Self-Referentiality and the Formation of the Slovene Literary Canon

Marko Juvan
Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Ljubljana

Introduction

National literary canon is usually considered the textual and institutional basis which enables literature to become a medium of cultural memory and one of the vehicles of national identity. The notion of the canon¹ points to the instruments of representation, to activities, agencies, interests, and strategies that lead to the fact that, in a given culture, a special corpus of texts and authors is selected, structured and reproduced under similar criteria of significance. This corpus, consisting of few “eternal masterpieces” in its center and larger, historically more flexible selections on the margin, remains more or less exemplary for several generations. Primarily it is used as a set of prototypes of linguo-stylistic correctness, eloquence, literariness, figures of speech, poetic genres, and relevant, prestigious themes. It further represents and proliferates dominant aesthetic, ethical or cognitive images, central to the culture, recycles its leading ideologemes, conventions, values as well as produces patterns for identification and imaginary totalities, such as a “nation.”

National literary canon, being a material force standing behind representation, can itself become subject of representation. I will attempt at demonstrating this by examples of Slovene poetry from the Enlightenment to Post-romanticism, that is, from a period in which the foundation of the national literary canon was actually laid. I have analyzed poetry in which it is evident how the Slovene literary canon – either as a target structure of intended values or a mnemonic point of reference – was developing within the emerging system of literary art. The poetic texts that I have studied not only represent the models, ideals, goals, and strategies of canonization, but also interfered in its enhancing and steering. They intertextually adopted, reproduced, referred to, and transformed iconic *topoi* that belonged to

transnational, generally European cultural memory\textsuperscript{2} and were stemming from the Antiquity – that of Parnassus and Elysium. In the Slovene poetry of the 18th and 19th centuries, too, these topoi were meant to represent cultural canonicity, artistic calling, or the state of being chosen, elevated, and collectively remembered. They were usually connected with the imagery of sacred mountains, Apollo, Muses, flowers, founts of inspirations, laurels, and Pegasus, with the symbolism of rhythms of cultural fecundity and decline (seasons, movement of the sun, fresh wind, etc.). The phrase slovenski ‘Slovene’ (or kranjski ‘Carniolan’, naš ‘our’, domači ‘domestic’, etc.) Parnas ‘Parnassus’ turned into a cliché that could be found throughout the entire 19th century in poetic genres, literary satires, and epigrams as well as in private letters, public discourse, reviews, or critical essays, for example in the writings of Fran Malavašič, one of the first Slovene literary critics, who in the 1840s wrote about the “new dawn on the Slovene Parnassus” with reference to the poetic almanac Krajnska čbelica (The Carniolan Bee).\textsuperscript{3} This commonplace was iconized, animated, and dramatized mainly through the poetic and imaginative functions of literary texts.

The Topoi of Parnassus and Elysium and the Systemic Self-Reference

As is generally known, Parnassus and Elysium are topoi of mythological origin, whose attributes have often been mingled or confused with those of the other two Greek sacred mountains, Olympus and Helicon.\textsuperscript{4} Their iconography and semantics have a common denominator: both contain imagery of the divinely inspired, elevated artists or poets. The basic iconographic structure of Helicon can be found in the proem to Hesiod’s Theogony (approx. 700 BC). Helicon is depicted as the mountainous landscape, embellished by holy springs, idyllic meadows, and inhabited by the dancing Muses, Apollo, and other deities. This is the place of Hesiod’s own divine poetic initiation: he is chosen by the gods to speak their language, charm the masses through it, and acquire a position equivalent to kings. Hesiod’s self-mythologization included in the narrative about his poetic vocation and inspiration is symbolized by a “shoot of sturdy laurel.”\textsuperscript{5} The sacred element of laurel connects Helicon as

\textsuperscript{3} Anton Slodnjak, Krajnska čbelica, in: A. Slodnjak, France Prešeren, ed. France Bernik (Ljubljana: SM, 1984), 100–143.
the place of being selected and poetically inspired by gods with the motives of poetic competition, *agon*, as was depicted in the anonymous *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* from the second century AD. Here more profane selective gestures become prominent: the ruler’s and public’s taste decide which contender is to receive the laurel wreath.\(^6\) The mythological origins of Elysium, however, are attested as early as in Homer (*Odyssey* IV, 516–519) and Hesiod (*Works and Days*, 167–173). It is classically articulated in the sixth volume of Virgil’s *Aeneid* (approx. 23 BC): Elysium is located in the underground, across from the place of condemned souls, or Tartaros. Elysium has all the features of an ideal landscape (“long extended plains of pleasure,” “beneath a laurel shade”), where non-mortals (“happy souls,” in the midst of them Orpheus, the “Thracian bard”), that is, all those heroes, priests, poets, and inventors that take credit for the existence and proliferation of their country, culture, and art are enjoying themselves (“Their airy limbs in sports they exercise, […] / some in heroic verse divinely sing; / others in artful measures led the ring”; “Some cheerful souls were feasting on the plain; / Some did the song, and some the choir maintain”) and are for this reason venerated and remembered:

Here patriots live, who, for their country's good,
In fighting fields, were prodigal of blood:
Priests of unblemish'd lives here make abode,
And poets worthy their inspiring god;
And searching wits, of more mechanic parts,
Who grac'd their age with new-invented arts:
Those who to worth their bounty did extend,
And those who knew that bounty to commend.
The heads of these with holy fillets bound,
And all their temples were with garlands crown'd.\(^7\)

According to Bettina Bosold-DasGupta, Parnassus replaced Helicon and Olympus as the mountain of Muses and Apollo in Roman literature (Virgil, *Eclogue* VI, Statius, *Thebaid* VI, 355–367), but for the most part it remained in the shadow of Helicon, which continued to be regarded as the *locus* of inspiration and mythical personifications of the arts. The present commonplace association of Apollo, Muses, and the inspired artists with Parnassus is a result of a relatively scarce tradition that began in the late Antiquity, developed through some medieval commentaries and encyclopedic compilations, and began to flourish only in the 14th

\(^6\) *Of The Origin Of Homer And Hesiod, And Of Their Contest (The Contest of Homer and Hesiod)*, translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White [1914], http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/homer/homrhes.htm [10 January 2010].

century, when poetry came to be regarded as comparable to sacred status of theology – for Dante (Divina Commedia, Purgatorio XXVII, 139-144; Paradiso I, 13–36), Petrarch, and their descendants, Parnassus represented the divine status of poetry, the landscape of the chosen poets, their eternal glory, and the rebirth of the Roman classical past. During the early modern period the topoi of Parnassus and Elysium were introduced into the European imagery in modified, adapted forms. Their mythological layout, intertwined with other paradisiac, Olympian, Arcadian, or idyllic images, was allegorized, occasionally given some local color, and significantly updated: Apollo, Orpheus, and the Greek and Roman cultural heroes like Homer or Virgil got company of medieval and early modern poets and artists. As wonderfully exemplified by Raffaello’s 1510–11 fresco The Parnassus in the Vatican Stanza della Segnatura, as early as Renaissance the ancient topos was significantly modernized (Apollo, sitting among the Muses, plays a modern string instrument, similar to violin) and employed to represent the cultural canon that, along with the Greek and Roman classics (Homer, Anacreon, Sappho, Horace, Virgil, Plutarch, Terence, etc.), incorporated medieval and modern authors writing in vernaculars – Dante, Petrarch, and Sannazaro, the author of Arcadia and Raffaello’s contemporary.

From systems theory point of view it may be argued that comparisons, allusions, motifs and stories that intertextually refer to the topics of Parnassus or Elysium are apt examples of the literary self-referentiality and autopoeisis. These are practices that establish elements and develop structures of a literary system by deriving them from its own history. In doing so, they differentiate the system from its environment; furthermore, they take care of its regulation and reactions to changes in the environment. Hence, in the elements of the literary system (in this case texts citing the imagery of Parnassus and Elysium) this very system is thematized, and considered in its socio-historical milieu: literary tropes and fictional narratives are vehicles for “staging” the conventions, texts, agents, and actions that are

---

8 Bettina Bosold-DasGupta, Traiano Boccalini und der Anti-Parnass: Frühjournalistische Kommunikation als Metadiskurs (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2005), 21–26. I thank for the reference to Boccalini’s role in the history of the Parnassus imagery to Harald Hendrix. According to Bosold-DasGupta (op. cit., 134–136), Traiano Boccalini’s satirical Raggiagli di Parnaso of 1612 belonged to the most successful Baroque texts (120 editions and translations, 200 imitations) and marked the beginnings of one among the genres that employed Parnassus imagery (ideal landscape of the arts with Apollo, Muses, and the immortal writers from various epochs) for representing and commenting on literary canons and contemporary literary, cultural, or political issues; Boccalini combined the topos of Parnassus with early journalistic genres.

9 See, e.g., http://www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/ParnassusRaphael.html [10 January 2010].

10 One of the best and earliest symbolical illustrations of the systemic autopoeisis is Maurits Cornelis Escher’s 1948 lithography Drawing Hands (see http://www.mcescher.com/Gallery/back-bmp/LW355.jpg [12 January 2010]).

involved in inventing, devising, and structuring the system, in which they are produced. Literary self-referentiality is normally understood as a fictional or figurative discourse about the themes concerning art, style, textuality as well as the values and conventions engraved in literature’s socio-historical context. Moreover, literature about literature is a self-regulatory strategy, typical especially of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, when several European literatures were establishing as separate, linguistically homogenized, and functionally specialized social systems. In Romanticism poetry thus became accompanied and intertwined with theory, reflecting on how literature as an emerging meta-genre striving for ontological and axiological autonomy engendered individuality and subjectivity.

Narratively full-blown allegories of Parnassus and Elysium or individual poetic allusions to them attempt not only to represent but also to enhance the social importance and canonical impact of literary discourse. Poeticizing Parnassus and Elysium in Slovene literary texts was involved in larger cultural projects and socio-ideological conflicts from the 1770s to the late 19th century. The topos of Parnassus offered to the poets identifying themselves as Carniolan or Slovene an opportunity for the allegorization of the problems, caused by building literary canon in their own language. Initially, Parnassus or Helicon represented the idea of cultural canonicity as such; the landscape of Muses enabled the Slovene poets and other cultural producers to measure themselves against classical Antiquity, to appropriate its “cultural capital.” It also provided for the affirmation of their ethnic, linguistic, and cultural distinctiveness. At first the Carniolan/Slovene literary canon was meant to symbolically project the rising Slovene ethnic, cultural, and linguistic identity within the duchy of Carniola as one of the traditional Habsburg hereditary lands, but in the second half of the 19th century it began to serve as a demonstration of the cultural output of the newly developing “imagined community,” the Slovene nation. Since then, both topoi have often been used as vehicles for fictionalizing, commenting on, and satirical depictions of the nation’s inter-poetic, ideological, and cultural struggles, especially those for canonical selection of authors, proper

---

12 S. J. Schmidt, op. cit., 25.
14 Until the middle of the 19th century these two ethnonyms were often used interchangeably – with strong predominance of Carniolan – because Carniola was the traditional Austrian province in which the majority of population spoke the Slovene language. The ethnonym Slovene, however, whose usage achieved prominence after the revolutionary year of 1848, had been used as early as the Reformation period to denote the Slovene speaking population of the Inner Austria, which included not only Carniola, but also Styria, Carinthia, the County of Gorizia, and Trieste with parts of Istra.
language use and adequate functions of literature, and value of particular literary currents or groups.

**Self-Referentiality and the Emergence of a Peripheral European Literary System**

From the last quarter of the 18th century on, culture in the Slovene ethnic territory, which had been ruled by foreign rulers since around 745 AD (when the predominantly Slavic principality of Carantania became part of the Frankish Empire), shared two general European processes, through which, according to Siegfried J. Schmidt, literary systems were emerging and determining their boundaries and social functions.\(^{17}\) The first process, called autonomization, made possible that literary discourse was gradually being perceived by writers, readers, critics, editors, as well as in education as a relatively autonomous unit of social communication that follows its own, primarily aesthetic purposes. Conventions were established inducing boundaries between the new aesthetic field and other forms of cultural representation. The second great process, complementary to the autonomization, was nationalization. With nationalization, vernacular writing was taking over positions of Latin in high culture, leaving step by step the normative framework of the classics and beginning to affiliate its themes and forms with other modern literatures written in vernaculars. It was increasingly believed that literature with its symbolic display of the capacities of the mother tongue could prove the nation’s historical and cultural identity. The post-Enlightenment nationalist ideology made use of literature as a representative form of public discourse in order to disseminate symbolic ties among public that was able to read standard “national” languages. Adopting pseudo-religious tone and referring to a biblical tradition of the Sacred Word constituted one of the favorite literary strategies of cultural nationalism.\(^{18}\)

It is a well-known fact that as early as Renaissance in some places in Europe, e. g., in the Italian lands, the universal classical-Christian catalogue of paradigmatic texts in Latin was complemented by individual local writers writing in vernaculars, who, without a specific identity, remained overshadowed by the great auctores, or at least they were not perceived as

---

\(^{17}\) S. J. Schmidt, op. cit., 282–283.

different. The vernacular corpus then proliferated, trying to overcome the patronage of the classical canon (e. g., *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*). At the end of the Enlightenment century and in Romanticism two separate ingredients of previously syncretic canon crystallized: “world literature” (the Antiquity was reduced to one of the periods in it) and the “classics” of individual national literatures.

The transnational processes described above laid the foundation for the literary formation of national identity in the Slovene lands. At the beginning of the 18th century the Slovene ethnic territory, divided into lands that were ruled by Austria, Hungary, and the republic of Venice, lacked greater cultural centers and institutions of its own, as well as Slovene speaking upper classes. This is why Slovene was vulnerable to influences of stronger neighboring languages and was dialectally greatly diversified; it was caught up into a bilingual or diglossic sociolinguistic situation. From the *Freising Folia* (972-1039) to the appearance of the first Protestant printed book in Slovene (Primus Trubar’s *Catechismus*, 1550) only fragments of Slovene written discourse were preserved. Nevertheless, it is supposed that Slovene was sporadically used in religious writing as well as in local administration, and even in written secular poetry. In the Reformation period from the second half of the 16th century an extensive religious repertoire, including Dalmatin’s translation of the *Bible* (1584), was printed, and a Slovene literacy program was organized in elementary schools. However, after the suppression of the Reformation movement and in line with scarce Slovene printing in the 17th and the first half of the 18th centuries the centrifugal sociolinguistic forces prevailed. Educated people were bilingual and until the middle of the 19th century, when public use of Slovene became a sign of nationalist political commitment, it was quite normal, that even scholars who celebrated their homeland or attempted to awaken national self-consciousness wrote in German (cf. Janez V. Valvasor’s polymath work *Die Ehre des Herzogthums Crain*, 1689, or Anton T. Linhart’s modern “national” history *Versuch einer Geschichte von Krain und den übrigen Ländern der südlichen Slaven Oesterreiches* of 1788–91 or his 1781 poetry collection *Blumen aus Krain*).

This allows us to conclude that the establishing, development and differentiation of the Slovene literary canon had a sociolinguistic background. It was intertwined with the problems of codification of the uniform Slovene literary language, its presence in education

---

19 This state of the cultural canon is visually represented in the above mentioned Raphael’s *Parnassus*, which influenced subsequent uses of the topos within and beyond the visual arts.
and public, its advancement in the “higher” social strata as well as with the problems of genre diversification and secularization. Thanks to what Even-Zohar calls “culture planning,” the emerging aesthetic literature in the Slovene language was practiced from the late 18th century and throughout the 19th century in order to set up the discursive cohesion within the literate population, which had been traditionally conscious only of its regional, provincial identities. Before their broader social diffusion that began only in the 1850s, these efforts were limited to smaller groups of the educated people, especially the clerics. From the tenth to the middle of the 19th century it was for the most part clergy that maintained a monopoly over literacy. The Catholic Church was nearly the only institution that systematically preserved supra-dialectal registers of Slovene, but these were used exclusively for religious purposes. Considering this heritage, we ought not to be surprised that in the early periods of the “national awakening” (from 1760s to 1840s), too, the clergy was presented with the task of animating and spreading ethnic or national consciousness. Priests and monks endeavored to standardize the literary language with grammars and dictionaries; they were also among the first Slovene poets, writers and translators.

In the context of the national revival ideologies of the 18th and 19th centuries, national literature’s emulation of the Classics provided for the proof of the expressive capabilities that the Slovene literary language was able to achieve. Testing and displaying the capacities of the mother tongue proved to be important particularly towards the middle of the 19th century, when the initiative in cultural production was taken over by lay educated classes (lawyers, doctors, public officials, teachers, politicians), who were influenced by contagious concepts of the European cultural nationalism. Thus to many Slovene intellectuals literature seemed – in addition to pedagogical, scholarly, and philological work – the most reliable strategy for shaping national consciousness, especially considering the fact that Slovenes did not dispose with state or political institutions nor did they control cultural and media infrastructure developed enough for practicing a fully differentiated public discourse in their standard language. Literature, with its stylistic diversity, rhetorical powers, and aesthetic appeal, thus seemed to them a fine shortcut leading to the cultural emancipation of Slovenes. Only in the revolutionary year of 1848, an explicit political program (Zedinjena Slovenija, ‘United Slovenia’) matured among liberal nationalist intelligentsia, which involved the need

---

22 The connections between the literary canon and standardization of the literary language are emphasized as well by J. Guillory in the above-mentioned work, pp. 60–77.
to found, in the framework of the Habsburg monarchy, an autonomous entity, a net of social and educational institutions, practices, and laws that would – through the Slovene public discourse – culturally and politically unite all the lands populated by Slovenes.

How were the processes of autonomization and nationalization of the emerging literary system reflected at the beginnings of the Slovene poetic literature and through intertextual references to the Parnassus imagery? The almanac Pisanice od lepeh umetnost I (1779) is the first proclaimed belles-lettres edition in the Slovene lands. Its title already pointed out that the Carniolan written word (“pisanice”) had become affiliated with the new concept of beaux arts (“od lepeh umetnost”). In this volume the monk Anton Feliks Dev (1732–86), “the first Slovene poet,” and a translator of Latin classics (Virgil and Ovid), used the antique topos of Parnassus in his allegorical epistolary poem Krajnska dužela želi tudi svoj dikcionarium imeti (“Carniola desires its own dictionary”).24 The Carniolan land, personified as mother, addresses her sons, the educated men loved by Muses. The message is intended for the poets and learned men of Blaž Kumerdej’s Enlightenment philological circle, a successor of Ljubljana Academia Operosorum of 1693–1725. She thanks them in exuberant style for the honor recently done by them and other patriotic scholars (Pohlin’s Krajnska grammatika of 1768, Valvasor’s monumental Die Ehre des Herzogthums Crain of 1689). She urges “darlings of the Muses” to take up the work for the dictionary and the orthography. As may be inferred from the discourse of this poem, Dev stands for the growth of language from “its own roots,” hence indicating a linguistic-political strategy of purism, parallel to bellettristic nationalizing. Similar strategy, which became typical of the Slovene Enlightenment tradition from 1790s well into the middle of the 19th century, presumed that it was language and culture of peasant people that remained authentic, elementary, and uncorrupted by foreign words during the century-long domination of German speaking classes. Such views were advocated by baron Sigismund Zois (1747–1819), a key figure of the Slovene Enlightenment, his protégé and internationally renowned linguist Jernej Kopitar (1780–1844), and also the “father of the nation,” the influential politician, journalist, and editor Janez Bleiweis (1808–81).25

---


25 Cf. Jože Pogačnik, Recepcija Prešernovega pesništva do leta 1866, in: Obdobje romantike v slovenskem jeziku, književnosti in kulturi, ed. B. Paternu (Ljubljana: Filozofskfa fakulteta, 1981), 299–303. In in his Grammatik der slavischen Sprache in Krain, Kärnten und Steyermark of 1808, which was the first modern scholarly grammar of Slovene (language spoken by “a million of Slavs in the Inner Austria”), Kopitar proceeded from the Herderian concept of “folk language” as the basis for the literary norm and from the peasant folk tradition as the only natural, pure, and realist foundation of the esthetic literature and a sustainable cultural development. Kopitar’s puristic views exerted deep influence on the codification of the standard Slovene literary language and on “populist” cultural politics until the second half of the 19th century, even though already in the 1830s they
Dev intertextually referred to the imagery of Parnassus in more elaborated way in the elegy and ode written in alexandrine – "Krajnskeh modric žaluvanje čez tu predolgu goridržanje svojega Belina v Laškeh duželah" (“The Carniolan Muses’ Grieving because of Their Belin’s Overly Long Stay in Latin Lands”) and "Vesele krajnskeh modric na prihod njeh Belina" (“The Carniolan Muses’ Joy at Their Belin’s Arrival”), both published in Pisanice II (1780). Similar to Dev’s opera libretto Belin, printed in the same volume, they speak about the painful absence of Belin (Apollo) and his return among Carniolan Muses (modrice). Emulating the model of classical topos, the poetic texts paint a utopian picture of Carniolan Classics. At the time when Dev poetically outlined the literary institution of “national” classics and envisioned its transfer from the once absolutely central Greco-Latin tradition into a rather peripheral Slovene cultural space, it was not possible to count on a fully fledged literary production in the Slovene language. Notwithstanding the fact that there was hardly anything from which the Slovene classics could actually be selected and canonized, the utopian, purely structural, and ideational emulation of the Classical canon enabled Dev to put forward the desired goals and contents of the emerging literary system. With his picturesque discourse, Dev also encouraged the Slovene speaking cultural elite to engage in developing the nascent and separate (in relation to Austrian state structures) “superstructure.”

With the intertextual reference to the Greco-Latin Parnassus Dev appropriated universally European tradition in order to stress the importance of vernacular poetry and literature for the national revival project. The transference of the normative model from a central cultural system to another, an emerging and peripheral one, occurred in Dev’s text in the shape of a serious travesty: the classical image of the canon was geoculturally transposed into the poet’s domestic environment and familiarized. In other words, Dev brought it closer to his ethnicity and mother tongue by means of names, imagery, and style. The baroque allegoric elegy Krajnskeh modric žaluvanje, with its amplifications, flamboyant figures of speech, architectonic composition, and rational argumentation, describes an idyllic landscape of Muses, which is transferred from Greece to Carniola. The “national” division of the antique Muses is also symptomatic: they are divided into two competing groups, into Carniolan modrice and their greedy Italian sisters, who captured Belin, the allegory of cultural

26 A. Gspan, op. cit., 192–197.
29 The Muses become Carniolan modrice, Apollo the allegedly Slavic god Belin, the slopes of Parnassus and Helicon are replaced by the avalanches above Ljubelj, and the fertile Greek plains by the Vipava Valley.
creativity. This dramatic conflict represents the competition between the nascent national literatures after the dissolution of the universal antique-Christian canon. The need for the future national classics is even more explicitly expressed in Dev’s ode Vesele krajnskeh modric. Here the Carniolan Muses are literally travestied, dressed in folkloric garb, and placed in the vernal landscape, which is awakening. Within this programmatic allegory of cultural awakening a kind of mise-en-abyme of systemic autopoiesis is inscribed: the Carniolan Muses, whose eroticism is acquiring rococo features, promise to Belin to give birth to Carniolan “Ovids and Virgils.” Modeled on the Augustus age, they embody a call and need for local classics, for the national literary canon.

To sum up, images of Parnassus in the texts of the first Slovene poet reveal a gradual separation of the emerging and peripheral literary system from the classical, “universal,” and central Greco-Latin framework, as well as attempts at symbolic appropriation of its cultural capital. The incipient inter-national competition between modern literatures indicated by Dev’s comparisons of Slovene Muses with their more prominent Italian sisters also comes to the forefront. Further, significant is the tendency for codification and elevation of the regional Carniolan language as aesthetic and literary. The inclination to prove the equality of the Slovene poetry and language with Greco-Latin classics on the one hand and with modern national literatures on the other hand continued in Romanticism, but with a difference – the national canon building was for the first time observed and self-referentially reflected in the context of “world literature.”

The Romantic Legacy: Literary Canon between Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism

The historical consciousness of literature’s worldwide scope had a rather peripheral, nationally biased origin, notwithstanding its cosmopolitan pedigree and claims to universalism. It was Goethe that – feeling somehow deprived as a German writer in relation to the French or English metropolises and their internationally renowned national canons – launched the concept of “world literature” in the late 1820s.  

Weltliteratur, Goethe – as Marx and Engels later would – expected “world literature” to transcend national parochialism through cosmopolitan cultural exchange, similar to international capitalist market. In accordance with Kant’s *ius cosmopoliticum*, Goethe thought that knowledge of other languages and literatures, their deeper understanding, and openness to their influence would lead people from different countries to mutual understanding and peace. The ideologeme of world literature was invented to buffer the dangers of imperialism, cultural wars, and economic competition between national entities in post-Napoleonic Europe.

From his particular perspective, marked by German cultural nationalism, Goethe – as one of the most outstanding cosmopolitans of the Herderian brand – was experiencing world literature primarily as a vast network of transnational interaction; that is, as a rise in the circulation of literary artworks across linguistic and national borders, and increasing cultural exchange between continents and civilizations. The Goethean concept of *Weltliteratur* was launched through that of “national literature.” World literature’s interactions and universal canons thus presuppose extant or at least emerging national literatures as their basic elements.

Inclusion of the national in the world, the presence of the world in the national, and nationality as a necessary condition for the appearance of world literature are symptoms of the interlocking ideologies of the post-enlightenment cultural nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and the aesthetic understanding of art practices. Autonomizing and nationalizing literature invoked the “nation” as a cultural hero on the ruins of the ancient canon and, from its Eurocentric perspective, generalized this aesthetic and national attitude to all literatures of the world. Following the logic of identity construction, nations as imagined communities only became possible through their relations with each other: while emulating the same discursive repertoire of the transnational current of nationalist ideology, they sought their individuality through relentless comparisons with and differentiation from other nations. Hence modern European nations were established within a new geopolitical reality that was perceived as inter-national.

An example of these processes in one of European peripheries – Slovene ethnic territory in the Habsburg Monarchy – is the poetry of the romantic France Prešeren (1800–49). Following Dev and the almanac *Pisanice*, Prešeren was also involved in devising the

---


31 Cf. J. Leerssen, Nationalism and the Cultivation of Culture (op. cit.).
system of national, “Slovene,” or “Carniolan” literature. In addition to his national self-awareness, however, Prešeren saw himself in a larger European context and was influenced by the Schlegel brothers’ program for cultivating a national language and literature. Their romantic universalism stamped his Poesije (Poesies) of 1847. Prešeren as a bilingual litterateur from the Biedermeier province of Carniola succeeded in wedding, in classical forms, existential-erotic themes with a liberal national idea. Artistically and at the same time with profound individual vision colored by his native sociolects, Prešeren employed historical and contemporary meters, poetic forms and genres from world literature, e.g., Greek anacreontic verse; Latin elegy; Arab ghazal; German ballad; Spanish romance; Italian sonnet, terza rima, and wreath of sonnets; French triolet; English Byronic tale in verse. He employed erudite examples or allusions to classical mythology (including the Parnassus imagery with Muses, flowers, and Orpheus), the Christian literary tradition, and the history and literary classics of Antiquity, the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Baroque. The poet uniquely reshaped rhetorical topics, figures, epic formulae, and Petrarchan metaphors, while compositionally observing classical tectonics.

His poem Glosa (1834/47), which is among the best romantic examples of systemic self-reference and self-regulation, tackles the relationship between verbal art in Slovene language and the local social environment, in which parochialism and simplistic capitalism play a decisive role.35 Prešeren reinforces his insistence on the poetic vocation by alluding to a set of classics of the newly established world’s canon (Homer, Ovid, Dante, Petrarch, Camões, Cervantes, and Tasso). They at first sight seem to justify the poem’s thesis that art – in opposition to the logic of profit – is always bound to be socially marginalized. Prešeren intertextually transfers world literature in a Slovene text written in a Habsburg province, thereby giving meaning to both his own poetic work and, through self-referentiality, also to the nascent system of national aesthetic literature. With locally perspectivized allusions to world classics, Prešeren accumulates their cultural capital in his text, evoked by the “currency” of their famous names. With reference to the canon of world and European literature, Prešeren also advocated an autonomous order of the literary that inverts the surrounding principles of the capitalist market.36

From this we may conclude that the emergence of a peripheral national literary system in the early 19th century tends to imply a specific local understanding of the global nature of literature, as well as the world imagination and intertextuality. After Dev, Prešeren may serve as a further example of how national identity is established relationally, through self-referential positioning of the poet among literatures in other languages and within world literature understood as a common heritage of mankind.

In conclusion, let me return to Parnassus imagery and outline its socio-cultural dimensions connected with Prešeren, his contemporaries and descendents. Motifs of Parnassus were frequently represented in the Slovene 19th-century poetry, for example in poetic homages by Miha Kastelic (Prijatlam krajnšine [To the Friends of Carniolan] of 1830) and Blaž Potočnik (Vodniku per Savici [To Vodnik at the Savica], 1830); in several sonnets, epigrams, and satires by Prešeren (from the almanac Krajnska čbelica [The Carniolan Bee], 1830–34, and Poezije, 1847); or in Fran Levstik’s satirical and burlesque epic Ježa na Parnas (The Ride onto Parnassus) of 1854 and 1861, which draws on the genre pattern provided by Alexander Pope’s The Dunciad. The Slovenized Parnassus began to display a gradual strengthening of the Carniolan-Slovene literary system in respect to the number of authors, the readership, the formation and development of cultural institutions, and preservation of its leading tradition.

However, of the greatest importance was the fact that the abstract and seemingly transhistorical representational scheme of Parnassus became involved in concrete, almost daily cultural and political fights for predominance on the national literary field. To the opposing individuals or groups that were publishing in newspapers, journals, feuilletons, almanacs, and various pamphlets, the self-referential imagery of Parnassus offered a suitable polemical vehicle for representing and commenting on the conflicting cultural policies based on different linguistic ideologies and aesthetic norms. Used as a strategy of competing cultural elites for the monopoly on defining and regulating the “national” and the “literary,” the commonplace mountain of Apollo and Muses was often parodically inverted and profanized, for example in Prešeren’s Nova pisarija (New Writing) of 1831. In this satirical dialogue written in terza rima and reminding of Alfieri’s satire I pedanti, Prešeren ridicules utilitarian, rural, pseudo-classicist, and (religiously) moralistic norms engrained in the Slovene literary tradition and advocated by local Carniolan adherents of the renowned Viennese

linguist Jernej Kopitar. Prešeren’s text is replete with allusions and parodic inversions that reflect and stress the discrepancy between the Carniolan socio-cultural banalities and classical prestige implied in the Parnassus topos, for example in phrases like “rovtnarske Atene” (rustic Athens) or “Apolon drugi bom jaz sred kozarjov / si v rovtah pletel neumrjoče vence” (Sitting among the goatherds in the back country, I’ll become a new Apollo and make myself immortal garlands). In the 1830s, Prešeren and his friend, the librarian and critic Matija Čop (1797–1835), a cosmopolitan expert in European literatures, engaged in a fierce polemic with Kopitar and his orthographic reforms (in 1833, Čop published an ironically entitled pamphlet Nuovo discacciamento di lettere inutili, dass ist Slowenischer ABC-Krieg). Prešeren’s local adversaries, supported and instructed by the almost indisputable authority of Kopitar (at that time custodian at the Vienna Court Library and chief censor for Slavic books), attempted to achieve the nation’s cultural progress step by step and among the predominantly peasant population, hence they drew on social organicism, utilitarianism, linguistic purism, and the presumably pure, uncorrupted “folk” language and folklore. Prešeren and Čop’s circle, gathered around the almanac Krajnska čbelica, wasponent of the alternative, more radical variety of cultural nationalism, which made a success only after their death, towards the end of the 19th century. Their option was more cosmopolitan and liberal, intended for educated classes and the cultivated bourgeoisie (Bildungbürgertum).

To sum up, during the 19th century the topos of Parnassus often depicted clashes over choosing canonical patterns of poetic language and thematics; it highlighted ideological and cultural struggles for power and influence over the literary field as well as the critical purge of utilitarianism endemic to Slovene fiction. Parnassus also offered a scheme for a critical reflection of backward ideological, economic, social, and publishing conditions that prevented the rise of autonomous poetry. Towards the end of the 1860s, the critic, editor, and writer Josip Stritar (1836–1923), representative of the liberal and radically nationalist “Young Slovene” generation (mladoslovenci of the 1860s and 1870s were inspired by the Young Czech movement), rehearsed Prešeren’s ironic and travestic inversions of Parnassus or Elysium. In his versified satirical dialogues Prešernov god v Eliziji (Prešeren’s Name-Day Party in Elysium) of 1868 and Prešernova pisma iz Elizije (Prešeren’s Letters from Elysium) of 1872, which mix poetical form with journalistic style and topical issues, Stritar mocks positions, ideas, and discourse of the older, more prudent, and less radical generation of nationalist intelligentsia (staroslovenci, “Old Slovenes”). Because Old Slovenes, having

dominated public space since 1848, were rather loyal to Habsburg monarchy and believed in nationalist cultural gradualism in the sense of Zois and Kopitar’s broad Enlightenment concept of Bildung, they marginalized the aesthetic role of literature. Although their leader Bleiweis esteemed Prešeren’s work and even praised and published it in his newspaper Novice, he did not regard Prešeren as the undisputable peak of the Slovene canon. Even after Prešeren’s death, Bleiweis and other Old Slovenes considered his poems as sentimental, subjective, complicated, immoral, and almost obsessed by love. Hence in their opinion there were at least two poets who deserved well of their country and should be celebrated or collectively remembered – Valentin Vodnik (1758–1819), the popular author of the first Slovene book of poetry, member of baron Zois’s Enlightenment circle, educator, grammarian, and journalist, and Janez Vesel - Koseski (1798–1884), the Schillerian author of bombastic patriotic and epic poetry. Bleiweis and other Old Slovenes thus oftentimes expressed skepticism about Young Slovenes’ eager elevation of Prešeren to the national icon and the apogee of art. Even though Stritar in his Prešernov god v Elizji carnivalized eternal life of the canonic poets, created parodic patchworks of their idiolocts, and travestied classical imagery of Elysium (e.g., immortals enjoy eating Carniolan sausages and frolicsomely toast to each other with light red wine from Lower Carniola), he clearly enthroned Prešeren as the national poet and placed him at the peak of both national and world literature’s canons: canonic Slovene writers from the 16th to the 19th century as well as world classics, such as Homer, Petrarch, and Goethe, are all paying tribute to Prešeren.40

During the decades when standard Slovene, developed in almost complete functional and stylistic diversity, was introduced to primary and secondary schools, newspapers, journals, book series, almanacs, theaters, reading houses, libraries, and political gatherings in the Slovene lands,41 Stritar – as writer, critic, and editor – brought the autonomy of art to an ideal and an explicit program. In legitimizing it, he canonized the romantic Prešeren as the “national poet” and one among the classics of “world literature.” He did this in a series of acts, including the above mentioned texts that were self-referentially based on the Elysium topos.

Stritar’s was the first significant critical interpretation of Prešeren’s life and works, which was published as introduction to the 1866 edition of Poezije for the newly designed series of national classics playfully entitled Klasje (Slovene klasik ‘classic’, klasje ‘ears’).

---

41 From 1868 to 1872, at the time of Stritar’s efforts to canonize Prešeren as the national poet, tabori, the radically nationalist mass meetings (with the average of 8.500 participants), which joined liberal intelligentsia and middle classes with peasantry, were organized by Young Slovenes all over Carniola, Carinthia, and Styria.
Here he established an influential and long-lasting paradigm for understanding the national mission of art and artist. Stritar’s essayist interpretation set forth Prešeren’s own poetic rendering of the Orphean myth from his seventh unit of the *Sonnet Wreath* of 1834:

Above them [i.e., flowers of our poetry, M. J.] savage peaks the mountains raise,
Like those which once were charmed by the refrain
Of Orpheus, when his lyre stirred hill and plain,
And Haemus’ crags and the wild folk of Thrace.

Ah, would, to cure the dearth of these our days,
An Orpheus dowered with song of native strain
Were sent to us that all Slovenes might gain
Fresh fire to set their frozen hearts ablaze.

His words might kindle thoughts that would remind
Us of lost pride of race; discord would cease;
Our people in one nation then combined

Would see that feuds no longer did increase.
His strains would bring the rule of joy and peace,
Where tempests roar and nature is unkind. (Transl. Vivian de Sola Pinto)

Stritar devised a narrative of Prešeren as the exemplary priest of beauty, victim, and savior as well as the poetic founder of the Slovenes. He saw in Prešeren the embodiment of national Bildung and the cultivating powers of poetry that could elevate and unite the nation. Stritar’s essay introduces into the Slovene tradition the notion typical of the discourse of cultural nationalism, and this idea has been believed to be uniquely Slovene until recently. It is called “Prešernian structure” or the “Slovene cultural syndrome.” It denotes the conviction that Slovene canonic poets and literature in general play the role of the fundamental institution that alone is able to constitute a “small,” politically dependent and non-sovereign

---

nation. This idea has backed significant changes in literary self-referentiality since the middle of the 19th century. The national canonic figure of Prešeren and his texts have begun to play the role of the Greco-Latin classics and to compete with the most prominent authors of world literature.

For example, Prešeren’s highly self-referential sonnet form, his imagery connoting poetic creativity, and his vision of the poet’s cultural roles (“the moistly blooming flowers of poetry,” and the poet as the new Orpheus from his *Sonnet Wreath*) have launched a model and point of reference for generations of successors. Especially modernist poets attempted to overcome his canonic influence by intertextually ironizing his romantic values, stylistic features, and views on poetry, for example by replacing Prešeren’s sentimental Parnassian “flowers” with ugly and prickly “weeds” in the disenchanted world (Božo Vodušek in his 1939 collection *Odčarani svet*) or profanizing his Orpheism and transforming it into an absurdist image of uninspired poet having indifferent public (Veno Taufer in his 1963 collection *Jetnik prostosti*).

Slovene literary discourse has devised several series of intertextual references to Prešeren’s key texts, above all to his “national narrative,” the historical verse tale *The Baptism on the Savica* (1836). Such a creative aspect of *imitatio* among his literary successors qualifies Prešeren’s canonic figure as a Slovene “cultural saint.” In the Slovene social life in general, however, his saintly status has been much more dependent on ritualized practices of cultural remembrance, such as celebrations of his anniversaries (more regularly since the 1860s), teaching his work in schools (since 1850s), publishing memorial miscellanies (*Prešernov album* of 1900), raising his monuments (1905 in the Ljubljana center), putting his portrait on national banknotes, or commemorating the day of his death as a national holiday of culture (since 1944).

---

