultural saint<sup>36</sup> is typically reserved for only one person in any literature, parallel to the singularity of the epic slot. As early as 1866, critic Josip Stritar, in his introductory essay on Prešeren, was elevating the latter to the status of national poet: 'Every nation has a man whom she imagines with a holy, pure nimbus over his head. What Shakespeare is to the English, Racine to the French, Dante to the Italians, Goethe to the Germans, Pushkin to the Russians, Mickiewicz to the Poles – that is Prešeren to the Slovenes.'<sup>37</sup> Stritar compares Prešeren's poetic work to a 'magnificent symphony, as diverse as the poet's soul life', and declares *Krst pri Savici* to be the 'finale of this symphony, in which all the voices merge and unite in a gentle, melancholic harmony.'<sup>38</sup>

Prešeren's narrative poem, however, contradicts on the formal level the expectations of a national epic. The author himself, in a letter to František L. Čelakovský from 22 August 1836, ambiguously reduces his 'latest product' (*mein neuestes Produkt*) *Baptism* to a 'metrical task' (*eine metrische Aufgabe*) with which he wanted to please the clergy.<sup>39</sup> The grand epic story is reduced to a short, ballad-like introduction to the main part of the poem. The second, longer part is devoted to the private life and psychological events of the individual, while the narrative unfolds novelistically, and is staged in dialogues. Such deconstruction of the national epic proves even more consistent on the thematic level. Because of the division inscribed in the core of ethnicity, the Slovenes – as a politically and culturally autonomous body – effectively destroy themselves in the 'Introduction'. They remain only latent in *Krst* as a community merging with the imposed universality of Christianity. In the epilogue, the converted Črtomir becomes a Christian missionary and goes to Aquilea, 'amidst those of Slovene descent / And further too', beyond their border.<sup>40</sup> This laconic account evokes the hero's crossing of the very semiotic border that, according to the idea of the 'national epic', is supposed to territorialize the national community.

Prešeren's dedicatory sonnet to Matija Čop announces the fluidity of the individual and the historical indeterminacy of the sociocultural systems within which the subject is supposed to orient itself. On the one hand, the poem takes up the contemporary discourse of post-Enlightenment free-thinking,

Kollárian Pan-Slavism, and national awakening; on the other, it reflects the doctrine and symbolism of Christian tradition. Conflict between the two discourses animates ambivalent perspectival shifts. Assessments of events and people fluctuate and contradict each other, mostly due to changing focalization. Thus Črtomir, whom the extradiegetic narrator initially portrays as an exemplary epic hero, is identified as the culprit of the fratricidal struggle at the end of the ‘Introduction’ through a focalization shift that adapts to Valjhun’s point of view; the priest also sees Črtomir this way. Bogomila, who carries Črtomir away through the glimmering rainbow that surrounds her, becomes the subject of the narrator’s slightly ironic remark shortly after Črtomir’s silent baptism:

<p>Molče v to prošnjo Črtomir dovoli,  z duhovnim bliža slapu se Savice,  molitve svete mašnik, on z njim moli,  v imeni krsti ga svete Trojice.  So na kolenah, kar jih je okoli,  se od veselja svet’ obraz device,  ki je bila podpora vere krive,  je opravljala službo bóg’nje Žive.</p>	<p>Up to Savica’s fall they make their way,  For Črtomir with her request complies;  The holy priest and he together pray,  In Father, Son and Spirit he’s baptised.  Those near fall down upon their knees straightway  And joy illuminates the maiden’s eyes,  The eyes of one who heathendom observed,  Who formerly the goddess Živa served.    (Prešeren 1999: 144–145)</p>
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Through escalating crises, Črtomir loses the attributes of agency: after a military defeat, he collapses as the subject of action; with his baptism and farewell to Bogomila, he fades as the subject of desire; and finally, he disappears as the subject of speech. In the two concluding stanzas, Črtomir remains silent. Črtomir sees the end of the *Baptism on the Savica* as a hollowed-out subject, hypnotically surrendering to the Other – the figure of Bogomila, in whom the power of the symbolic order of Christianity has settled. But Črtomir as a subject does not place himself only in external imitation of the ‘universal law’ of Christianity, as Slavoj Žižek thought.<sup>41</sup> He did not even identify himself with the original paganism. Prešeren’s Črtomir no longer conforms to the traditional notion of a coherent self.

Despite Prešeren's deconstruction of national epic, his *Baptism on the Savica*, written in 1835 and first printed in book form on 14 April 1836, is still considered a national myth, while Črtomir remains a frustrating symbol of the Slovene national character. *Krst* occupies a prominent place in cultural memory, as it crystallizes the discourses that continue to haunt the society to which it was originally addressed. Consequently, the poem has provided semantically charged material for intertextual paraphrases or allusions, critical interpretations, and political controversies. The multiplicity of comments, mentions, adaptations, quotations, allusions, and other forms of intertextuality created an imaginary through which posterity continually reassessed its cultural affiliations and grappled with ever-changing contemporary issues.<sup>42</sup>

### ***The imaginary of Baptism on the Savica***

To date, there have been about fifty more or less apocryphal adaptations of or riffs on *Baptism on the Savica*. From different angles, in different styles and genres, they have taken up a number of themes: loss of independence through forced Christianization and submission to foreign rule (Mimi Malenšek's historical novel *Črtomir and Bogomila*, 1959), the defeatism of the national character (the poems of Oton Župančič from 1904, Miran Jarc from 1940, and Jože Snoj from 1994), resistance to Germanization (the historical drama *Ljubislava* by Etbin Kristan, 1907), the pietistic quality of the nation and the tragic fratricide during World War II (the short story *Črtomir and Bogomila* by Lea Fatur (1912), the libretto *Baptism on the Savica* by Zorko Simčič (1953)), the tension between heroic action and resignation, individualism and collectivism (poems by Alojz Gradnik, 1926, and Edvard Kocbek, 1963), the modern will to power and nihilism (poetry cycle *Baptism* by Veno Taufer and Dominik Smole's absurdist political drama *Baptism on the Savica*, both published in 1969), reflections on myth-making in national history (Branko Gradišnik's short metafiction of 1988, Dimitrij Rupel's historical metafiction *Lion's Share*, 1989), and, last but not least, the decanonization of the sacred text in popular culture (a travesty in the 2015 mock anthology *SLOLvene Classics* by Bojan Gorenc).

*Krst pri Savici* is an example of what Igor P. Smirnov once called a key text.<sup>43</sup> As the central text of a particular culture, it is used longterm as a source of terms, expressions, names, narrative sequences, and descriptions, i.e., as a kind of collective language through which a community observes itself, interprets its past, its present state, and its future possibilities. Like older works of European literature – the *Odyssey*, *Oedipus the King*, *Antigone*, *Don Juan*, *Faust*, *Hamlet*, *Don Quixote* – Prešeren's narrative

poem has shaped Slovene cultural tradition through its recurring symbols. To achieve such status, the key text must first be canonized.

Canonization of *Krst* began in the mid-nineteenth century, and was completed at the end of the same. After two reprints (in 1844 on the front pages of the newspaper *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice*, and in Prešeren's collection *Poezije* from 1847), the poem was considered a praiseworthy – more objective, heroic, epic, nationally engaged – exception in the work of the poet known, respected, and detested as a sentimental love poet. The fragments of *Krst* were included in high school reading books (1850, 1868), adapted for the stage of reading clubs (Penn and Levstik 1867), received positive reviews and in-depth interpretations that placed it at the top of the poet's oeuvre. Moreover, a number of epigones fell under Prešeren's spell, and parodists began to poke fun at *Baptism*'s serious tone (Simon Jenko in 1855 in the comic poem *Ognjeplamtič* [Mr. Fireblaze]). In 1900, on the centenary of Prešeren's birth, the acts of his final canonization as the Slovene national poet took place – a tribute album appeared in 1900, and, after a five-year delay, Prešeren's monument was erected in the center of Ljubljana.<sup>44</sup> With the subsequent commemorative practices dedicated to the Slovene cultural saint Prešeren, *Baptism*, the finale of his volume *Poesies*, became firmly established in the reading repertoire.

Another step on the way to defining a key Slovene text was a semiotic process that can be called antonomazing. As early as the 1860s, journalists began to appropriate proper names from *Krst* (titles, names of protagonists, place names) that referred to its motifs, characters, and themes. Following the logic of antonomasia – a trope related to metonymy – the proper names of *Baptism* were transformed into common nouns denoting, for example, national character, destiny, etc.

In 1864, a controversy erupted that has defined the functioning of the imaginary of *Baptism* to this day: Janko Pajk claimed that the poem expressed Prešeren's conversion from freethinker to convinced Catholic. The contrast between freethinking and Catholic Christianity, which according to Janko Kos is a key feature of Slovene intellectual history,<sup>45</sup> has since flared up again and again through interpretations and literary rewritings of *Baptism*. In particular, Fran Levec's 1882 publication of Prešeren's ambiguous letter, in which the poet saw *Baptism* as a metrical task meant to please the clergy, fueled the tension between conservative Catholic and progressive liberal evaluations of Prešeren's work. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, liberal and socialist intellectuals and writers even rejected *Krst* as inconsistent because the main character Črtomir appeared as an unprincipled convert who did not deserve to be a role model for the nation.<sup>46</sup> In the very heat of debate, however, *Krst* became the epitome of being Slovenian, that is, an ambivalent and frustrating

symbol of divided national character. Expressions such as 'our Črtomirs', 'Črtomir, our hero', or 'Črtomirship' became commonplace. The poetics of symbolism also contributed to Črtomir becoming a symbol of the deepest layers and contradictions of the Slovene soul at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the nineteenth century, and partly again during the Second World War, literary critics and writers emphasized Črtomir's epic heroism, patriotism, and love of freedom. His sentimental side and his quiet conversion were practically suppressed or embarrassingly tolerated. From the fin-de-siècle onward, the discord of Črtomir's character came to the forefront of literary allusions and rewriting. His vacillation between the old and the new religion, between action and passivity, collectivism and individualism, will and resignation, hope and hopelessness was thematized. Writers dealt with the controversial question of conversion and the occasion of despair, especially with Črtomir's suicidal tendencies. All the while, work was being done on demythicizing and deromanticizing Prešeren's plot, including the deconstruction of the romantic love for Bogomila.

The figure of the epic protagonist underwent radical changes in the twentieth century. They range from an allegorical or symbolic representation by the fin-de-siècle lyricist Oton Župančič (Črtomir embodies the fractured national character) and the postmodern theater director Dragan Živadinov (Črtomir is multiplied in the historical changes of ideology and art forms) to the realistic representation of Črtomir's unstable character by the historical novelist Mimi Malenšek in the 1950s and the modernist existentialism of the 1960s, which de-romanticizes the key text to reveal the fluid subject and the self-destructive will to power immanent in ideology (Veno Taufer's experimental poetry cycle and Dominik Smole's anti-drama, a disloyal sequel to Prešeren's epic). In the 1980s and 90s, postmodernists exposed the fictionality of both *The Baptism on the Savica* and history as such through metafictional interplay of possible worlds, for example in Dimitrij Rupel's novel, *Lion's Share*.

## Conclusion

Prešeren's *Krst pri Savici* assumes the place of the Slovene national epic because of its historical interpretation of the non-historical nation, its structural combination of classical and modern genre patterns, and the canonization of its author as cultural saint and national poet. Even though the theme and form of representation in *Krst* run counter to the model of a great national epic, it is precisely its ambiguity, brevity, and semantic openness that have led to ever new, divergent, and contradictory interpretations in literature, criticism, and society at large. The intertextual and metatextual

sequences sparked by the key text attest to the fact that it may be ongoing dissent (rather than consensus) that secures Krst's epic place as a flawed and traumatic national epic.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Taterka, 'Nation erzählt sich selbst', 20–24, 26–31.

<sup>2</sup> Taterka, 36, 56.

<sup>3</sup> Hainsworth, *The Idea of Epic*, 7–10, 76–114.

<sup>4</sup> This text is based on my earlier work on Prešeren and his *Baptism on the Savica*. See Juvan, *Imaginarij Krsta*; 'Panorama romantične pesnitve', and 'The Nation Between the Epic and the Novel'.

<sup>5</sup> For detailed discussion of the genesis, background, structure, and interpretation of *Krst*, see Paternu, *France Prešeren*, 83–153. On *Krst* and Biedermeierism see Scherber, 'Od metrične naloge do nacionalne epopeje'.

<sup>6</sup> Štih and Simoniti, *Slovenska zgodovina do razsvetljenstva*, 29–41.

<sup>7</sup> See Leerssen, 'Primitive orality and archaic heroism'.

<sup>8</sup> Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature*, 197–198.

<sup>9</sup> Graubner, 'Epos, Volksepos, Menschheitsepos', 88–90. More on this below.

<sup>10</sup> Hainsworth, *The Idea of Epic*, vii.

<sup>11</sup> On comparative contexts of *Baptism*, see Kos, *Primerjalna zgodovina slovenske literature*, 68–74; Kos, 'Motivi Prešernovega Krsta pri Savici in evropska literatura', 143–160.

<sup>12</sup> According to Taterka, the European national epics are reminiscent of German discussion of the genre; moreover, because of their mutual appropriations, borrowings and responses, the national epics are indeed transnational and modern, although each of them claims to represent a unique national character going back to antiquity ('Nation erzählt sich selbst', 60). ('Nation erzählt sich selbst', 60).

<sup>13</sup> Kos, 'Motivi', 144–151.

<sup>14</sup> According to O'Neill ('Romantic re-appropriations of the epic', 193), who boldly generalizes from the British case, 'Epic serves as a bright star towards whose seemingly steadfast light many Romantic



poets aspire. And yet Romantic poetry thrives on transformations of genre, on a remodelling of past works in the interests of new, often hybridized forms.'

<sup>15</sup> Zhirmunsky, *Byron i Pushkin*.

<sup>16</sup> See Detering et al., 'Nationalepen zwischen Fakten und Fiktionen'.

<sup>17</sup> See Graubner, 'Epos, Volksepos, Menschheitsepos – zum Epos-Konzept bei Herder'.

<sup>18</sup> Graubner, op. cit., 86.

<sup>19</sup> Taterka, 'Die Nation erzählt sich selbst', 24.

<sup>20</sup> Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, 59, 10, 265.

<sup>21</sup> Schlegel, op. cit., 80, 267.

<sup>22</sup> Goethe, *The Auto-Biography of Goethe*, 462.

<sup>23</sup> Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 1045.

<sup>24</sup> Hegel, o. c., 1057.

<sup>25</sup> Hegel, o. c., 1044.

<sup>26</sup> Hegel, o. c., 1092; the translation adapted.

<sup>27</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 110–111.

<sup>28</sup> Marx, o. c., 111.

<sup>29</sup> On the epic as a genre see also Lord, 'Narrative poetry'; Merchant, *The Epic*.

<sup>30</sup> On romantic narrative poems in Slavic literatures, see Hvišč, *Epické literárne druhy v slovenskom a pol'skom romantizme*; Kšicová, *Poéma za romantismu a novoromantismu*; Lasecka-Zielakowa, *Powieść poetycka w Polsce w okresie romantyzmu*; Popović, *Srpska romantičarska poema*.

<sup>31</sup> *Card Catalogue of Literary Terms in Slovenian Periodicals*, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Institute of Slovenian Literature and Literary Studies, Ljubljana.

<sup>32</sup> Zois et al., *Izbrano delo*, 55–57.

<sup>33</sup> 'Als ob sich eine Epopoe, die ein wahres Nationalwerk seyn sollte [...] in jedem Zeitalter &c willkürlich producieren ließe!' (Čop, *Pisma Matija Čopa*, 145).

<sup>34</sup> Čop, o. c., 284–285.

- <sup>35</sup> Paternu, 'Struktura in funkcija Jenkove parodije v razvoju slovenske romantične epike', 371-372.
- <sup>36</sup> See Dović and Helgason, *National Poets, Cultural Saints*; Dović and Helgason (eds.), *Great Immortality*.
- <sup>37</sup> Stritar, *Zbrano delo*, 48. Taterka cites an example of a very similar formulation from 1883 with reference to the Lithuanian national epic: 'Was für die Griechen *Odyssee* und *Ilias* sind, für die Römer die *Aeneis*, für die Juden das Alte Testament – das ist für uns Litauer dieses Lied der *Witolorausda*, der erste Teil des großen Epos *Anafielas*.' (Taterka, 'Die Nation erzählt sich selbst', 61)
- <sup>38</sup> Stritar, *Zbrano delo*, 43-44.
- <sup>39</sup> Prešeren, *Zbrano delo*, 190.
- <sup>40</sup> Prešeren, *Poems*, 144-145.
- <sup>41</sup> Žižek, *Jezik, ideologija, Slovenci*, 34-39.
- <sup>42</sup> For details about intertextual works inspired by *Baptism* see Juvan, *Imaginarij Krsta v slovenski literaturi*.
- <sup>43</sup> Smirnov, 'Citirovanie kak istoriko-literaturnaja problema'.
- <sup>44</sup> See Dović, 'Prešeren 1905: Ritual Afterlives and Slovenian Nationalism'.
- <sup>45</sup> Kos, *Duhovna zgodovina Slovencev*.
- <sup>46</sup> Bernik, 'Črtomir kot nacionalni mit'.

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