

FORTISSIMUS ROBORE: MARTIN KRPAN AS A CASE OF BIBLICAL RECEPTION

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Abstract

Martin Krpan z Vrha, written by Fran Levstik as a conscious experiment in prose-writing, has been interpreted variously during the last century and a half. The duel between a Slovenian peasant and a giant who comes to terrorise Vienna was in turn read by scholars as a political satire, the realisation of a literary and linguistic programme, a literary parody etc. Its motif was mostly interpreted with reference to Slavic folklore characters (Pegam and Lambergar, Prince Marko, Peter Klepec etc.) The analysis according to the model devised by Vladimir Propp, however, shows striking similarities with the Biblical story of David and Goliath (1 Sm 17). The reception of this motif is marked by significant political overtones, already present in antiquity and then interestingly developed in places as diverse as sixteenth-century Florence, Prague, and the Netherlands. As attested by the sources, Levstik used this motif several times; to a certain extent he even identified with its hero.

*Nation – David,
Dance before the Lord!*
Anton Vodnik

SEARCH FOR SOURCES

More than a hundred and fifty years have passed since the publication of *Martin Krpan z Vrha* (Martin Krpan from Hilltop, 1858), a story written by one of the founding fathers of Slovenian literature, Fran Levstik (1831-1887). Consciously designed as such by its influential author, *Martin Krpan* figures as the first important work of Slovenian prose-writing and a milestone of literary narrative. Although the story's tantalising accessibility eventually made it a classic of children's literature, its complex labyrinth of meanings fostered several widely different and often contradictory interpretations. These are sometimes strictly historical,¹ but more often than not they transcend the realm of history. Researchers have pointed out that Martin Krpan was in turn perceived as a political satire, a realisation

¹ See for instance Sergij Vilfan, "K zgodovini kmečkega kupčevanja s soljo: gospodarsko-pravne podlage povesti o Martinu Krpanu," *Kronika* 10-11 (1962-1963): 129-44; 1-12.

of Levstik's literary and linguistic programme, a literary parody and a plain, humorous exercise in storytelling.²

The plot of this multifaceted story is fairly straightforward. It opens with Martin Krpan, a strong and brave man from Inner Carniola, which was then a part of the Habsburg Empire; Krpan is smuggling salt³ on his mare when the Emperor's chariot comes by. The narrow road is filled with snow, and while making way for the chariot to pass, Krpan impresses the Emperor by lifting both the horse and its load. – This feat is remembered a year later when a horrible giant named Brdaus comes to Vienna and nobody is able to defeat him. An imperial messenger comes to Krpan's house in the village of Hilltop by Holy Trinity and asks for help. They both speed off to Vienna, which is draped in black: Brdaus has just killed the Emperor's son. – The Emperor orders some food for the guest and then takes him to the armoury, yet Krpan cannot find anything suitable, everything falls apart in his brawny hands. He decides to fashion his own arms, first something that resembles a butcher's axe and then a mighty wooden club; for this he cuts down a linden tree in the Emperor's garden, thus enraging the Empress. After a skirmish with the sulky Emperor, he goes to pick a horse. Again, all of the available horses are too weak, and it is his seemingly feeble mare that has to be fetched from home. – Finally the day of the fight arrives. When Brdaus sees Krpan, he laughs scornfully at his unmilitary appearance and tells him to get out of his sight while he is still alive. Krpan replies that it is Brdaus who is about to lose his head. When they ride towards each other, Krpan surprisingly parries Brdaus' sword with his linden club and the blade of the giant sinks into the soft wood. Krpan pulls his suddenly incapacitated opponent off his horse, cuts off his head and returns to the city with the people of Vienna shouting: "Krpan has saved us!" – The Emperor promises to grant him every wish, the hand of his daughter included; Krpan, a widower, hesitates to marry again, but then the Empress interferes: "You ruined my tree, I'm not giving you my daughter!" After a heated altercation which the Emperor somehow manages to tone down, Krpan finally leaves the court with a purse full of gold and an imperial letter legalising his salt trade.⁴

Various folk motifs have long been recognised as instrumental in shaping this open and polysemous, playful yet meticulously designed tale. Perhaps the first critic to have pointed out this connection was Josip Stritar, then already the doyen of Slovenian literary criticism, who wrote in 1874 that one of the possible motifs *might* be the well-known folk epic *Pegam and Lambergar*.⁵

This poem, perhaps composed in the fifteenth century, is preserved in several variants and is first mentioned in a source from 1674. It is a description of a duel between a historical figure, a knight from Carniola called Caspar Lamberg, and a mythical one, Pegam, who comes to Vienna and challenges the Emperor to find him a worthy opponent. The Emperor immediately calls for Lambergar, who dutifully leaves his castle and comes to Vienna for the tournament. Obeying his mother's advice, Lambergar ignores the two lateral heads on

² Boris Paternu, "Levstikov Martin Krpan med mitom in resničnostjo," *Slavistična revija* 26 (1978): 234.

³ Krpan's mysterious "English salt" is discussed by Miran Hladnik, "Pa začnimo pri Krpanu," *Sodobnost* 66 (2002): 227-37.

⁴ Anton Slodnjak, ed., *Fran Levstik: Zbrano delo 4* (Ljubljana: DZS, 1954), 36-53; 495-503; for an English translation see Fran Levstik, *Martin Krpan*, trans. Maja Visenjak Limon and David Limon (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2004).

⁵ Anton Slodnjak, ed., *Fran Levstik: Zbrano delo 6* (Ljubljana: DZS, 1956), 496-97.

Pegam's body, aiming for the central one. They clash three times, and the third time around he cuts Pegam's middle head off, takes it to the Emperor and is given his reward, three castles in Carniola.⁶

Stritar seems to have had his reasons for the guarded circumspection of his statement, as Levstik himself was not particularly talkative about what had induced him to write the story. As late as 1870, he received an admiring letter from Josip Jurčič (1844-1881), the budding author of the first Slovenian novel: "You would do me a great favour if you could once tell me – just me – how you came to write Krpan. Was it the folksong *Lambergar and Pegam* that made you do it? I plan to write about it *ex voto* – because I studied your Krpan with such joy before I started to dabble myself."⁷ There is no trace of Levstik ever answering this request.

Yet what Stritar stated so cautiously was almost self-evident. Introducing Brdaus, the storyteller himself mentions that the giant challenged every champion in the Empire "just like the famous Pegam." More importantly, a poetic recreation of Pegam and Lambergar by Levstik's friend Fran Cegnar was published in June 1858, that is, while Krpan was being written. Levstik immediately produced a devastating review, which the editor diplomatically refused to publish, although Cegnar, who later read it, thanked Levstik for his advice and honesty.⁸ The review shows Levstik's familiarity with both Slovenian and Serbian epic tradition; besides *Pegam and Lambergar*, he quotes two parallel Serbian poems, *Kraljević Marko i Arapin* (Prince Marko and an Arab) and *Kraljević Marko i Musa Kesedžija* (Prince Marko and Musa Kesedžija). Apart from these, Anton Slodnjak has recognised further motifs from Slovenian folktales, based on historical personalities from previous centuries known by their Herculean power, such as *Peter Klepec*, *hudi Kljukec* (Kljukec the Terrible) and *Štempihar*; the last one is also mentioned in the text itself.⁹ Later researchers have noticed further parallels, such as *löl Kotlić* or *Kanjoš Macedonović*, but these may already be contaminated by the popularity of Levstik's story.¹⁰

BIBLICAL PARALLELS

An element so far conspicuously absent from the interpretations of *Martin Krpan* is the Bible story of David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17),¹¹ a story that presents its theological

⁶ Zmaga Kumer et al., eds., *Slovenske ljudske pesmi*, vol. 1 (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1970), 5-15; cf. Monika Krojež, *Od Ajda do Zlatoroga: Slovenska bajeslovna bitja* (Celovec: Mohorjeva, 2008), 56-57; Marija Stanonik, *Interdisciplinarnost slovstvene folklore* (Ljubljana: ZRC, 2008), 402-04.

⁷ Anton Slodnjak, "Uvod," in *Fran Levstik: Martin Krpan* (Celje: Družba sv. Mohorja, 1940), 24.

⁸ For the review see Slodnjak, *ZD* 6, 20-33; 362-67.

⁹ Slodnjak, "Uvod," 13-20. Cf. Paternu, "Levstikov Martin Krpan med mitom in resničnostjo," 238, and Juraj Martinović, "Martin Krpan kao parodija," *Slavistična revija* 18 (1970): 219-40. Both Kljukec and Štempihar and their folklore aspect are analysed by Stanonik, *Interdisciplinarnost slovstvene folklore*, 106-07.

¹⁰ Milko Matičetov, "Löl Kotlić – Krpan iz Rezije," *Sodobnost* 11 (1963): 249-56; Jože Pogačnik, "Martin Krpan in Kanjoš Macedonović," *Jezik in slovstvo* 22 (1976/77): 161-71.

¹¹ Anton Slodnjak cited it very briefly, in a single sentence from 1940, to point out the ubiquity of the motif; cf. Slodnjak, "Uvod," 13-14. In his critical edition of the text, published fourteen years later, the Biblical parallel is not mentioned at all. Similarly, David and Goliath are mentioned *en passant* as a common motif by Boris Paternu, *Slovenska proza do moderne* (Koper: Primorska založba Lipa, 1957), 22, but not in Paternu, "Levstikov Martin Krpan med mitom in resničnostjo," published two decades later.

message, a trusting praise of the Lord of Hosts (1 Sm 17:45), by means of a romantic epic.¹² The narrative patterns used are reminiscent of a folktale¹³ and it has been pointed out that despite its present function as a basic historical metaphor, the story also “bears extraordinary similarity” to Aarne-Thompson-Uther Tale Type 300.¹⁴

The Latin Vulgate was studied thoroughly in the nineteenth-century Austrian gymnasias, and even the teaching of Slovenian was mostly based on stories from the Bible.¹⁵ What is more, due to the Sunday school instruction, even the uneducated audience was more than familiar with the story. Levstik, whose corpus includes translations from the Old Testament,¹⁶ knew the story to the extent that he was able to cite from it effortlessly; in his *Deseti brat* (The Tenth Brother) he mentions how “David kept the lambs of his father,”¹⁷ using a phrase which appears twice in 1 Sm 17.¹⁸ In the same text Levstik links Slavic oral tradition – which he quoted so extensively in his review of *Pegam and Lambergar* – to its Greek and Hebrew counterparts; his main character boasts of having been a shepherd “like David, like Paris, like the Serbian princes.”¹⁹ *Deseti brat* is strongly autobiographical and its thinly disguised hero, who proudly identifies with David the poet – or perhaps David the prophet – is in fact Levstik himself. Another case of Levstik identifying with David is his ghazal *Žensko lice* (Woman’s Visage).²⁰ There even seems to be a biographical explanation for Levstik’s interest in the Biblical character. In his youth, Levstik actually fought and defeated his own Goliath (who happened to be a gendarmerie sergeant major), “an awfully tall man,” in front of awestricken youths from his native village. This incident, celebrated locally and recorded by Josip Stritar, has been interpreted as a key to Levstik’s *Weltanschauung*.²¹

Not surprisingly, this familiarity with the Biblical archetype shows in his *Martin Krpan* as well. While the two plots do not seem strikingly similar at the level of concrete detail, where the parallels with *Pegam and Lambergar* (such as Vienna and the Emperor)

¹² This inventive approach somewhat contradicts the earlier historical layers, such as 1 Sm 16:14-23 and 2 Sm 21:19; it seems that the Septuagint later even attempted to harmonise the text by omitting parts of it. See Gwilym H. Jones, “1 and 2 Samuel,” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 208.

¹³ Felix Hunger, “David und Goliath,” in *Enzyklopädie des Märchens: Handwörterbuch zur historischen und vergleichenden Erzählforschung*, ed. Kurt Ranke (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 366.

¹⁴ Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning*, trans. Jacqueline S. Teitelbaum (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), x. For a detailed analysis of ATU 300 with further bibliography, see Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography, Based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson*, vol. 1 (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2004), 174-75.

¹⁵ Matjaž Kmecl, *Fran Levstik* (Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga, 1981), 51.

¹⁶ Job and Judges; cf. Slodnjak, *ZD 4*, 481.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁸ Abiit David et reversus est a Saul ut pasceret gregem patris sui (1 Sm 17:15); pascebat servus tuus patris sui gregem (1 Sm 17:34).

¹⁹ Slodnjak, *ZD 4*, 71. Heda Jason, “The Story of David and Goliath: A Folk Epic?” *Biblica* 60 (1979): 38-39, points out that the instances of parallelism in 1 Sm 17 probably betray a *Vorlage* based on oral poetry; her work adopts the methodology employed by Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960). – Levstik was genuinely interested in oral poetry; reviewing Cegnar’s *Pegam and Lambergar*, he even mentions a concept which A. B. Lord would later term the *oral formula*: “Homer and the Serbs sometimes do <repeat their verses>, but only because they can neither write nor read; and the people who composed the Odyssey and Iliad certainly could not either; in order to avoid memorising, they keep singing things which they have sung earlier, with the very same words.” Slodnjak, *ZD 6*, 30.

²⁰ Anton Slodnjak, ed., *Fran Levstik: Zbrano delo 1* (Ljubljana: DZS, 1948), 149.

²¹ Kmecl, *Fran Levstik*, 34-36.

are much more transparent, an investigation on the abstract plane shows markedly different results. The subsequent analysis is based on the chart by Heda Jason, from which the first two columns in the following table are taken. Jason examined 1 Sm 17 according to the functions in the fairy-tale model devised by Vladimir Propp.²²

Abstract plane	Concrete plane (Bible)	Concrete plane (Krpan)
Villain attacks hero's camp (function 8a)	Philistines (Goliath) attack Israel (1 Sm 17:1-11)	Brdaus appears in Vienna
Hero leaves his home in order to meet villain (11)	David's brothers go to war against Philistines (12-15)	Emperor's men from the whole Empire are not afraid to meet the challenge
Hero does not defeat villain (-18)	David's brothers do not go forth to battle and do not defeat Goliath (-)	All who try are defeated; the giant kills every one of them
Villain attacks hero's camp (8a)	Goliath challenges Israel to battle (16)	Brdaus terrorises Vienna, gentry and common folk, men and women alike
Dispatcher sends hero to the battlefield (9)	Jesse sends David to the battlefield (17-18)	Emperor's messenger calls Krpan to Vienna
Hero leaves his home in order to meet villain (11)	David leaves for the field of battle against Philistines (19-20a)	Krpan comes out of his cottage and gets into the carriage, which speeds off to Vienna
Hero arrives close to villain's quarters (15)	David arrives to the field of battle against Philistines (20b)	Krpan comes to the Emperor's court
Dispatcher announces task to hero (9)	Men of Israel announce to David Saul's offer of his daughter to the victor over Goliath (21-30)	Emperor's messenger tells Krpan that he is the last hope of the Emperor and of Vienna
Hero decides to go forth against villain (10)	David announces to Saul his desire to go out against Goliath (31-32)	Krpan promises the Emperor to give Brdaus such a beating that he'll never trouble Vienna again

²² Jason, "Story of David and Goliath," 42-43. The last three functions analysed by Jason, 16, 23 and 27, are not included in the table since the motif of king's daughter – both in the Bible and in *Martin Krpan* – is slightly more complex than they imply *prima facie*; see below. The functions themselves were proposed by Vladimir J. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968 <1928>), 25-65. Propp's model has its limitations when applied to modern tales; cf. Miran Hladnik, "Kako je ime metodi?" *Slavistična revija* 59, no. 1-2 (2001): 4-5. Propp himself points out this problem in his second chapter, limiting his scope to ATU types 300-749. Both 1 Sm 17 and *Martin Krpan* belong to ATU type 300.

Donor tests the hero (12)	Saul tries to frighten David (33)	Emperor tries to frighten Krpan: Brdaus has been using weapons since boyhood
Hero passes test of donor (13)	David is not frightened and proves his heroism to Saul by a story from his past (34-37)	Krpan tells the Emperor not to worry, since he is not afraid of any weapons the giant might have
Donor gives means of help to hero (14)	Saul offers his arms to David; David takes equipment according to his taste (38-40)	Emperor offers his arms to Krpan; Krpan takes equipment according to his taste
Hero meets villain in battle (16)	David fights with Goliath (41-50)	Krpan fights with Brdaus

There are similarities at the level of detail as well. When the Emperor warns Krpan about Brdaus, who “has been using weapons since boyhood,” his phrase echoes Saul’s warning about Goliath, *hic autem vir bellator ab adulescentia sua* (1 Sm 17:33). Krpan’s reaction to the weapons offered by the Emperor again mirrors David’s choice: they both refuse conventional means as inappropriate and provide for themselves. Moreover, there is nothing supernatural in Krpan’s weapons or in his enemy; despite being “a terrible giant,” Brdaus himself, very much like Goliath, “is perceived as a human being and no deeds beyond normal mortal ability are attributed to him.”²³ Likewise, Krpan possesses no supernatural knowledge that would help him in his struggle. The story of Pegam and Lambergar, for instance, is markedly different in this aspect; apart from his own head, Pegam has two demonic heads to deceive the adversary, and Lambergar can only hope to win because of the advice given to him, inexplicably, by his mother, who has the narrative role of the marvellous helper.

The second part of the story is given somewhat less attention in Jason’s analysis, yet a detailed inspection shows further interesting correspondences. On the field of battle, Brdaus starts laughing at Krpan’s appearance, almost exactly like Goliath: *Cumque inspexisset Philisteus et vidisset David, despexit eum* (1 Sm 17:42). After the giant’s threatening speech, Krpan answers calmly, explaining his reasons for fighting and finally adding: “But I am not going until I have your head.” Again, this is reminiscent of the words of David: *Et percutiam te et auferam caput tuum a te* (1 Sm 17:46). It seems that obeying the tradition of ATU Tale Type 300, where beheading is of crucial importance as the proof of the hero’s mission accomplished, is the only reason for the bloodthirstiness of the otherwise good-natured Krpan that has bothered so many readers.²⁴ When the two clash, it is precisely the unconventionality of Krpan’s weaponry that costs Brdaus his head (cf. 1 Sm 17:49-51). Victorious, Krpan returns to the city and people rush to meet him, shouting praises as David’s countrymen do on his return (1 Sm 18:6-7). This seems to be an explanation for the animosity raging at the court, with the Empress yelling at the

²³ Jason, “Story of David and Goliath,” 50.

²⁴ Cf. Paternu, *Slovenska proza do moderne*, 24.

knights present: “Shame on you gentlemen, too, that you let a farmer do your fighting for you” (cf. 1 Sm 18:8-9). Having been promised the Emperor’s daughter, Krpan – who is himself not eager to marry again – is suddenly denied the wedding: “You ruined my tree, I’m not giving you my daughter.” In a like manner Saul withdraws his marital offer once the danger is averted (1 Sm 18:17-19). Instead, Krpan is offered a different reward, a bizarre assortment of food which is actually a trap to make him an object of mockery. Yet he manages to outmanoeuvre the imperial court, and his problematic reward eventually turns to a valuable asset. In the Bible, Saul denies David his daughter Merab, whom he had previously promised, offering him another daughter, Michal, as a trap that could cost David his life (1 Sm 18:20-25), yet David evades the trap and eventually manages to turn Saul’s offer to his own advantage (1 Sm 18:26-30).

POLITICAL CONTEXTS

Levstik’s silence about his reasons for writing *Martin Krpan* necessitates drawing on further, circumstantial sources. Examples from the reception history of the David and Goliath story might provide some further explanation for his use of the motif.

Not surprisingly, the prevalent reading of the David and Goliath story was political. As early as the sixth century BC, its Hebrew audience understood its message within the context of their opposition to Babylonian hegemony, with Saul as an example of a political leader behaving in a manner not worthy of his title.²⁵ This strand of interpretation was again strengthened in the period of Hellenistic and Roman domination²⁶ and then further developed by the Christian exegetic tradition. Patristic authors often used the story as a case in point in their opposition to undeserving emperors; both Saint Gregory Nazianzen and Saint Athanasius of Alexandria employed it against Julian the Apostate.²⁷

Levstik presents his Krpan as “a huge, powerful man,” to whom moving his mare, “load and all,” is like “moving a chair.” In the Bible, David is described as *robore fortissimus*, “a mighty man of valour” (1 Sm 16:18) who can attack a lion or a bear, strike it and kill it (1 Sm 17:34-35). A well-known case of reception stressing David’s physical presence is Michelangelo’s interpretation in marble, ordered by the city of Florence and immediately nicknamed “il gigante,” even in official documents: one of them, from June 1503, stipulates a public presentation of the newly sculpted masterpiece, *adeo quod possit videri gigas marmoreus ab omnibus volentibus videre*.²⁸ Paradoxically, Michelangelo’s David is a *republican* hero, despite his later royal role in the Bible; the statue was ordered by the Signoria in its struggle against the Medici, so David’s strength and self-confidence represent the power of the Florentines. Interestingly, the statue of David in front of the city hall was to be accompanied by another stalwart republican

²⁵ Stefan Ark Nitsche, *David gegen Goliath: Die Geschichte der Geschichten einer Geschichte; Zur fächerübergreifenden Rezeption einer biblischen Story* (Münster: LIT, 1998), 67-70.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 102-48.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 168-73.

²⁸ Michael Hirst, “Michelangelo in Florence: ‘David’ in 1503 and ‘Hercules’ in 1506,” *The Burlington Magazine* 142 (2000): 487.

champion, Hercules.²⁹ Michelangelo's sketch for this planned statue is still preserved.³⁰ Although the project never materialised, its very idea accentuates David's strength and shows the city's determination to show its *robur*.³¹

Following this tradition, David and Goliath became an exceedingly popular motif in European religious and political struggles of the epoch when the modern idea of nationhood slowly started to evolve. The Bible provided a wealth of precious material for forging and developing new identities. When the provinces of the Netherlands in the sixteenth century rejected Philip II – another Habsburg – as their ruler and started their fight for independence, their wood-engravers flooded Europe with iconographic representations of the Biblical duel between David and Goliath, presenting the people of the Netherlands as the new Israel, mining the Bible for both motivation and legitimacy.³² In a parallel case, a newly built theatre was opened in Prague in 1577, with a drama titled *King Saul* performed in the Czech language. During a period of mounting tension between Bohemian aristocracy and the Habsburg emperor, its powerful message about the ruler who had forfeited his God-given authority was a clear signal to both Vienna and the audience.³³ In the course of events, this small contribution to the erosion of imperial authority was brought to fruition four decades later, when imperial regents were thrown out of the windows of Prague Castle in an event that came to be known as Prague Defenestration, a dramatic thirty-metre fall that was providentially stopped by a pile of manure.

Although historical settings are notoriously difficult to compare, these parallels may also throw some light on the atmosphere in which *Martin Krpan* was written. The revolution of 1848 brought a considerable amount of hope to the Slovenian elite as well as the broader population. Both remained loyal to the Emperor and were widely perceived as such, particularly after Slavic troops actually saved Vienna³⁴ from the revolutionary peril: "Wien ist in den Händen von Windischgrätz, Jellachich und Auersperg," Karl Marx moaned when it was all over, thundering against both "the caterwauling of the Austrian nationalities" in general and "the Slavic party and its hero Jellachich" in particular.³⁵ Yet the anticipated reward for this loyalty never came and Slovenian demands – such as the call for a constitution, for an administrative union of Slovenian lands within the monarchy, and for the equality of the Slovenian and German language in schools and offices – were flatly denied, much to the surprise and chagrin of their proponents. Once the revolution was crushed, the Slovenian ethnic territory remained divided, the use of Slovenian was quite limited and even the constitution was eventually repealed. What followed was a grim decade of absolutist rule and strict censorship. Matija Ma-

²⁹ In fact, another *figura Erculis* was already at the Palazzo Vecchio, sporting a Latin epigram that included the line *disiecti ingratas urbes sevosque tyrannos / oppressi ...* Maria Monica Donato, "Hercules and David in the Early Decoration of the Palazzo Vecchio: Manuscript Evidence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 54 (1991): 83-84.

³⁰ Hirst, "Michelangelo in Florence," 491-92.

³¹ For the broader context see Volker Herzner, "David Florentinus I," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* NF 20 (1978), and "David Florentinus II," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* NF 24 (1982).

³² Nitsche, *David gegen Goliath*, 270-91.

³³ Cf. Heinz Kindermann, *Theatergeschichte Europas*, 10 vols. (Salzburg: O. Müller, 1957-1974), 2.403-04; Nitsche, *David gegen Goliath*, 269; 93.

³⁴ Paternu, *Slovenska proza do moderne*, 25.

³⁵ Karl Marx, "Sieg der Kontrerevolution zu Wien," *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, November 7, 1848.

jar (1809-1892), the *spiritus movens* of Slovenian claims in 1848, soon came to a sad realisation: “One cannot do anything with politics these days,” he wrote in 1851, “we should only observe what is going on – and work hard in literature. Literature is our politics now.”³⁶

Levstik, who was perhaps “the most outstanding representative” of the Slovenian programme from 1848,³⁷ decided to obey this principle. His first version of *Martin Krpan*, which he wisely chose not to publish, laid great stress on Krpan’s conflict with the Habsburg court.³⁸ The first-version Krpan is eventually persecuted by the Emperor and has to flee (cf. 1 Sm 19), barely saving his life by climbing a rope from a guarded tower on the eve of execution (1 Sm 19:11-12). This version would probably never have made it to print. Anton Janežič (1828-1869), the editor of the paper where *Krpan* was published, had already timorously distorted a supposedly dangerous section in Levstik’s previous essay, *Popotovanje iz Litije do Čateža* (Travelling from Litija to Čatež), an innocuous literary programme published earlier in 1858.³⁹ Considering all this, Levstik decided to omit the second part of the story entirely and to smooth over the conflict in the part that he eventually published.

All these findings seem to concur with the prevailing appraisal of *Martin Krpan* as a politically charged narrative.⁴⁰ Parallels between Levstik’s writing and the Biblical story are difficult to ignore and are concordant with the author’s intention; yet whether these parallels are a sign of a deliberate effort remains an entirely different question. After all, Levstik was able to write a poem, unwittingly, after a model he forgot ever having seen;⁴¹ subconsciously echoing a thoroughly familiar story would have been all the easier for him. To quote Josip Stritar in the abovementioned letter: “Authors of genius are characterised by the fact that they give more than they promise, they can do more than they want to.”⁴² In any case, *Martin Krpan* remains radically different from its Biblical archetype; its author’s literary ideal, *ridentem dicere verum*,⁴³ and its intricate abundance of sources and references make this disparity very clear. Like everything else, *Krpan*’s Biblical layer is subject to Levstik’s gentle irony; his unlikely saviour who comes from Holy Trinity is first preaching God’s greatness and then pulling horses by their

³⁶ Peter Vodopivec, *Od Pohlinove slovnice do samostojne države: Slovenska zgodovina od konca 18. do konca 20. stoletja* (Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2006), 68.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁸ Fran Levstik, “Kerpan z Verha,” in *Fran Levstik: Zbrano delo 4*, ed. Anton Slodnjak (Ljubljana: DZS, 1954).

³⁹ Slodnjak, *ZD 4*, 499.

⁴⁰ Vodopivec, *Od Pohlinove slovnice do samostojne države*, 70; Hladnik, “Pa začnimo pri Krpanu,” 233-34; Paternu, “Levstikov Martin Krpan med mitom in resničnostjo,” 242; Kmecl, *Fran Levstik*, 85. Bojan Baskar, “Martin Krpan ali habsburški mit kot sodobni slovenski mit,” *Emolog* 18 (2008): 89, ignores the first version of the story and remains sceptical of Krpan’s rebelliousness, pointing to the fact that Krpan remains appreciative of and even loyal towards the Emperor. This detail is justified by both historical and Biblical context. Slovenian demands in 1848 included a “Slovenian kingdom,” but within the Habsburg realm; the Emperor’s legitimacy was never disputed. Similarly, David never questioned Saul’s role as “the Lord’s anointed” (cf. 2 Sm 1).

⁴¹ Levstik admitted that his *Božična* (Christmas poem) looked strangely similar to *Christnacht* by August von Platen-Hallermünde (1796-1835), which he reportedly only discovered after having published his poem. Slodnjak, *ZD 6*, 364-65, doubts this, but believes his sincerity.

⁴² Slodnjak, *ZD 4*, 497.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 498.

tails. Still, a closer look at 1 Sm 17 shows that studies of Bible reception in Slovenian literature, which have recently begun to reappear at the forefront of scholarly interest,⁴⁴ need not fear any lack of material.

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⁴⁴ See for instance Janko Kos, "Recepcija Biblije v slovenski literaturi," *Bogoslovni vestnik* 57 (1997): 151-58; Marija Stanonik, "Svetopisemska motivika v slovenskem leposlovju 19. in 20. stoletja," *Slavistična revija* 51, suppl. (2003): 261-307; Vid Snoj, *Nova zaveza in slovenska literatura* (Ljubljana: ZRC SAZU, 2005).

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