

Triglav in Slovenian National Consciousness: Literary Representations of the Alpine Region from the Enlightenment to the Interwar Period

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This article analyses various ways in which Slovenian writers (especially Valentin Vodnik, France Prešeren, and France Bevk) depicted Triglav and the mountain areas of Slovenia in literature from the Enlightenment to the interwar period. This is done through the prism of their aesthetic value and nation-building role, as well as their influence on the development of Slovenian sensibility, identity, and national consciousness. Inspiring the research was the conviction that the mountains occupy a special place in the collective memory of Slovenians, and that Triglav is a symbol of Slovenianness. An important point in the discussion is the comparative study of the origin and significance of Triglav (lit. "the three-headed one") according to Slovenian (Janez Vajkard Valvasor, Anton Tomaž Linhart, Janez Trdina, Davorin Trstenjak) and Polish scholars (Henryk Łowmiański, Jerzy Strzelczyk, Aleksander Gieysztor, Andrzej Szyjewski), and how they correspond to the representations of Triglav in the works of selected Slovenian writers (Vodnik's "Veršac," Prešeren's The Baptism on the Savica, Bevk's The Dying God Triglav).

Keywords: Slovenian literature / national identity / national mythology / mount Triglav / Vodnik, Valentin / Prešeren, France / Bevk, France

Introduction

The highest peak in the country (2,864 m) has become ingrained in Slovenian collective consciousness as a symbol of the quintessence of national identity. This was the result of the enduring relationship

with the Eastern Julian Alps, from the beginnings of Celtic, Roman, and Longobard settlement (Bohinjska Bela, Stara Fužina, Srednja vas, Češnjica, Ajdovski gradec, Trenta) through the first attempts to reach the summit in the eighteenth century and the founding of associations for mountaineering enthusiasts in the nineteenth century. It continued with the competition with the German-speaking Carniolans in marking out the trails and determining the locations of mountain shelters and huts, the purchase of Triglav by Jakob Aljaž and the construction of the Aljaž Tower (Aljažev stolp) on the summit. Later, it was reflected in the historical events in the Triglav area and at the summit as the border between Yugoslavia and Italy ran across Triglav from 1922 and was the site of a number of military operations. The presence of Triglav in events important to the nation significantly impacted its image in the Slovenian collective consciousness. It is first mentioned in seventeenth century sources (Janez Vajkard Valvasor), with the name Triglav emerging in the eighteenth century (Anton Tomaž Linhart).¹ Almost a hundred years later, the first more comprehensive publication on Triglav was written by Davorin Trstenjak (*Triglav, mythologično raziskavanje*, 1870), followed by a study by Adolf Gstirner ("Der Name Triglav und seine Geschichte," 1938) who referred to Gregor Krek and took issue with some of the findings of Trstenjak. In all of the attempts to explore the origins and meaning of Triglav (using Slovenian sources), three main ideas crystallized: (a) the connection between Triglav and the city of Szczecin, (b) the recognition of Triglav as a deity of fire and/or in connection with Trajan, and (c) the rejection of any association of Triglav with the beliefs of the Slavs, including Slovenians. It was important to find an answer to the question posed by Valter Bohinec in his article from 1925: "Does the name Triglav really originate from the name of the old three-headed Slavic god?" (Bohinec 79). If so, was this the supreme Slavic deity or a regional one (worshipped by Polabian Slavs and Pomeranians or Alpine Slavs)? As it transpired, it was particularly difficult to verify and assess the hypotheses formulated by the numerous historians and scholars who had researched the topic due to a lack of reliable sources, hence the divided opinions on the subject. This was most likely the reason why a representation was shaped in the Slovenian consciousness (and also later in literature and art), in which there was a characteristic tendency to reject any associations of Triglav with other deities. Different

¹ This refers to the name Triglav since Adolf Gstirner mentions that the name Terglau was used to refer to this mountain in 1452 (Gstirner 14).

interpretations primarily focused on presenting the image of the mountain itself as a sacred place and the related experiences and ideas, the sources of which are attributed to the representations of Triglav in the pre-Christian era, giving the mountain a special power without specifying its character.

Among the many representations of Triglav in science, literature, visual culture, social habits, and rituals, including many discourses and practices constituting Triglav as a Slovenian national symbol, I will focus on the presentation of the controversial mythical and religious dimensions of Mount Triglav in scientific and literary discourse, taking into account the state of knowledge on this subject in the Polish scholarly community. Three literary works written at different times were selected for analysis: the Enlightenment (“Veršac” by Valentin Vodnik), Romanticism (*The Baptism on the Savica* by France Prešeren) and the fascist occupation (*The Dying God Triglav* by France Bevk). The aim of this selection is to examine different, often ambivalent forms of presenting Triglav in literature by representatives of a broader socio-historical situation (Enlightenment, Romantic and anti-fascist nationalism), through the prism of their aesthetic and national value and the importance of Slavic religion in the formation of Slovenian national autonomy.

The mountain—the embodiment of the highest ideals

In many cultures, mountains are associated with sacred places and spiritual experiences, e.g., Mount Sinai in the Middle East, Mount Olympus in Greece, Mount Kailash in Tibet, Tai Shan in China, Mount Fuji in Japan, Uluru in Australia, Meru Peak in India, Hara Berezaiti in Iran, the mythical “Mountain of the Land” in Mesopotamia or Mount Gerizim in Palestine, also called “the earth’s navel” (Eliade 68–69). In many cases, the topos of the mountains was described as something completely different from the surrounding world, something mysterious that attracts and repels at the same time, *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, something that commands respect and evokes fear, is far and near, sacred, and so associated with religion (Otto 39–55). Edwin Bernbaum analyzed the significance of mountains in a religious context. He lists the following roles or images of mountains: (a) the mountain as the center of the universe, a central axis linking together the three levels of the cosmos (heaven, earth, and hell), ensuring stability and order; (b) the mountain as the center of

the world; (c) the mountain as the center from the perspective of the areas surrounding it; (d) the mountain as a place of a higher reality, the world of clouds and sky; (e) the mountain as an earthly paradise; (f) the mountain as an abode of gods, water nymphs, beings of super-human power; (g) the mountains as a distant world where the bodies of the dead are buried; (h) the mountains as popular pilgrimage centers, etc. (Bernbaum 208–209). In all cases, the mountain world is secluded, embodying the highest ideals of humanity (Šaver 94). Mircea Eliade saw mountain areas in a similar way, drawing attention to their symbolic and religious significance and to the most universal archetypes of the mountain as a cosmic axis linking different levels of existence (Eliade 62–63). According to Eliade, the cosmic mountain, similar to a pillar, ladder, tree or liana, is an example of a cosmic axis around which the world is stretched. It is “the center of the world,” i.e., a sacred place constituting a break in the continuum enabling passage from one cosmic region to another (from heaven to earth and vice versa; 62–63). However, the symbolic meaning of the mountain may not only be related to the center but also to the height (elevation above sea level). The researchers claimed that because of its height, the mountain symbolizes transcendence and a place where heaven and earth meet, whereas its central location determines its symbolic manifestation. This is why climbing a mountain is a spiritual experience which leads us to know both ourselves and god (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 155–156).

The diversity of opinions on the symbolic meaning of mountains and the different cultural and social functions largely depends on the culture they concern (Bernbaum 208). In Slovenia, the mountains are understood as a social and cultural phenomenon which became a component of the notions of the nation and Slovenian collective memory.

The mythology of Triglav

According to Polish sources, Triglav (pol. Trzygłów) was a god of the Pomeranian and Polabian Slavs, worshipped in Szczecin (Borstaburg) and Brandenburg (Strzelczyk 215). We can find references in the works of a number of writers: St. Otto of Bamberg, a missionary in West Pomerania, Ebbo Bambergensis, Herbord, and an anonymous monk from Prüfening. St. Otto mentions a beautiful horse belonging to the god Triglav, which was kept for divinatory purposes, and the course of the procedure of divination similar to the practices around the

sacred horse of Svarozhits in Retra-Radogoszcz, described by Thietmar of Merseburg (216). He claimed that temples and statues dedicated to Triglav were torn down on Otto's orders:

He broke the torso of the statue of Triglav himself, but he took his three silver-plated heads—the reason he was called Triglav [“the three-headed one”]—with himself after that, and then handed them over to Pope Callixtus of blessed memory ... as the evidence of his work, and the conversion and beliefs of those tribes. (qtd. in Strzelczyk 216)

The other biographer, Ebbo Bambergensis, mentions three hills (in Szczecin) in his work *The Life of Otto, Bishop of Bamberg (Vita Ottonis episcopi Bambergensis)*:

Out of the three hills, the taller middle one, dedicated to the highest pagan god, Triglav, had a three-headed likeness, which was covered by a golden veil over the eyes and lips, and the priests assured that he was the highest god and had three heads because he ruled three kingdoms: heaven, earth, and hell, and said that he covered his face to remain indifferent to people's sins, by not seeing and staying silent. (qtd. in Strzelczyk 216)

Ebbo wrote that Triglav was worshipped in Szczecin, Wolin, and Brenna (Brandenburg), Jerzy Strzelczyk claims it was Szczecin and Brandenburg (Strzelczyk 215), whereas Henryk Łowmiański lists Szczecin and Wolin (Łowmiański 175). No other places are known for the worship of this god (at least in the Polish sources) nor does the explanation of the nature and origin of Triglav extend beyond the beliefs of the Pomeranian and Polabian Slavs. In Polish academic circles, scholars have speculated as to whether the Brandenburg and Szczecin versions of Triglav were one or two gods; whether Triglav, just like Svetovit and Svarozhits, was not just another local name of the same highest god of the Polabians, the equivalent of the Russian Perun (Brückner 83); whether the polycephaly of Polabian and Pomeranian gods was a result of Celtic influences on the Polabian religion or the influence of Christian notions of the Holy Trinity (Łowmiański 195). According to Christian Knauthe, Triglav was worshipped in Serbia, he had three golden heads under one hat and held the moon in his hand, whereas Aleksander Gieysztor thought he was the hypostasis of Veles, a Slavic god of the underworld and livestock (Strzelczyk 217; Ławecki et al. 63). However, Alexander Hilferding believed that

Triglav, whose name was just a nickname given to him because of the number of his heads, was Svetovit (Arkonian), “Svarozhits,” worshipped equally with Triglav as the main god; and their identicalness is reflected not only in their polycephaly, but also in having a cult horse and a similar divination procedure. (qtd. in Łowmiański 176–177)

Aleksander Brückner agreed with Hilferding, writing: “Svarozhits, Svetovit, Triglav, Yarovit of the Hevelli and Pomeranian Slavs (in Wolgast) are four different names of the same deity” (Brückner 83). He added: “It is not possible for a god to originally be named Triglav; it is certainly the same Dazhbog, who can see everything on earth, in heaven, and in the underworld” (83). Just like Brückner, Mikołaj Rudnicki, and Gerard Labuda (Łowmiański 195), Stanisław Urbańczyk draws attention to a very significant—though unacceptable for some—issue of *interpretatio christiana*. The scholar thought that power over three kingdoms was a late product of priestly speculations, possibly under the influence of Christian terms (Urbańczyk 46). This train of thought was also followed by Łowmiański, who claimed that Triglav was modelled on the Christian Holy Trinity (Łowmiański 400). Andrzej Szyjewski also saw an echo of the Holy Trinity in Triglav and considered the three worlds ruled over by Triglav as originating in Christian cosmology (Szyjewski 70). The influences of the Christian religion on the interpretation of the meaning of Triglav may bear testament to the relatively late emergence of the cult of Triglav among the Pomeranian Slavs, yet there is not enough evidence to prove that, which is why Gieysztor rejects the above thesis, claiming that: “Those three kingdoms, encompassing heaven, earth, and the underworld, do not have to be adopted from Christianity. A three-zone division can also be found on the so-called Zbruch Idol, Sviatovid ... [I]t is characteristic of the traditional culture of the Slavs, at least the Western ones” (Gieysztor 125). Gieysztor’s opinion would therefore not coincide with Brückner’s claim that Triglav was a young deity. His presence in the writings of Ebbo, Herbord, the monk from Prüfening, and Saxo Grammaticus as a three-headed god shows his archaic quality, which is also reflected in the presence of his name in *durdevdan* poems (Mihajlov 90).

Understanding Triglav separately from the beliefs of the Polabian and Pomeranian Slavs was rare. As one of the few Polish scholars to do so, Szyjewski mentioned Triglav as the mountain and its relationship with Slovenia. He pointed out that Mount Triglav is often mentioned in studies, sometimes enveloped in an entire myth, where it takes on the form of the Cosmic Mountain. In Balkan legends, heaven is to be

found at the summit of Mount Triglav, the first point to emerge from the primeval ocean:

By God's will, it came out of the abyss of the ocean, where it had been submerged together with the sun, moon, and the stars, lightnings and winds, since the beginning of the world; the high mountain of Triglav emerged first. According to the Slovaks, it was the Tatra Mountains (Szyjewski 70).

Tadeusz Linker also writes about Triglav's connection with the creation of the world: "With the word *Halu*, Jessa created the world and all that existed in it. Therefore Triglav, having heard it, tore off his three heads, and from the blood that flowed from them arose hosts of three successive deities" (Linker 24).

Based on the above-mentioned sources, Triglav was understood as both a deity and as a mountain in Slovenia. In Slovenia itself, however, little mention is made of the cosmogonic myth involving Triglav. According to many Slovenian sources, the name Triglav originated in Szczecin, among the earliest being the polymath Janez Vajkard Valvasor's *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola (Die Ehre dess Hertzogthums Crain, 1689)* and Anton Tomaž Linhart's work *An Essay on the History of Carniola and Other Lands of the Austrian South Slavs (Versuch einer Geschichte von Krain und den übrigen Ländern der südlichen Slaven Oesterreichs, 1791)*, the first history that treated the Slovenian nation as a whole. Linhart quotes Bishop Thietmar of Merseburg's description of Szczecin as *urs tricornonis*, "three-headed," as it was located on three hills. Here, St. Otto of Bamberg destroyed a statue of the god Triglav and gave its three heads to Pope Callixtus in Rome as a symbol of his domination over the local population. In the ninth chapter of his book, Linhart argues that this god is connected with Mount Triglav in Carniola (the name Carniola was used for the largest part of present-day Slovenia until the nineteenth century). However, he does not mention the varieties of the god Triglav. As assumed by other historians, due to a lack of sufficient evidence for the existence of the god Triglav in the Eastern Alps, it was difficult to support Linhart's thesis. Thus the above mentioned connection of Triglav with Szczecin, where northern Slavs worshipped their gods, did not persist in the Slovenian collective consciousness, even though Urbańczyk attempted to prove it by means of local place names where the name and cult of Triglav were known beyond Pomerania, e.g. in the Slovenian Alps (Urbańczyk 195).

In *The History of Slovenian Nation (Zgodovina slovenskega naroda, 1866)*, Janez Trdina provided the most representative and comprehensive description of Triglav in Slovenian lands: "Triglav was to

them the ruler of land, sea, and air, and because of this threefold reign, he was attributed three heads, and also named after these three heads” (Trdina 17). Trdina already considered both the divine power of Triglav and its association with the god’s appearance, just like Nikolai Mikhailov:

Triglav was a three-headed god, which can certainly be inferred from the name itself. ... He also owned a black horse, which undoubtedly had a sacred role and which was used in prophesying. ... Although Triglav is sometimes similar to Svetovid, Léger thinks that he can without a doubt be defined as an independent god. (Mihajlov 53)

Mikhailov, based on the opinion of Vladimir Petrukhin, also claims that in the East Slavic and South Slavic mythology, Triglav could be an equivalent of the god Trajan/Trojan (Mihajlov 172); this conjecture was mentioned earlier by Trstenjak in his work *Triglav, mythologično raziskavanje* and by Frans Vyncke (Mihajlov 106–107). According to Urbańczyk, Trojan is considered a deity of the East Slavs, originating from the “divine” emperor Trajan; known also in the Balkans as a demon, a night specter with wax wings that is afraid of the sun or one with goat ears (Urbańczyk 194). It is agreed, however, that the etymological and mythological evidence of Trstenjak’s hypothesis is not convincing, which is why it was not supported by Slovenian scholars. For many Slovenians, as Božidar Jezernik points out, the question of how and when Triglav came to be/was born was no longer as interesting as the discovery of the meaning of the name itself and the moment it began to be used (Jezernik 52).

The etymology of the name Triglav

Evgen Lovšin lists seven names used for Mount Triglav: Triglav, Trgwou, Krma, Babji zob, Kum, Klek, and Beli vrh (Lovšin et al. 27). The name Krma can be found in the earliest mentions of Triglav in Valvasor’s *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola*. The word *krma* means “a rear part of a boat” or “fodder” (this is perhaps an analogy since Triglav’s face is covered with lush grass in its lower part). Franc Bezljaj supplements this definition by adding that it is a name of pre-Roman origin, and just like *garma* or *karma*, it denotes “a rock crevice” (its cognate words are *krmol* and *krmulja*, “a rocky summit”; Bezljaj 178). Other names used in reference to Triglav (in the central part of Slovenia) include Babji zob and Kum used interchangeably with

Triglav by Janez Mencinger in his book *My Walk on Triglav* (*Moja hoja na Triglav*, 1897). The name *Beli vrh* can be found in the writings of Belsazar Hacquet, the first explorer of Slovenian mountains and the author of *Carniolan Mineralogy* (*Oryctographia Carniolica*, 1778), which is the first publication to feature an illustration of Mount Triglav by Franz X. Baraga (Lovšin et al. 27). Two names were inscribed there: *Velki Terglou*, and below the illustration in the text—*Terglovus*.

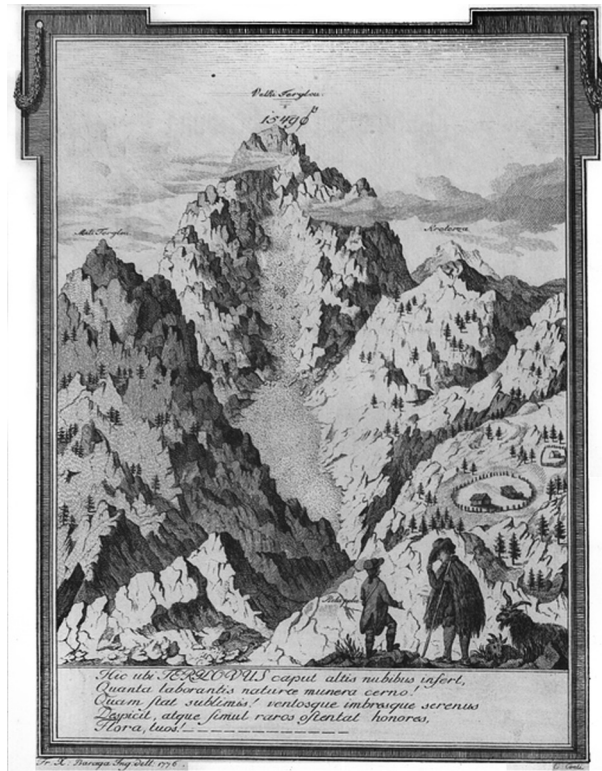


Figure 1: Triglav in Hacquet's book *Oryctographia Carniolica* (1778).

The spelling of the above listed names probably resulted from the local language use, particularly by the inhabitants of Bohinj and Mojstrana, who would say *Terglou* and *T(e)rgwou* with the stress falling on the last syllable (Bizjak 328). Alfons Gstirner studied how the original name *Terglou* transformed into *Triglav* and came to the conclusion that “our highest mountain was called *Terglau* or *Terglou* from the first surviving mention in 1452 until the nineteenth century” (Gstirner 18).

He found the first record of the name in the German work titled *Illyrian Provinces and Their Inhabitants (Die Illyrische Provinzen und ihre Eiwohner, 1812)*, where Triglav figured as the highest mountain of the Illyrian Provinces (Bizjak 329). Gstirner was criticized by a number of writers and scholars to the extent that his publication was rejected on the suspicion that it supported the German authorities (Kugy 379). It is interesting that Wikipedia misinforms the readers saying that Triglav is Terglou in German. In fact, since the second half of the nineteenth century, the Germans have used the name Triglav and have not translated it as Dreikopf, as opposed to the Italians, who introduced the name Monte Tricorno right after the end of World War I and have retained this use until today (Bizjak 329).

In German-speaking countries, the name Triglav became established thanks to two literary works in German: Karel Dežman's 1868 tale about a mountain goat with golden horns in the Trenta Valley and a well-known Alpine epic poem *Goldhorn (Zlatorog, 1877)* written by Rudolf Baumbach (based on the motifs included in Dežman's tale). It is worth noting that Baumbach's iconic *Zlatorog* has never been translated into German as *Goldhorn*, just like the name Triglav which naturally supplanted Terglou (Bizjak 329).

The word *triglav* itself, denoting "three heads," was usually explained in association with a view of the mountain, specifically the presence of its three peaks (as in the case of Mount Troglav—elevation 1,913 m—in the Dinara Mountain Range, on the border between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina). However, some researchers doubted the accuracy of this thesis, as they could not discern the three peaks. For example, Janez Bizjak claims that the mountain does not have three peaks at all, except for the view from Bohinj and Soriška planina. In fact, Bizjak says that Triglav looks like a pyramid, akin to a triangular grain of buckwheat (Bizjak 330; see also Gstirner 22). This is why Fran Orožen rejected the belief that the name Triglav has something to do with the mountain's three peaks: "This highest mountain is named after the old Slavic god Triglav, not after its three heads, which do not exist, in fact" (qtd. in Lovšin et al. 14). A similar opinion is shared by many other scholars who have preferred the mythological explanation. Opinions about the name Triglav, its meaning and origin are therefore divided and this is perhaps why Triglav has continually aroused the interest of scholars, artists, and Slovenians themselves, who still regard the mountain as a vital symbol forming their identity.

Triglav in literature and journalism

Before their conversion to Christianity, the inhabitants of what is now Slovenia believed in Triglav's divine powers. This was related to the inaccessibility of the mountain areas and the atmospheric phenomena in the Alpine region. After the ninth century, however, Triglav lost its sacred status, but the Enlightenment patron of culture Žiga Zois and the first Slovenian lay poet Valentin Vodnik recognized its high artistic value and attributed divine powers to it, yet not of the same nature as in Anton Tomaž Linhart's phrasing:

Triglav, the three-headed god, as the name suggests, because he was attributed dominion over air, earth, and water. He was worshiped especially by the Slavs living in northern Germany, where they built beautiful temples for him. Mount Triglav in Bohinj, which is the highest mountain in Carniola, full of beautiful pictures of wild nature, is probably named after this deity. (qtd. in Lovšin et al. 12)

Linhart's symptomatic use of the word "probably" due to a lack of evidence connecting the Pomeranian god Triglav with the Slovenian Mount Triglav has profoundly influenced opinions about the meaning of Triglav and its representations in Slovenian literature from the Enlightenment until the present day. In his letters to Zois—who compared Mount Vršac with Mount Parnassus and Mount Triglav with Mount Olympus (Lovšin et al. 12)—Vodnik does not even mention Linhart's hypothesis. Meanwhile, in his popular poem titled "Veršac" (1806),² the oldest Slovenian descriptive poem about mountains, he introduces the figure of the Christian God instead of mentioning the god Triglav: "Before this mighty God / I wish to go beyond my body" (Vodnik 62, transl. by Simon Zupan).³ This would seem to undermine Linhart's hypothesis. This was a rather important move, because of its tendency to interpret Triglav in the Christian context (one personal God) and a tendency to strengthen the collective identity of Slovenians assuming that Triglav is a local deity typical of Slovenia. In the light of Eliade's theory, Triglav represented the "center of the world" for Slovenians and which could also mean the embodiment of "our world" as the most important world, "the navel of the world" (Eliade 67–68).

² Veršac, today Vršac (elevation 2,346 m), is a mountain from which a view of Triglav can be admired. However, this was not known in the nineteenth century. As Fran Orožen notes in *Planinski vestnik*, Vršac is only marked on a special map as Mišel Vrh (Orožen 24–27).

³ In original: »Pod velikim tuki Bógam / Breztelesni bit želím« (Vodnik 62).

The lines “Before this mighty God / I wish to go beyond my body” puzzled many literary scholars because it is not clear which god is meant, the Christian God or Triglav (see Kos, “Vodnikov Vršac” and *Valentin Vodnik*). The title also raised a number of questions since the toponym Veršac was not recorded on maps at the time, leading scholars to speculate as to which mountain the poem referred. The description of the view from the summit was scrutinized:

Sit down on Veršac,
And behold a world unknown;
Look, amidst grey barren rock
A clump of elegant flowers blooms.
...
The clear Sava here begins,
The mother of poetic gift,
Twelve lakes together it connects,
A school of common sense.
...
Before this mighty God
I wish to go beyond my body,
Breathing freely in my circle
I feel I dwell in heaven. (Vodnik 61–62)⁴

According to Jakob Aljaž, Veršac referred to Kanjavec (elevation 2,570 m), while the canon Ivan Sušnik claimed that it represented Mali Triglav (2,740 m). Fran Orožen also concluded that Veršac refers to Mali Triglav (Orožen 27).

In his “Veršac,” Vodnik, the poet and at the same time the “first Slovenian tourist,” expresses his admiration for the surrounding view of the mountains and the nearby lands, plants, animals, and people: He was an active mountaineer who saw great aesthetic and nation-building value in the mountains and paved the way to mountain poetry. It is thanks to his poetry that the Julian Alps with Triglav, Savica Falls, and Bohinj became symbols of Slovenian identity. Vodnik also mentions Triglav in his other works, including a poem “Bohinjska Bistrica” written in manuscript form and a poem “Moj spomenik” (Dovič 249–250). The fourth stanza reads: “By the Sava I was raised, / By the

⁴ In original: “Na Veršacu doli sédi, / Neznán svét se teb odprè; / Glej med sivih pléš v' srédi / Zarod žlahtnih rôž cvetè. ... // Tukaj bistra Sava zvirá / Mati pevske umnosti, / Jezér dvanajst kup nabirá / Šola zdrave treznosti. ... // Pod velikim tuki Bógam / Breztelesni bit želím, / Čiste sape sréd mej krógam / Menim de na neb' živím” (Vodnik 61–62).

lowlands of Ljubljana, / By the Triglav I was inspired, / By its snowy peaks” (Vodnik 128).⁵

As early as the Enlightenment period, the name Triglav appeared a number of times in the correspondence between Zois and Vodnik. Zois stressed in his letters that a “poet under Triglav” should write in Carniolan language (Zois 31). He mentioned the “Triglav muse” (46) and recommended that Vodnik should “kiss old Triglav’s beard” (42). He also wrote about “an arduous hike to the Great God and Little Triglav” (49), which indicates Zois’ interest in topics related to the mythology of Triglav (Dović 249).

According to Marijan Dović, the most recent scholar to tackle the role of mountain imagery in early Slovenian poetry, the motif of mountains not only appeared in Vodnik’s works, but also in the poetry of Urban Jarnik (“Moj sedanji kraj,” 1809), Ignac Holzapfel (“Slavinja,” 1824), Blaž Potočnik (“Vodniku per Savici 1829,” 1830), Jakob Zupan (“Kranjski Plutarčik,” 1830), Jožef Žemlja (“28. jutro velciga travna 1828,” 1833), etc. The majority of them drew on Vodnik’s image of Triglav and its aesthetic qualities (Dović 251).

France Prešeren introduced a new perspective on the mountains, perhaps because he was not a nature enthusiast like Valentin Vodnik. Wanting to convey content important to the Slovenian nation because he considered it historically significant (Christianization of Alpine Slavs), he chose a symbolic location in the Julian Alps. The Savica Falls and its surroundings are the setting of the most important Slovenian epic poem, *The Baptism on the Savica* (*Krst pri Savici*). This poem, written by Prešeren in 1835 during the most prolific period of his career, is considered to be crucial for any understanding of Slovenian identity (also in the context of the Slavic world),⁶ a canonical, timeless text which is often referred to by writers and literary scholars alike. Janko Kos notes that Prešeren based his poem on historical data taken from Janez Vajkard Valvasor’s *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola* and Linhart’s *An Attempt at the History of Carniola and Other Lands of the Austrian South Slavs*. However, the idea of Slavdom presented in the *Introduction* was probably inspired by *The Daughter of Sláva* (*Slávy dcera*, 1824), a series of sonnets written by Slovak national rebirth ideologist Ján Kollár. According to Kos, in *The Baptism on the Savica*, the influences of the works of Dante (the

⁵ In original: “Redila me Sava, / Ljubljansko poljé, / navdale Trigláva / me snéžne kopé” (Vodnik 128).

⁶ For more information on this topic, see Juvan, *Imaginarij*, “Nation,” and “Przewycięzanie.”

character of Beatrice from *The Divine Comedy*) and Byron are also noticeable (Kos, *Pregled* 103–104).

Prešeren's poem⁷ provides a description of the heroic Slovenian struggle against German domination and Christianization, a retrospective of the love between Črtomir and Bogomila, and an account of Bogomila's spiritual transformation and views on Christianity and death. We also find references to mountain spaces since the action takes place around Lake Bled and Bohinj as well as at the Savica Falls.

The mountain area, particularly in the vicinity of Lake Bohinj (Savica Falls), is closely integrated with the events and characters that appear in the poem. To Prešeren, mountains are not only a source of strong visual impressions, but also abundant historical and mythological content with a considerable emotional charge. He mentions Triglav in the first stanza of *Baptism*, after the epic description of the last battle of Ajdovski gradec in *Introduction*:

The matching violence of both men and clouds
 Dark night has ended, now bright down
 With ruddy sparks does gild the threefold peaks
 Of the grey master of Carniola's mountains.
 Bohinj Lake rests in calm and quiet now,
 No trace remaining of the recent tempest.
 But 'neath the waves the sheatfish battle on
 With other robbers of the watery depths. (Prešeren, *Baptism* 68)⁸

He describes Lake Bohinj, above which Triglav rises. The lake is calm because the battle is over, but it seems that it is only apparently calm—the battle of fish under the water continues, just like Črtomir's despair. The depictions of nature therefore correspond to the external situation and Črtomir's mental state.

⁷ *The Baptism on the Savica* consists of two parts: *Introduction* and *Baptism*. The poem was written together with its preceding sonnet dedicated to Prešeren's late close friend and associate Matija Čop, a Slovenian literary critic, writer, linguist, and literary historian. In the sonnet dedicated to Matija Čop, Prešeren presents the characters of the poem, as well as their views and attitude to life. According to one of the two main characters, Bogomila, only Christianity can guarantee happiness in this world, while Črtomir, disillusioned with reality, believes that death is the only way to liberation from suffering (Kos, *Pregled* 104).

⁸ In original: "Mož in oblakov vojsko je obojno / končala temna noč, kar svetla zarja / zlatí z rumenmi žarki glavo trojno / snežnikov kranjskih sigva poglavarja, / Bohinjsko jezero stoji pokojno, / sledu ni več vunanjega viharja; / al somov vojska pod vodó ne mine, / in drugih roparjov v dnu globočine" (Prešeren, *Krst* 15).

Apart from Bohinj, Prešeren foregrounds the aesthetic qualities of Lake Bled, the castle located in an island in the middle of the lake, and the surrounding snow-capped mountains. This image, which he calls paradise, is a reflection of Črtomir's pleasant memories of his youth and happy moments spent with Bogomila in Bled:

Here is an island circled round by waves,
 In our days it's a pilgrim shrine to Mary;
 Against the background stand the snowcapped giants
 And fields that spread before them; Castle Bled
 Reveals still greater beauties to the left.
 The hillocks on the right conceal each other.
 Carniola does not have a prettier scene
 Than this one: it is truly heaven's twin. (68)⁹

Further on in *Baptism*, the description of nature is related to Črtomir's mental state. The picture of the austere mountain terrain at the waterfall reflects his agitation and impatience while he waits for a message about Bogomila:

The falls next morning thunder in his ears.
 Our hero ponders as the lazy waters
 Below him roar and shake the river banks.
 Above him towering cliffs and mountain heights,
 These with their trees the river undermines,
 As in its wrath its foam flies to the skies!
 So hastens youth and then it spends itself,
 Thus Črtomir reflects upon this scene. (72)¹⁰

This stems from the fact that Črtomir's inner world is treated equally with the external world of the mountain area described: "Does not this lake on whose shore, at the edge, / You stand, O Črtomir, resemble you?" (68).¹¹ This is closely related to the events presented in the

⁹ In original: "Tje na otok 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 lepšga kraja, / ko je z okolšno ta, podoba raja" (Prešeren, *Krst* 16–17).

¹⁰ In original: "Slap drugo jutro mu grmi v ušesa; / junak premišlja, kak bolj spodej lena / voda razgraja, kak bregove stresa, / in kak pred njo se góre 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" (Prešeren, *Krst* 22).

¹¹ In original: "Al jezero, ki na njega pokrajni / stojiš, ni, Črtomír! podoba tvoja?" (Prešeren, *Krst* 15).

poem, i.e. the story of the war in which the ancestors of the Slovenian people experienced a political and religious transformation, and to the individual story about the troubled love of Črtomir and Bogomila. Prešeren made Lake Bohinj and Savica Falls the center of the most important events: the acceptance of Christianity by the pagan leader and Bogomila's internal transformation, and Bled Island located within the Alpine paradise—home to Živa, a goddess of the Polabian Slavs (Dović 253).

Among the many writers who have dealt with the Christianization of Carinthians and Carniolans as a crucial historical moment and made reference to Triglav (as a mountain and a deity), France Bevk, with his work *The Dying God Triglav* (*Umirajoči bog Triglav*, 1930), is to the forefront. In parallel to Prešeren's poem, Bevk's novel was written at a critical historical moment. In the case of Prešeren, this was the period of German domination in the nineteenth century, while in the case of Bevk—Italian fascism in the twentieth century.¹² Zoran Božič believes that Bevk's work refers directly to Prešeren's *Baptism on the Savica*, constituting its continuation and explanation (Božič 63). The fundamental element connecting these two works is the theme of Christianization: in Prešeren, the acceptance of Christianity by all Slovenians at the end of the first millennium (the so-called first Christianization), and in Bevk—by the rebellious inhabitants of Kobarid in the first half of the feudal fourteenth century (the so-called second/late Christianization). Based on historical facts, both writers also comment on their contemporary reality and have a similar attitude to the authorities and censorship, national unity and consciousness, as well as nature. It is no accident, perhaps, that the motif of Triglav appears in both texts. In Prešeren, Triglav is mentioned as a mountain: “[B]right dawn / With ruddy sparks does gild the threefold peaks / Of the grey master of Carniola's mountains” (Prešeren, *Baptism* 68).¹³ In Bevk, however, Triglav is described as an old Slovenian deity whose existence and presence is confirmed in the form of a sign on a sacred linden tree by a sacred spring: “Upon his arrival, Gorazd found a linden

¹² In 1836, on the territory of present-day Slovenia, the official language was German in political life, administrative offices, public institutions, courts, and education. Slovenian could not even be taught as part of extra-curricular classes. In 1930, in turn, the use of Slovenian language was only allowed in private contexts in the Littoral region. In 1926, all the Slovenian schools were closed down and the following inscription appeared in public places: “Qui si parla soltanto italiano” (Božič 66).

¹³ In original: “[S]vetla zarja / zlatí z rumenmi žarki glavo trojno / snežnikov kranjskih sivga poglavarja” (Prešeren, *Krst* 15).

tree and a spring and a sign of the god Triglav tied into the bark” (Bevk 25).¹⁴ In both works, Christianity triumphs over the old faith: Črtomir is baptized, while among the rebellious inhabitants of Kobarid, faith in Jesus Christ appeases people and brings peace.

Apart from the fundamental thematic and ideological element connecting both works, two primary differences should also be noted which might have affected Slovenian consciousness. The first can be found in the storyline and lies in the endings: in Prešeren, the ending is pessimistic because Črtomir suffers defeat, whereas in Bevk it is optimistic—Gorazd wins. The second difference is formal in nature and concerns the style and language of the works. The content comprised in poetic form in *The Baptism on the Savica* was only comprehensible to a small group of readers, as opposed to Bevk’s novel which was written in prose and using more accessible language. It can therefore be concluded that despite its lower artistic value, *The Dying God Triglav* reached a broader audience and had a greater influence on Slovenian national consciousness (including the motivation to fight for their rights) than Prešeren’s poem.¹⁵

France Bevk wrote his novel in 1930 during the Italian annexation of the Littoral region. However, he did not write about his own time, but set the novel in the medieval town of Kobarid in 1331. Cirila Toplak believes that the novel can be interpreted in a number of ways: (a) as a novel about the rebellion of the inhabitants of Kobarid against an imposed religion and a fanatical (Italian) inquisition, (b) as an allegory of the relations between Italians and Slovenians in the 1930s, or (c) as a general expression of the Slovenian national consciousness (Toplak 54–55).

Bevk sets out his understanding of Triglav in the very title of his work: Triglav is a deity, not a mountain. In the novel, Triglav is presented as the only god worshipped by the inhabitants of Kobarid before they were Christianized. Yet it is a local deity, not a supreme Slovenian or Slavic one. It is interesting that, as Toplak states, Bevk put forward

¹⁴ In original: “Gorazd je uzrl lipo in studenec in v lubje lipe vrezano znamenje boga Triglava” (Bevk 25).

¹⁵ It should be noted, however, that there is a gap of nearly a hundred years between the two works and the position of the writer and literature was different in the two periods. Prešeren’s approach was largely individualistic and idealistic (he advocated a higher status of the Slovenian literary language), while Bevk’s was a practical one (what mattered most was for Slovenians not to give in to Italianization and for them to use the Slovenian language, which was supposed to be understood as concern for preserving Slovenian identity).

such an understanding despite being familiar with the comprehensive and reliable ethnographic sources about the beliefs of the inhabitants of the Soča Valley. They were collected by Pavel Medvešček, whose book only mentions Triglav as a sacred mountain once but says nothing about Triglav as the deity (see Medvešček). Other regional researchers mention Triglav only as a recognizable point in space, which Andrej Pleterski explains was a taboo subject for the inhabitants of Kobarid (Toplak 55). Perhaps it did not play as significant a role in the consciousness of Kobarid's inhabitants as some believe, including Bevk. In the novel, we can read the following:

On good days they worshiped Triglav, the three-faced god, who was personified in a tree with three peaks and a well with three springs. Although, from generation to generation, because of the loneliness in which the last pagans lived, the richness of their religion dwindled, the god Triglav remained unshaken in their souls until the end. (Bevk 22)¹⁶

Marko Snoj maintains that it is unlikely that the mountain name Triglav was equated with the Slavic god Triglav (Snoj 439), whereas Ivo Juvančič suggests that worshipping trees and streams around Kobarid testifies to the religious syncretism of Christianity with old Slovenian myths and Illyrian-Celtic influences in particular (Juvančič 54).

However, if we take a look at *The Dying God Triglav* from a broader perspective and without going into ethnological sources, we may see an allegory of the political situation in the south-western part of Slovenia in the 1930s. At the time, Mount Triglav was recognized as the highest peak of the Julian Alps, with the border between Yugoslavia and Italy running across it after the Treaty of Rapallo was signed in 1922. The image of Triglav was then included in the coat of arms of Ljubljana,¹⁷ which might have been the decisive factor in recognizing Triglav as a symbol of Slovenian identity (Toplak 57). Another piece of evidence to back up this thesis was the choice of the linden tree as a sacred tree which had allegedly fallen victim to the activities of the Italian inquisition. This is not, however, consistent with what ethnologists wrote about sacred trees, e.g., Zmago Šmitek

¹⁶ In original: "V lepih dneh so častili Triglava, triobličnega boga, ki je bil poosebljen v drevesu s tremi vrhovi in v studencu s tremi izvirki. Dasi se je od roda do roda radi osamelosti, v kateri so živeli zadnji pagani, bogastvo njihove vere manjšalo, je ostal bog Triglav v njihovih dušah do konca neomajen" (Bevk 22).

¹⁷ This is not an isolated case, however, as Mount Triglav could already be found on some coats of arms of noble families with Slovenian roots in the seventeenth century (see Svetina).

listed other tree species considered as sacred by the Slovenians (oak, cherry tree, spruce, poplar). Such a move by Bevk, interpreted as a certain expression of creativity by some, could be explained as a reference to historic events on the one hand, and on the other as granting nature, mountain areas in particular, a value that the Slovenians attributed to deities that should be worshipped. Hence, the novel's accumulation of descriptions of elements of nature and people's attitude towards it seems to be crucial to understanding Triglav and the mountain sphere as a metaphor of Slovenia, and the Slovenian attitude towards it: "Happy marriage of nature. The latter animal, every tree and plant manifested a soul that fed and shrieked. ... Every morning the sun rose again as the living spirit of the earth and enveloped them in its light" (Bevk 171).¹⁸

Conclusion

Triglav as a symbol of Slovenianness was one of the most common topics in Slovenian literature, including travel journals (Janez Mencinger), poetry (Fran Saleški Finžgar, Simon Gregorčič, Alojz Gradnik, Oton Župančič, Juš Kozak, Matija Zemljič), works of various twentieth-century authors (Edvard Kocbek, Anton Ingolič, Mojca Kumerdej, Tadej Golob), and literature written by mountaineers (Henrik Tuma, Julius Kugy, Nejc Zaplotnik, Dušan Jelinčič, Tomaž Humar, Viki Grošelj).¹⁹ The presence of Triglav in Slovenian cinematography is also worth noting. The first Slovenian feature-length film was *In the Realm of Goldenhorn* (*V kraljestvu Zlatoroga*, 1931) set in the Julian Alps, followed by *The Slopes of Triglav* (*Triglavske strmine*, 1932).

After 1945, Triglav also became a source of inspiration for the members of the Slovenian artistic group OHO (*Triglav*, 1968), and then for the group IRWIN which, referring to the *Triglav* project from 1968, opened a series of often related interpretations: *Like to Like / Mount Triglav* (*Svoji k svojim / Triglav*, 2004), *Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav* (*Triglav na Triglavu*, 2007), *Golden Triglav* (*Zlati Triglav*, 2008), etc. 1986 saw one of the most important performances referring to Triglav and *The Baptism on the Savica*, the spectacle *Baptism under Triglav* (*Krst*

¹⁸ In original: "Veselo svatovanje narave. Slednja žival, vsako drevo in rastlina je očitovala dušo, ki se je napajala in vriskala. ... Vsako jutro je sonce znova vstalo kot živi duh zemlje in ju je ovilo v svojo svetlobo" (Bevk 171).

¹⁹ For more information on the so-called mountaineering literature, see Bjelčevič, "O lastnostih."

pod Triglavom) by the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre and other groups of the Neue Slowenische Kunst (Irwin, Laibach).

The manner in which Triglav is depicted in the works discussed above provides us with considerable insight in the perception of mountain areas by Slovenian authors, discerning the aesthetic qualities perceived differently by each individual, and about the influence of the mountain sphere on the development of the Slovenian collective identity and self-awareness. The conceptualization of Triglav was closely related to memory, the notions of the authors themselves, the desire for self-discovery, self-assertion, and the consolidation of identity. This process comprises the mythologization of the past, the interpretation of historic events, the socio-political situation, and the widespread Slovenian habit of climbing the highest peaks of the Julian Alps. The extensive literary works of poets, writers, and mountaineers presenting the aesthetic qualities, topography, and mythology of the Alps from different perspectives and in varying circumstances (in terms of the socio-political situation) were also not without significance, influencing the state of national consciousness, the sensitivity, attitudes, and experiences (including those related to mountain hiking and climbing) of the Slovenians, and the scientific activity of researchers dealing with this topic in Slovenia (Jernej Habjan, Marijan Dovič, Peter Mikša). It was perhaps the ambiguity of Triglav and the lack of unanimity among scholars regarding its origins and significance that has contributed to its sustained popularity and topicality in Slovenian culture.

Translated from Polish by Anna Mirek.

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Triglav v slovenski narodni zavesti: literarne reprezentacije alpskega območja od razsvetljenstva do medvojnega obdobja

Ključne besede: slovenska književnost / nacionalna identiteta / nacionalna mitologija / Triglav / Vodnik, Valentin / Prešeren, France / Bevk, France

Članek analizira različne načine prikazovanja Triglava in gorskih območij v slovenskih literarnih delih od razsvetljenstva do medvojnega obdobja (še zlasti v delih Valentina Vodnika, Franceta Prešerna in Franceta Bevka), in sicer skozi prizmo njihove estetske vrednosti, narodotvorne vloge ter vpliva na oblikovanje slovenske identitete in narodne zavesti. Raziskava izhaja iz prepričanja, da imajo gore posebno mesto v kolektivnem spominu Slovencev, Triglav pa velja za simbol slovenstva. Ob tem se članek osredotoča na primerjavo med razpravami o pomenu Triglava, ki so jih prispevali tako slovenski (Janez Vajkard Val-

vasor, Anton Tomaž Linhart, Janez Trdina in Davorin Trstenjak) kot poljski raziskovalci (Henryk Łowmiański, Jerzy Strzelczyk, Aleksander Gieysztor in Andrzej Szyjewski), ter prikazi Triglava v izbranih literarnih delih slovenskih avtorjev (v Vodnikovem »Veršacu«, Prešernovem *Krstu pri Savici* in Bevkovem *Uminajočem bogu Triglavu*).

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