

VALENTIN VODNIK, “THE FIRST SLOVENIAN POET”: THE POLITICS OF INTERPRETATIONS

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Each generation in its own way weighs up and measures the past according to contemporary outlooks in order to give shape to the future. Views of the past and of the future are constantly being modified, supplemented, and adjusted from generation to generation. It is, therefore, inevitable that leaders and prophets take on new personal characteristics and that their reputations change, falling and rising (Gspan 1958: 146). Thus, over the past two centuries, the image of Valentin Vodnik has undergone radical change in accordance with prevailing political conditions. Interpretations of Vodnik’s poetry have also varied with changing political circumstances. This is particularly true of his ode to Napoleon, which he published in his *Pismenost* (Literacy) of 1811. The poem “Illyria Revived” does not represent the peak of Vodnik’s poetic creativity, nor—in the assessment of Ivan Prijatelj—is it “completely original in its phraseology,” for even the syntagma of “Illyria Revived” had been used by others before him (Prijatelj 1911: 587). It did, however, receive a great response and inspired several generations, each of which read and interpreted it in its own way.

“To Make of Our People... Slovenians”

The new political groups (nations) that had begun to appear in the nineteenth-century in Europe were so without precedence that their contemporaries had to “invent for them an entire historical continuity” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 7). In the second half of the nineteenth century, the idea of a “nation” in the Slovenian lands of the Habsburg monarchy was a novelty for which contemporaries had no basis in personal experience. As a writer in the *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice* (Agricultural and handicrafts news) noted at that time, not all people could distinguish between the words *narodno* 'national', 'popular' and *nerodno* 'clumsy', 'awkward':

Some Slovenians do not distinguish, as is necessary, between the two words: *narodno* and *nerodno*. *Narodno* (national) is something beautiful, which is the proper quality of one people or nation, or another, hence we say: *národnost*: *Nationalität* (nationality). *Nerodno*, however, is something of little worth. *Ungeschicklichkeit* (something clumsy, botched). It would be distasteful if we were not properly to distinguish between

these two quite different words. Therefore, let them be engraved upon our minds!¹

At the time when Janez Bleiweis began publishing *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice*, writers in Slovenian were using as many as three types of script and had no collective name; instead, they referred to themselves by regional nomenclature, “since they still were not aware of their communality” (Županić 1911: 272). At that time, the national awakeners were intent on making a radical break with the past and were aiming to establish a new, national identity that would overcome the differences deriving from the old, regional identities. They stressed that “hitherto we have been merely Gorenci, Dolenci, Notrajnci, Pivčani, Krašovci, Berkinci, Istrianci, Čičje, beli Krajnci, Koroški in Štajerski Slovenci—but we have not been true Slovenians.” (D. 1849: 209)

Nationalization of the “Satisfied Carniolan”

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Valentin Vodnik (1758–1819), who was recognized as the “first Slovenian poet, scholar, and awakener of our people,” (Committee for Vodnik’s monument 1889: 1), was the most acceptable candidate for the role of the “great man” who would help join the former country folk into the Slovenian nation. When the monument in his honor, which was the “first national monument,” was unveiled in Ljubljana, an anonymous writer in the newspaper *Slovenec* (Slovenian) wrote in celebration of Vodnik:

The acts of an individual man of distinction reveal what is glowing and burning in a thousand hearts. Such a man is the standard-bearer in battle and the prophet of victory, after him, with bold and joyful steps, march the national troops. And just such a man, whose memory is today being celebrated by the grateful Slovenian people, was Valentin Vodnik, first Slovenian poet, cleric and scholar, martyr of the Slovenian nationality, model of patriotism, spiritual father and awakener of our nation, for which he lived and suffered.²

The image of Vodnik as the “first Slovenian poet,” an invention of the first half of the nineteenth century, had emerged out of nationalistic ambitions. The poet’s mentor, Baron Sigmund Zois von Edelstein, had seemingly encouraged Vodnik by saying that Vodnik would later be “First poet of the Carniolans—or, better to say—indeed, you already are!” (Zois 1859: 50), and advised him to find “the right tone” if he wished to become the “first Carniolan-Slavic poet” (Zois 1859: 61). On Vodnik’s gravestone was a

¹ Nekaj od Slovincov. *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice*, 28 August 1844: 155.

² “V proslavo Valentinu Vodniku,” *Slovenec*, 28 June 28 1889: 1–2.

Latin inscription indicating that there rested “Valentino Vodnik Slavo-Carniolo” (Valentin Vodnik Slavic Carniolan; Steska 1928: 58). In January 1828, Matija Čop wrote to Jernej Kopitar in this connection: “Recently they placed a not wholly bad memorial to Vodnik with this inscription: Valentino Vodnik Slavo-Carniolo (as if it were something special that a Carniolan should lie in the Ljubljana cemetery, and as if that were the most noteworthy thing about Vodnik!” (Čop 1983: 61). According to Matija Čop’s record in his materials for the history of Slovenian literature, during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Vodnik was famed as a distinguished Carniolan writer and man of whom “the most—or, so to say, everything—must be expected for the Carniolan language and literature” (Čop 1983: 97). In 1844, the *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice* presented Vodnik as the “celebrated Carniolan poet” (Danecki 1844: 139). The politician Lovro Toman referred to Vodnik as the “first Slovenian poet.” On the first centenary of Vodnik’s birth, he “composed the words for this joyous occasion,” naming Vodnik “our first poet” (Malavašič 1859: 64).

The development of Vodnik from “first Carniolan poet” into “first Slovenian poet” is clearly reflected in the publications of his poem, which today we know by the title of “Dramilo” (The awakening). On the initial publication of part of the poem, it was still without a title, but the introductory verse proclaimed: “Carniolan, your land is healthy...” (Krajncz, tvoja deshela je zdrava...’ (Vodnik 1795: 30). In *Pésmaš sa pokúshino* (A poetry sampler), the poet entitled it “Pésmaš Na moje Rojáke” (Poem to my compatriots), and also slightly altered the introductory verse: “Krajncz! Toja sémla je sdráva...” In the publication of Vodnik’s poems edited by Andrej Smole and France Prešeren, the title was shortened to “Na moje roje” (To my compatriots), although the opening verse still addresses the “Krajnc” (Smole and Prešeren 1840: 1). The title of the poem is now more in accordance with Young-Slovenian political ideals: “Dramilo mojih rojakov” (The awakening of my compatriots), while in the introduction the poet calls out: “Slovén’c! tvoja zemlja je zdráva...” (Levstik 1869: 5).

That Levstik’s reading would prevail was not clear for decades. On 2 December 1888, for instance, when the new building of the Carniolan Provincial Museum Rudolfinum was opened in Ljubljana, the then director Karl Deschmann addressed the guests in German and concluded his speech in the “local” (i.e., Slovenian) language, quoting Vodnik’s verses: “Kranjc, Tvoja zemlja je zdrava.”³ However, when the Vodnik’s poem was republished by Fran Wiesthaler (1891: 13), the editor retained the title from

³ “Otvoritev dež. muzeja ‘Rudolfinuma,’” *Slovenski Narod*, 3 December 1888: 2–3. Dragotin Dežman was a prominent Slovenian national awakener until 1861, when he Germanized his name into Karl Deschmann and became “an enthusiastic Carniolan” (Levec 1889: 254). In his Carniolan enthusiasm, however, Slovenian nationalists saw a sign of apostasy.

Levstik's edition, with the address only slightly altered: "Sloven'c! tvoja zemlja je zdrava..."⁴ The poem kept this title also in the edition published after the First World War by Ivan Pregelj (1919: 17), who likewise slightly corrected the first verse: "Sloven'c! Tvoja zemlja je zdrava..."

"Illyria Revived"

After 14 October 1809 peace treaty of Schönbrunn, the Austrian Empire was obliged to cede Dalmatia, Croatia west of the river Sava up to the mouth of the Una at Jasenovac, Carniola, Gorizia, Trieste and Istria, and western Carinthia together with the district of Villach. These provinces comprised a population of almost two million and territory extending over 60,400 km². Napoleon united them into a single administrative unit, the Illyrian Provinces, which became a separate province attached to the French Empire (Orožen 1902: 161; Melik 1920: 127).

During the time of the Illyrian Provinces (1809–14), Valentin Vodnik was a professor and director of the three-year gymnasium and superintendent of the elementary schools, as well as being head of the arts and crafts school. In addition, he gave instruction in history and geography, Latin and poetics, French and Italian. He was active in persuading Marshal Marmont, governor of the Illyrian Provinces, to permit instruction in reading and writing, as well as the catechism and the basics of mathematics, to be conducted in the regional language. At this time, introducing the regional language into schools was by no means a simple matter, since there were no textbooks in Slovenian, nor teachers qualified to instruct in the language. Vodnik, therefore, personally and energetically engaged himself in the task, and within a brief period he had written a basic grammar (1811a), Christian divinity studies (1811b), a Slovenian grammar (1811c), a French manual (1811c), and a trilingual primer.

Through the educational reforms, Marshal Marmont had been able to encourage Vodnik and also to win his sympathy for the French occupational authority. A report from an Austrian spy, in 1814 reveals that during the final period of French occupation Vodnik was declaring before the pupils: "The (river) Ljubljana will sooner flow back up toward Vrhnika than will the Austrians come back again to Ljubljana" (Koruza 1970: 111). Vodnik also wrote an ode to Napoleon. The poem opens ceremonially with

⁴ Wiesthaler otherwise asserts that nowhere did he correct the poet's language: "for what is stated by Smole and Prešeren regarding their edition, likewise holds true for mine, namely: "that Vodnik's poems and other writings are here printed just as he had written them. Nothing has been altered, nothing corrected. May this serve as a caution to those people who might feel that some letter, some emphasis has been swallowed, or that some word may not be fitting" (Wiesthaler 1891: 5).

Napoleon's exhortation: "Illyria, arise!" continuing with "Illyrian" history—completely in the spirit of Napoleon, who had chosen that antique name on account of the imperialist analogy with the ancient Roman Empire—and concluding with an expression of Vodnik's grateful trust in Napoleon and the poet's conviction that, within the domain of Napoleon's empire, his homeland would not be forgotten but rather elevated ("redeemed")—i.e. that in culture it would be on a par with the rest of Europe and would become its "gem" (Vodnik 1811c).

"Illyria Redeemed"

The end of Napoleon and of his empire meant also the end of the Illyrian Provinces. This "joyful fact" was announced to the citizens of Ljubljana and the environs with a fifty-round cannon salvo from the Ljubljana Castle, while in the meantime the townsfolk were celebrating this event with "public illuminations" (Orožen 1902: 168). On the following day, once the Austrian troops had again positioned themselves in Ljubljana, a mass of thanksgiving was held in the capital, at which the *Te Deum* was sung (Lah 1928: 13). On the emperor's birthday, 12 February 1814, the citizens of Ljubljana "with great gladness" reinstated on the town hall the Habsburg double-headed eagle, which during the French occupation had been carefully stored away (Orožen 1902: 168–69).

Although it had been specified in a separate article of the peace agreement that no state would persecute any of its subjects who, during the time of foreign occupation, had supported or been favorably disposed towards the foreign regime, the Austrian authorities nonetheless, immediately and with full vengeance turned upon all those "Illyrians," whom they reproached for being Francophiles (Mal 1929: 4). Vodnik was a victim of the purge. The court commissary, count Franz Joseph Saurau, on 19 July 1814 proposed to the emperor that Vodnik should be dismissed on account of his friendly attitude toward the French. As proof, he submitted "Illyria Revived," which he described as a eulogy to Napoleon composed "in the spirit of French all-conquering obsession"; in addition, Vodnik's name was alleged to be on the list of members of the freemasonic lodge of "Friends of the Roman King and of Napoleon" (Levec 1908: 632; Prijatelj 1911a: 58–88; Kidrič 1930: 103; Kos 1990: 24). In 1814, Vodnik was pensioned off at one-third of his salary, so that to the end of his life he had to struggle in penury (Bohinjec 1889: 23; Wiesthaler 1891: 10; Sket 1893: 155; Glaser 1895: 63; Aljaž 1919: 6; Budal 1939: 13; Kos 1990: 25).

The treaty of Schönbrunn awarded the territory of the Illyrian Provinces to the Austrian Empire. By the patent of 3 August 1816, Emperor Franz I united Carinthia, Carniola, the regions of Gorizia, the Littoral, and Civil Croatia into the Kingdom of Illyria (Trdina 1866: 137; Orožen 1902: 170). The Constitution of 25 April 1848 referred to this formation as one of

the lands of the constitutional monarchy (Vosnjak 1917: 80). Likewise, in the March Constitution of 1849, recognition was given to the Kingdom of Illyria. Thereafter, the name vanished from the official nomenclature, and the memory of the crown lands of Illyria continued to be preserved only in the name of the official gazette of the Littoral region, which right up until WW I bore the title of *Official Gazette of the Austro-Illyrian Littoral* (Vosnjak 1917: 83). Although it did officially continue to exist, during the period of Metternich's absolutism Illyria was so displeasing to the authorities that they even forbade the use of the name of Illyria. Vodnik's *Illyria Revived* was expurgated from school textbooks and, on account of censorship, could not be included in the collection of Vodnik's poems, which had been compiled by Andrej Smole and France Prešeren. Its republication was permitted only after the March Revolution, which led to the abolishment of censorship (Vodnik 1848: 20; 1848b: 3–6; Grafenauer 1918a: 189).

After the Kingdom of Illyria was again under the Habsburg scepter, "Vodnik also attempted to rectify what he had spoilt with 'Illyria Revived'" (Glaser 1895: 150), and "to console the angry stepmother" (Budal 1939: 13). Therefore, he composed a new ode, "Illyria Redeemed." In the bilingual edition of *Vodnikov spomenik/Vodnik-Album* (Memorial to Vodnik) of 1859, Peter Hicinger considered that with this work the poet had "risen sufficiently high" and in it had "well revealed his love both of the nation and of the imperial house of Habsburg" (Hicinger 1859: 28). "Illyria Redeemed" extols the Austrian Emperor Franz I for having ordered the establishment of a chair of Slovenian language at the lyceum in Ljubljana (1817). In the poem, Vodnik refers to the Slovenian origin of the Habsburgs and expresses his disappointment with Napoleon who "Rampages, squanders/ Crushes all beneath his fist" and who, on account of his greed for conquering, did not make real the poet's dream that Illyria would become the "gem of Europe" (Grafenauer 1918b: 155). In the second variant, the poet ascribed to Napoleon further denationalizing intentions, so that in his times Illyria sighed for the 'old father' (Grafenauer 1918b: 168). However, "the stepmother did not truly believe him and did not abandon him; she herself sensed how authentic a poetic outpouring Napoleon had enticed out of Vodnik, and what a hollow imitation she herself had drawn" (Budal 1939: 13).

Literary history has assessed "Illyria Redeemed" as an overly long, excessively mechanical, and insufficiently thoughtful repetition of "Illyria Revived" (Kos 1990: 120). This is most likely the main reason literary critics have not accorded it great attention. Franc Kogoj interpreted the poem roughly in his speech at Jesenice on 16 February 1919:

It was, they say, in order to console the police minds that Vodnik composed the second Illyria, *Illyria Redeemed*. Be

that as it may. Vodnik gave to his second Illyria the right title: “Redeemed.” We know that he could also be naughty. Whoever wishes to be redeemed must, in addition to other qualities, also have that of dying. And the real Illyria was dead and—redeemed. (Aljaž 1919: 6)

Assessments of the importance of the Napoleonic era for the development of the Illyrian Provinces have changed greatly over the years. According to evaluations from the middle and end of the nineteenth century, during the short period of four years certain changes did indeed occur, yet they were not particularly great with regard to the previous situation. According to Josip Apih, in the Illyrian Provinces Napoleon “raised the French language to prominence, while denying the validity of German as the “regional language,” and leaving only a small corner open for the local speech or vernacular; after all, French could not suddenly be poured into Slovenian heads.” The difference between the period of Napoleon and that of Franz Joseph I (1848–1917), therefore, “lay only in the fact that Napoleon had introduced Slovenian into elementary school as a language of instruction, and into secondary school as a subject of study” (Apih 1888: 10).

In the estimation of the historian Josip Mal, however, Napoleon’s conquests had long-term consequences for development in Europe. During the first half of the nineteenth century, in fact, the universal aspirations of Napoleon’s empire—to subjugate all states, without differentiation between their national composition—actually gave birth to resistance by the subjugated peoples. “They felt the foreign government as a pressure upon them, and national awareness was aroused within them (Napoleon calls out, ‘Illyria, arise!’).” In this battle, national awareness was awakened, “the peoples began to become aware of their individuality, they started to study their past.” (Mal 1910: 2)

“Be a Light unto All the People”

The March 1848 Revolution in Vienna did away with the feudal social order, and through the constitution recognized the right of the Austrian peoples to use of the vernacular in schools and administrative offices. In his speech to the grand assembly of the Slovenian Association on 22 November 1848 in Ljubljana, their leader Janez Bleiweis expressed the enthusiasm of the Slovenian nationalists paraphrasing the first stanza of “Illyria Revived”:

“Be a light unto all Austrian peoples”—thus spoke the gentle Emperor Ferdinand on the fifteenth day of March this year—and light there was!—the sun of new fortune, the sun of freedom shone upon all peoples. Now, only now, have the

words of the late Vodnik acquired their true meaning—it is not to Napoleon, but to our Ferdinand that the words hold true:

Ferdinand says:

Illyria arise!

It arises – exclaims:

Who calls to the day?

Ferdinand calls to you, Ferdinand our gracious Emperor!⁵

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Springtime of Nations brought about the nationalization of society, of politics and the state (Vosnjak 1917: 126). On the political map of western Europe new national states were emerging, among which the most important was Germany. The founders of the greater German state dreamed of a country that would reach from the Baltic to the Adriatic Sea and would therefore also include the Austrian provinces. The nationally conscious Slovenians regarded this possibility with fear and vigorously engaged themselves against the inclusion of Austria into the German federal state. Luka Martinak, for instance, wrote that

if the mighty fortifications of famed Austria are to disintegrate, then the Slovenian nationality may also fall with them. For, if we are to imagine the worst instance, they might enter into the German federation, in which they would be not only subjugated, but also annihilated... (Martinak 1848: 50)

In these new circumstances, people had also begun to re-read the “historical and magnificent poem ‘Illyria Revived.’” This poem had become a regular feature of the repertoire at national ceremonies; hence, on the centenary of Vodnik’s birth there were surely not any “Slovenians among the educated whose hearts had not already many times been warmed by this inestimable poem” (Metelko 1859: 22). The collaborators on *Vodnikov spomenik/Vodnik-Album* endeavored to absolve the author of “Illyria Revived” of any doubts regarding his patriotism, for:

already the very title of this poem most well reveals the feelings of an ardent patriot, who for his dear people was hoping for a new spiritual life when the ancient name of Illyria was reawakened in him. But, if anyone would wish to claim that the poet had too much forgotten the national-defense ‘Oaths,’ he would nevertheless ultimately have to concede that it was only patriotism that turned the poet’s eye towards the domineering ruler. (Hicinger 1859: 26)

⁵ “Nagovor,” *Slovenija*, 24 November 1848: 165; Velki zbor slovenskiga društva v Ljubljani 22. listopada; *Kmetijske in rokodelske Novice*, 6 December 1848: 206

“Memory Is Enough: Songs Sung of Me”

The celebrations on the centenary of Vodnik’s birth were “a living document of this age of ours.” The speakers stressed the poet’s Carniolan patriotism, the bands played the emperor’s anthem and the Radetzky March. One year later a bilingual edition of *Vodnikov spomenik/Vodnik-Album* was published, which, although “late, was nevertheless not too late to rehabilitate ‘the father of Slovenian poetry’” (Malavašič 1859: 63).

Vodnik’s rehabilitation in the second half of the nineteenth century was, actually, also his reinterpretation: the author of *Illyria Revived* was proclaimed as an Austrian patriot. Chaplain Peter Bohinjec, who had presented Valentin Vodnik to the Slovenian youth as the first Slovenian poet, rhetorically reflected:

Who, then, could calumniate this honest man for having been too great an admirer of Napoleon? Who could ever doubt in his Austrian patriotism? – Was not Vodnik, indeed, the spiritual pastor of the Austrian militiamen?... Would Vodnik, sturdy in character as an oak, have altered his genuine patriotism for some froth of French glory? No, and a hundred times no! The very title ‘Illyria Revived’ reveals the sentiments of an impassioned patriot who anticipates for his beloved compatriots a new spiritual life, when the ancient name of Illyria shall be re-awakened for them. And the poem by itself alone? It is not so much a tribute to the glory of Napoleon as to the glory of ancient Illyria, it is not so much the French desire as the desire of an old Austrian which sings the militiamen “Oath,” which overflows with love for his homeland, dear Slovenia, which then and, God willing it so, precisely at that time rose and developed, after being for so many centuries covered in dust and despised. (Bohinjec 1889: 19)

The image of Vodnik as an Austrian patriot continued to be regarded as authentic right up until the end of WW I (see, for example, Grafenauer 1917: 87). Such a view provoked a sharp response from Ivan Lah, who already in the first issue of *Ljubljanski Zvon*, published in 1919, had stated:

They have cloaked the poet in Carniolan patriotism in order to conceal his honest Illyrian heart. Likewise in the schools they have presented him to the youth in the light of his obedience to Austria: the poem of his life they have excused as a sin necessitated by the times. They doubted in his strength of character and warned of imprudence, for he could be led

astray by his heart. This was education – from our past! When we erected the monument to him in Ljubljana, we could not clearly and openly relate the truth about him. Yet it seems to me that at that time the sculptor Gangl succeeded exceptionally well in expressing through the poet's pleasant smile all that we, wittingly or unwittingly, had been concealing in our hearts. Does not that very smile speak of the secret which we had not understood until the most recent days? Has it not now become clear to us what the good Pater Valentin wished to say? Have we not read it there? (Lah 1919: 56).

“One Generation Springs up, Quite New”

The political champions of a national utilitarian orientation exploited Vodnik's work in a similar way to the works of Adam Koseski to awaken a newly rising bourgeoisie. On the centenary of the poet's birth, a magnificent celebration was arranged at his home in Šiška, and the following year the bilingual edition of *Vodnikov spomenik/Vodnik-Album* was released. During the period of the *čitalnice* (public reading rooms), year after year at Candlemas they ceremonially honored the memory of the poet; the *vodnikovanje* (celebrations of Vodnik) strengthened the cult of the poet, who once again was contributing greatly toward the spread of “Slovenian national thought” (Gspan 1958: 148–49). In the estimation of the journal *Dom in Svet* (Home and the world), at the end of the nineteenth century Vodnik's name had become “almost the most popular among our poets.”⁶

On the centenary of Vodnik's birth, Lovro Toman gave the impetus for erecting the “first national monument.” He justified his proposal to his “dearly beloved fellow countrymen, faithful Slovenians,” by pointing out that Vodnik had “himself raised the monument,” with the words:

Neither daughter, nor son
After me shall be,
Memory is enough:
Songs sung of me.

Toman, however, considered that he was speaking in the name of the whole homeland and of all patriots when saying that

it is to this very memory, to this merit that the monument must be erected. Yes!—in truth it is our duty. A nation that respects and honors its great men is also honoring itself. Monuments to famous fellow countrymen are the pillars on which are

⁶ Raznoterosti, *Dom in Svet*, June 1889: 131.

attached the threads of the homeland's history,—memories are like Memnon's file, from which at sunrise and sunset enchanting voices sounded. So, too, from such monuments, wonder stirring voices resound, especially when the sky of the homeland darkens or lightens.

Let us now begin to display our gratitude towards our outstanding compatriot, by deed and visibly before the world! Whatever honors our nation, our small land, forever serves also to honor the common state of Austria. May we bring it eternal glory, for it is our duty. (Toman 1858: 354)

At the end of June 1889, on what was then Valvasor Square and later became Vodnik Square in Ljubljana, the poet's admirers erected a bronze monument. The ceremonies marking the unveiling of Vodnik's monument lasted for three days and represented a national cultural-political event of extraordinary importance. Contemporary witnesses experienced the time of the ceremonial unveiling of the "first national monument" as a national holiday which "will remain inscribed in golden letters in our cultural, our literary history" (Lampe 1889: 162). On the evening of 28 June 1889, a concert was held in the *čitalnica*, followed on the next day by a visit to the Carniolan Provincial Museum Rudolfinum, an excursion to the Ljubljana Castle or to Pod Turn castle, a wreath-laying ceremony at Vodnik's grave, and theatre presentations in the *čitalnica*; then, on the third day, precisely at mid-day following a Mass in St James's church, was unveiled the work of art which "celebrates far and wide the united Slovenian name." Fran Wiesthaler, director of the lyceum, spoke:

Convinced of the truth of the saying that the people are not worthy of their spiritually great men if they are unable to demonstrate their esteem towards them; the Slovenian people, however, have undertaken as a sacred duty to set in place a visible outward sign of their grateful devotion to their most meritorious compatriot, who until his last breath had worked for them, and finally even suffered and suffered extreme want. (Wiesthaler 1889: 391)

The place selected for Vodnik's monument was before the portal of the large façade of the lyceum. This was a way of indicating Vodnik's importance for the development of Slovenian school education (Lampe 1889: 162–63), while his image was intended to make the pupils aware of "what kind of basis a man must work upon, and how untiringly self-sacrificing, in order for a monument to be erected by his successors in his recognition."⁷ According to a 28 June 1889 report in *Slovenec*, Vodnik's monument was placed "before the building in which he taught Slovenian to

⁷ Raznoterosti, *Dom in Svet*, June 1889: 131.

the youth, and from which he had sent forth so many deserving men to our homeland,” and who otherwise was

a constant beacon, a priestly scholar, a man of iron character, a celebrated poet and patriot, who never strayed from the path of his ideals and who was forever faithful in his heart towards the homeland in which he was born, and firm in loyalty towards his ruler.⁸

The Easter earthquake of 1895 severely damaged the old lyceum building, and so, in the autumn of 1902, demolition began. Many at the time thought that the new gymnasium would be built in its place, but this did not happen; instead, the market-place developed there. An unknown writer in *Slovenec* vehemently protested against the location:

If anyone, it is Vodnik who has the right to complain that his fellow-countrymen were plotting against him behind his back; behind him they have created an empty space which he will not even look at, but is instead stubbornly turning his back upon it. He does not even know which way to turn. Ever since they demolished the old lyceum all has become to him fearfully unnatural and unbearable. His friends wonder how they might be able to help him. Now, again behind his back, they will set up a market-place. Professor Vodnik, who on occasions polished Slovenian and French verses, will now have to listen to what is the price of cabbage and potatoes, which is of very little interest to him.⁹

Viktor Steska, however, commented laconically on the matter:

Strange: Where once there bubbled the fount of wisdom, from now on they'll be selling cabbage-heads! Vodnik, however, will be thinking, his back turned towards the place “where he worked for his own people”: Sic transit gloria mundi! (Steska 1903: 59)

“One Nation Springs up, Quite New”

A new view of the French occupation was becoming recognized shortly before WW I, when the memory of that “brief, yet glorious era of French rule” was revealed as being a “powerful lever to the Slovenian movement” (Vosnjak 1917: 67). Bogumil Vošnjak’s book *Ustava in uprava ilirskih dežel* (Constitution and administration of the Illyrian Provinces 1910) lent contemporary relevance to Napoleon’s Illyria. Then, Ivan

⁸ Vodnikova slavnost. Dne 29. julija; *Slovenec*, 3 July 1889: 1–2.

⁹ Vodnikov spomenik v Ljubljani in drugo, *Slovenec*, 9 May 1903: 5.

Prijatelj, in a 1911 discussion published in the Gorizia journal *Veda* expressed the opinion that this period, although short-lived, had been “of immense importance in the national-cultural life of the Slovenians,” since it “directly signified the awakening of the Slovenian people (...) from a lengthy slumber” (Prijatelj 1911: 599). In contrast to the then prevailing opinion, Prijatelj had re-read Vodnik’s “Illyria Revived” as an “honest expression of his spirit” (Prijatelj 1911a: 589).

The muses rest during war, and there was no activity around the Vodnik monument: “We passed over the centenary of Vodnik’s death quietly and modestly; the hopes and concerns, joys and pains of the future being born had thrust the modest jubilee quite to one side” (Grafenauer 1918a: 179). Nevertheless, the jubilee had clearly stimulated Ivan Grafenauer to reconsider the poet Valentin Vodnik and his “Illyria Revived,” “an ode to Slovenian history,” as he described it (Grafenauer 1918b: 131–32). According to Grafenauer’s, it was only after Napoleon had established Illyria and within it united a great part of the Slovenians, Croats, and Serbs, that the Slovenian language “acquired greater validation in schools and in public life.” This is why the poet had begun to hope for “a brighter blossoming of the Slovenian language and people,” and also why he composed the ode “To old Slovenian glory and to the Slovenian future (‘Illyria Revived’)” (Grafenauer 1918b: 122–23).

During the First World War, Vodnik and his “Illyria Revived” were undoubtedly most fervently recalled by the Slovenian members of the Yugoslav Committee in London, Niko Zupanič (1916) and Bogumil Vošnjak (1917). In his 28 April 1916 speech to American-Slovenians in Cleveland, “Slovenija, vstani!” (Slovenia, arise!), Zupanič supported the national liberation of the Slovenians and their unification with the Serbs and Croats in the nation-state of Yugoslavia: “It was not without reason that our first poet, Valentin Vodnik, in the year 1811, proclaimed that Yugoslavia (Illyria) will be the jewelry of Europe!” (Zupanič 1916: 68). At the end of the First World War, Zupanič published a book entitled *Ave Illyria*, which should most likely be read as the author’s Latin translation of the exhortation “Slovenia, arise!” In it, Zupanič recounts that the Slovenian poet Valentin Vodnik had with enthusiastic words greeted Illyria’s rise and its founder, Napoleon, for he had made possible the introduction of literature and schooling in the Illyrian language. All of this was brought to an end in 1814, when Illyria was again placed under Austrian rule. Austrian legislation endeavored to annihilate the roots of national awareness, but it was already too late. This consciousness could no longer be smothered, and it was waiting only for a suitable moment to blaze forth with all its energy (Zoupanitch 1919: 81).

In Slovenia, Vodnik’s memory was publicly honored once again on 8 January 1919. This celebration, however, was not as massive as had been

the ceremony to mark the centenary of the poet's birth. There also emerged differing points of view with regard to Vodnik as an appropriate hero for the new times. These differences can be felt in the varying reports of the *Mestni arhivar* (Municipal archivist) and *Slovenec*. While the former records that the ceremony was "solemnly celebrated" (*Mestni arhivar* 1934: 74), according to *Slovenec*, the ceremony was conducted "Quietly, so quietly indeed that many did not even know about it." On this occasion, the Christian-Social Union placed on Vodnik's monument a wreath with the dedication: "To the first Slovenian and social worker on the centenary of his death." The *Slovenec* reporter thought that

had it not been for this, the bronze statue would still today remain a bronze statue, silent and solitary. A further proof that Ljubljana actually does not know how to value the great men of its nation... Glory to such a Ljubljana...¹⁰

At the beginning of 1919, a ceremony was held in the Home of Handicrafts to mark the anniversary of Vodnik's birth. The event was reported in *Slovenec* as follows:

Right now, when we are united with the Serbs and Croats in a single state, it is fitting that we should celebrate Valentin Vodnik. In his most splendid poem, in 'Illyria Revived,' he lauds our homeland and in prophetic spirit declares: 'Illyria—the ring of Europe may it be.' Later, however, various regional borders split up this 'ring of Europe'—Illyria—into eight smaller parts; now, however, the borders have fallen, Illyria is united, and when on Sunday, at the Home of Handicrafts, the choir of the Catholic Union sang Dr Ipavec's composition 'Illyria Revived,' it seemed to us like the hymn to Yugoslavia.¹¹

The river of blood had traced enormous changes on the political map of Europe, amongst which the most visible was the collapse of the Dual Monarchy. These great political changes had, however, enabled contemporaries also to take a new view of Vodnik's importance:

Had Valentin Vodnik done nothing else for his people than to compose only that ode, his portrait would still deserve to hold an eminent place in the gallery of pictures of our thinkers. In this ode, he reveals himself to be a pure and genuine Yugoslav without any reservation. (Aljaž 1919: 6)

This is why Dr. Kogoj commented:

¹⁰ "Stoletni spomin smrti Valentina Vodnika," *Slovenec*, 8 January 1919: 6.

¹¹ "Valentin Vodnikova slavnost v Rokodelskem domu," *Slovenec*, 5 February 1919: 6.

More than a daughter and son might celebrate Vodnik, he is celebrated by his own works. Today, at last, we fully comprehend these works. Before and during the world war, many of Vodnik's thoughts were somehow veiled over. Today, however, one hundred years after his death, Vodnik stands before us in all the greatness of Illyria Revived—in the united Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians—as a full and inspired Yugoslav.

To Valentin Vodnik, our enlightener, persecuted one and prophet, eternal glory and honor! (Aljaž 1919: 6)

After WW I, then, the prevailing opinion was that Valentin Vodnik was not only the first Slovenian poet, but also the first Slovenian who had hailed “Illyria-Yugoslavia” (Pregelj 1919: 6). After the new “Illyria-Yugoslavia” had emerged (Bevk 1919: 2), the opinion was finally accepted that “in the book of our history, the brief period of French occupation was decisively on the side of positive gains” (Mal 1929: 4). The emergence of a new nation-state opened up to its citizens completely new, hitherto unimagined prospects:

Today, at last, the significance of Illyria also becomes present before our eyes as it is realized within Yugoslavia. Formerly, we had somewhat unnaturally been skirting around it, in history we regarded it as an insignificant event, and at school we even tried somehow to exculpate Vodnik for his “Illyria Revived,” yet we did not attempt to probe our way more deeply into the idea of Napoleon's Illyria... (Rus 1929: 7)

During the first year of the new state's existence, there also appeared new editions of Vodnik's poems. In his foreword to the collection, the editor wrote at the time:

Even if we had only “Illyria Revived,” which he had printed in 1811 in his “Grammar for the First School,” we should not dare to consider Vodnik merely as a Carniolan poet, but rather as a poet who, with the genius of great artist-prophets, has composed one of the most beautiful and most national of Slovenian occasional poems. We celebrate in the first order the poet of “Illyria Revived,” and we remember him in these days of new freedom, on the centenary of his death. (Pregelj 1919: 9–10)

“New Illyria”

Centenaries of the founding of the Illyrian Provinces were not publicly celebrated, since to Vienna the ‘memory of Illyria was, of course, not pleasant,’ and the 110th centenary had fallen during the disruption of the

first post-war year. One decade later, the conditions were already considerably different, for the 120th centenary had occurred during the period of “free Yugoslavia, to which we have come with the same fraternal aid of France as we did to Illyria 120 years ago.” At that time, they saw in the Illyrian Provinces the precursor of the “free and great, ever more powerful and fortunate” Yugoslavia, and so the “precursors” of the nation-state were recalled “with love and gratitude” (Rus 1929: 7). To mark the 120th anniversary of the foundation of Napoleon’s Illyria, the architect Jože Plečnik designed a tall marble column with Napoleon’s gilt head crowned with a laurel wreath on one side, and on the other “the expressive face of Illyria—a Slovenian woman.”¹² On the column were inscribed verses from Vodnik’s “Illyria Revived,” and beneath it were buried the ashes of an unknown French soldier from the year 1809 (Hadžič 1929a: 3).

The unveiling of the monument to Napoleon and Illyria on 13 October 1929 was a great event attended by an enthusiastic crowd. The *Slovenec* reporter deemed it to be “one of the most splendid national ceremonies which we have ever experienced hitherto in Ljubljana.”¹³ Contemporaries thought the so-called Illyrian celebrations “beautiful and uplifting,” “inspiring and instructive,” since they demonstrated that “each communal appearance arouses new enthusiasm in the people and ever anew elevates and at the same time deepens the national thinking.” To the *Slovenec* reporter, such ceremonies also opened up an instructive view of the past, which clearly indicated what was to be the right path towards the future.¹⁴

General Stevan Hadžič, minister of defense, addressed those in attendance in the name of the royal government. He presented Napoleon’s Illyria as the “predecessor of present-day Yugoslavia,” and hailed the new monument as a “symbol of our unity, which has been rendered real by our exalted ruler with the aid of the devoted and affectionate peoples of all Yugoslavia.” He concluded his address with the salutation: “Long live His Excellency King Alexander!” (Hadžič 1929b: 3).

Guests from France attended the ceremonial unveiling of the as well. Emil Haumont, professor at the Sorbonne and president of the Society of Friends of Yugoslavia, expressed the thanks of the French to the citizens of Ljubljana “for the beautiful thought with which they wish to revive recollections of the past.” The speaker described Napoleon as a “creator, a genius, who perceptively recognized in those distant Illyrian Provinces the primary elements of a nation with a great future and one which, had it not been for the defeat in 1812, would undoubtedly in 1813 or 1814 have

¹² “Od Ilirije do Jugoslavije,” *Slovenec*, 13 October 1929: 1.

¹³ “Francija in Jugoslavija – dva nerazdružljiva prijatelja,” *Slovenec*, 15 October 1929: 3.

¹⁴ “Po ilirskih svečanostih,” *Slovenec*, 15 October 1929: 1.

founded the Illyrian Kingdom as the precursor of present-day Yugoslavia” (Haumant 1929: 2).

Numerous entertainments and celebrations were held in conjunction with the unveiling of the monument to Napoleon and to Illyria. The press reported extensively on the event. *Slovenski Narod* (Slovenian nation), for instance, reported on the significance of the anniversary of an “important historical event that has become the foundation of our free and brighter future.” The celebrations accompanying the unveiling of the monument should become a “new landmark in our national life,” while the monument itself should speak to later generations of “how long and hard has been our path towards liberation and how high we have raised the banner of cultural and economic advancement.”¹⁵ The daily *Slovenec* described the Illyrian ceremony as a “manifestation of our nation on the anniversary of an important historical event in our national history, which first drew the traces of our national freedom.”¹⁶ For *Jutro* (Morning), the monument to Napoleon’s Illyria was an “eternal recognition of the debt which is felt by all Yugoslavia towards the genius of its first fulfillment,” while the times of the Illyrian Provinces were a “bright interval in the midst of political enslavement, a blessed respite after centuries of spiritual dependence and—manifestly—for a hundred years to come, the evocative crystallization of the ideal of national sovereignty.”¹⁷

Gaston Deschamps described the “Ljubljana ceremony” in the Paris journal *Le Temps*, depicting Ljubljana as a “splendid city” that until only recently had borne, “like the brand of servitude, the Austrian name of Laibach, and which, following its liberation, had with joy recovered its old Slovenian name of Ljubljana.” In the town, rejuvenated by freedom, in mid-October 1929 celebrations were held which were “official, yet at the same time popular.” During these events, the town was draped in the “blue-white-red flags of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which, as gesture of cordial friendship, had decided on the same colors as those which radiate from the flag of the French Republic.”¹⁸

On this view, Slovenian national awareness developed despite German oppression requiring French intervention to alleviate it. The writer Fran Govekar, under the pseudonym of Platon (Plato), explained in *Slovenski Narod* why the Slovenians had only now, so late, come to recall Napoleon and his Illyrian Provinces:

The German governing system actually directed their thinking and feeling. Since the Germans hated France, and indeed

¹⁵ “K proslavi 120 letnice Ilirije oživljene,” *Slovenski narod*, 12 October 1929: 3.

¹⁶ “Ilirske svečanosti v Ljubljani,” *Slovenec*, 12 October 1929: 9.

¹⁷ “Spomenik, ki ga danes odkrije Ljubljana,” *Jutro*, 13 October 1929: 1.

¹⁸ “Francoz o Ljubljani iz naših dni,” *Slovenec*, 13 October 1929: 4.

especially Napoleon, the well educated Slovenians right up till the revolution remained cold towards France, Illyria and Napoleon. Even our writers did not express sympathy towards the French, but in a purely instructional spirit even showed resistance. Jurčič's tale about "Golida" and his "Memories of an old Slovenian," and also Finžgar's original "Our Blood" were not particularly amicable towards the French. If I am not mistaken, the first openly Francophile novels were written by Govekar and by Dr Lah, while among the poets Francophile novels were written by Aškerc. Today, when we have a solemnly declared alliance between Yugoslavia and France, everyone of course has the courage to show himself as a friend of the French. (Platon 1929: 2)

The unveiling of the monument to Napoleon and to Illyria, and the Illyrian celebrations connected with it consequently represented the ceremonial, ritual part of the de-Germanization of Slovenian history. A new, official interpretation of the past became ascendant, according to which the French had not been occupiers, but had instead "brought to us a new life, laid the foundations for the new era of our national development" (Rus 1929: 7).

Beneath the surface of celebratory eulogizing and enthusiasm for the historical achievements it was, however, possible to detect polemics stemming from diverse views of the past and present. If General Hadžič, for instance, retained the Illyrian ceremonies in his memory as sound proof of the "patriotic awareness of our common homeland, of the deep national and state-forming consciousness, of allegiance and love towards the united Yugoslavia" (Hadžič 1929a: 1), *Slovenec* noted the contradictions between the former "little Illyria" and the present "great Yugoslavia,"

a state of fully equal rights, of equality and fraternity, a state of which our most exalted and wise ruler solemnly declared: "Croats will continue to be Croats, Serbs Serbs, Slovenians Slovenians. Yet all will be proud to be Yugoslavs."

General Hadžič recollected the cleric Valentin Vodnik as "the contemporary of our greatest national enlightener, the first Karadjordje" (Hadžič 1929a: 1); *Slovenec*, on the other hand, recalled above all Marshal Marmont, first governor of the Illyrian Provinces, and Valentin Vodnik, for

these two men ensured that the national-cultural relations in our lands were ordered in a just and exemplary manner for those times. This concerned the administrative language and the education of public service administrators. Following the decrees, the hitherto prevailing German language was excluded from the elementary schools, and also "Illyrian"—which the Dubrovnik officials had wished to introduce—was

not approved. Marmont, who had earlier already been administering Dalmatia, and had encouraged the Serbo-Croatian language and familiarity with it, was led by Vodnik's initiative to recognize that the Slovenians could derive their education only through their mother tongue, and that with the use of this language the unity of Illyria would in no way suffer.¹⁹

Con Roma–With Rome

Following the exceptionally resonant response to the Illyrian celebrations of 1929, the fame of Valentin Vodnik again began to wane. Ivan Prijatelj, who in 1911 had considered Vodnik to be a 'modest poet who has at times been forced to make inroads into the field of grammar' (Prijatelj 1911a: 600), a quarter of a century later concluded that 'Vodnik was not a poet, but rather an exceptional national enlightener in the bound and unbound word' (Prijatelj 1935: 53). Commemorative days for Vodnik were no longer arranged, and his verses had been removed from public programs. During WW II, the military units of the Slovenian resistance movement were named after Slovenian poets and writers, by which gesture they wished to emphasize their national-liberation mission; there was no Vodnik brigade.

Following the capitulation of Yugoslavia and the dismemberment of the state by occupying forces, the Italian daily press recalled the Illyrian Provinces. Already on Thursday, 24 April 1941, the Trieste edition of *Il Piccolo* had published an extensive article on Ljubljana in which it was particularly emphasized that Ljubljana—i.e., Emona,²⁰—had been established by the Romans, who were "most praiseworthy for the flourishing of that province." The columnist also mentioned the Napoleonic period in Slovenian lands, and concluded with details about Ljubljana as the center of the Slovenians.²¹

Some days later, following the annexation of the Province of Ljubljana by the Kingdom of Italy, Lido Caiani published a lengthy article in the Milan edition of *Il Popolo d'Italia*. The article was published in its entirety in the dailies *Slovenec* and *Jutro*. Caiani presented the annexation of the Province of Ljubljana as a "historical and political event of the greatest significance," which had "led to the conclusion of a long period of alternating changes and unstable positions." The time of the first Yugoslavia had been, in his words, one of "historical impracticability and political violence," all of which had been a "brutal affront to the high cultural level

¹⁹ "Od Ilirije do Jugoslavije," *Slovenec*, 13 October 1929: 1.

²⁰ Emona was the Roman name of the town that existed on the site of Ljubljana in ancient times.

²¹ "Il Piccolo on Ljubljana," *Slovenski narod*, 25 April 1941: 2.

of the Slovenians.” The annexation of the Province of Ljubljana marked the end to the “servitude of the Slovenians to Belgrade,” and enabled its people to enter once again “into the European community, from which they had been driven out by interlopers and mystificators.”²²

Conclusion

Several generations of Slovenian national enlighteners have appropriated Vodnik’s image and his work. They have presented both in accordance with their own interpretations, noting what in a particular period was (and still is) important or not. These evaluations have constantly reflected ideological, political, ethical, and other conceptions, in the light of which the past is interpreted and evaluated (Jezernik 1979: 239; 2006: 171). Along these lines, Valentin Vodnik, a controversial and a politically opportunist poet, enjoyed fame with Slovenian nationalists in the decades since his death for reasons that had nothing to do with his poetic qualities but everything to do with the politics of the time in which he was being evaluated.

Although successive interpreters have presented their proper views of Vodnik as correct and enduring, the poet’s image and the understanding of his work—particularly of his ode “Illyria Revived”—have constantly changed. This is a consequence of the fact that the image and interpretation of Vodnik are products of the prevailing political and economic system, and an effective means of transferring the ideological messages of this system (see Goro and Root 1990: 35). National political leaders have adjusted their views of Vodnik and his work—particularly his ode to Napoleon—to current socio-political conditions in order more easily to manipulate historical memory. The most important manipulation is already found in the choice of the “great men” whose memory is preserved, for by preserving the memory of some, they consign others to oblivion. By the use of selective memory, the national awakens effectively reconstructed the past and invented legitimizing traditions, even in cases when the image of the past was different to that of officially approved history.

Univerza v Ljubljani

²² “Zgodovinski in politični dogodek največjega pomena za Slovence,” *Slovenski narod*, 5 May 1941: 1. “Dogodek, za Slovence največjega pomena,” *Slovenec*, 6 May 1941: 1–2.

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POVZETEK

VALENTIN VODNIK: PRVI SLOVENSKI PESNIK

V pri ujo em prispevku avtor analizira, kako so v drugi polovici devetnajstega in prvi polovici dvajsetega stoletja slovenski nacionalisti oziroma »narodni buditelji« konstruirali podobo »prvega slovenskega pesnika« Valentina Vodnika kot vodnika slovenskega naroda. Pri tem so se sklicevali v najve ji meri na njegovo odo Napoleonu z naslovom Ilirija o ivljena, ki je bila prvi  objavljena leta 1811, torej v  asu Ilirskih provinc. Od leta 1858 dalje, ko so slovenski narodni buditelji sve ano proslavljali stoletnico Vodnikovega rojstva, pa vse do  asa oblikovanja prve nacionalne dr zave Ju nih Slovanov, so slovenski nacionalisti s pridom uporabljali Vodnikovo ime in delo za popularizacijo svojega politi nega programa. Ker se to dogajalo v hitro spreminjajo em se geopoliti nem kontekstu, so se temu ustrezno spreminjale tudi interpretacije pomena Valentina Vodnika in njegovih pesnikih poskusov.