

Ivan Cankar

In 2001 the University of Toronto Libraries received a large gift of books from the Laurentian University among which was a remarkable collection of first editions by the Slovene writer Ivan Cankar (1876–1918). These books along with several first editions from the stacks of Robarts Library were recently transferred to the Fisher Library.

After the national poet France Prešeren, Ivan Cankar is the second-most revered writer in Slovenia. His poetics and politics were part of the aesthetic program of *Slovenska moderna*, the first modern Slovene artistic movement that was active from 1895 to 1914. His works reflect elements of *fin-de-siècle* European literary currents, including decadence, naturalism, symbolism, and, with his last work *Podobe iz sanj* (Dream Visions, 1917), expressionism.

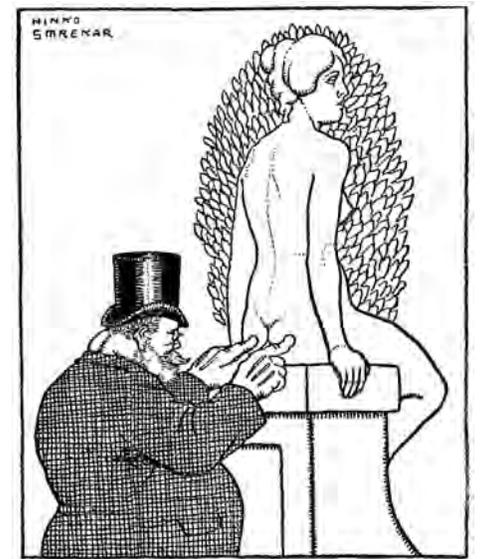
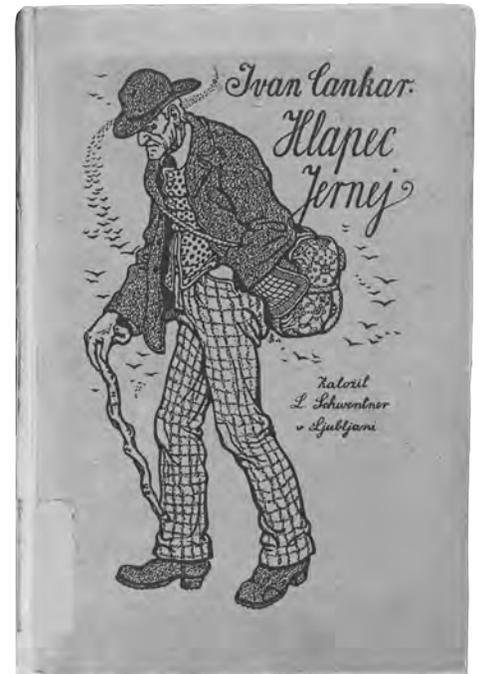
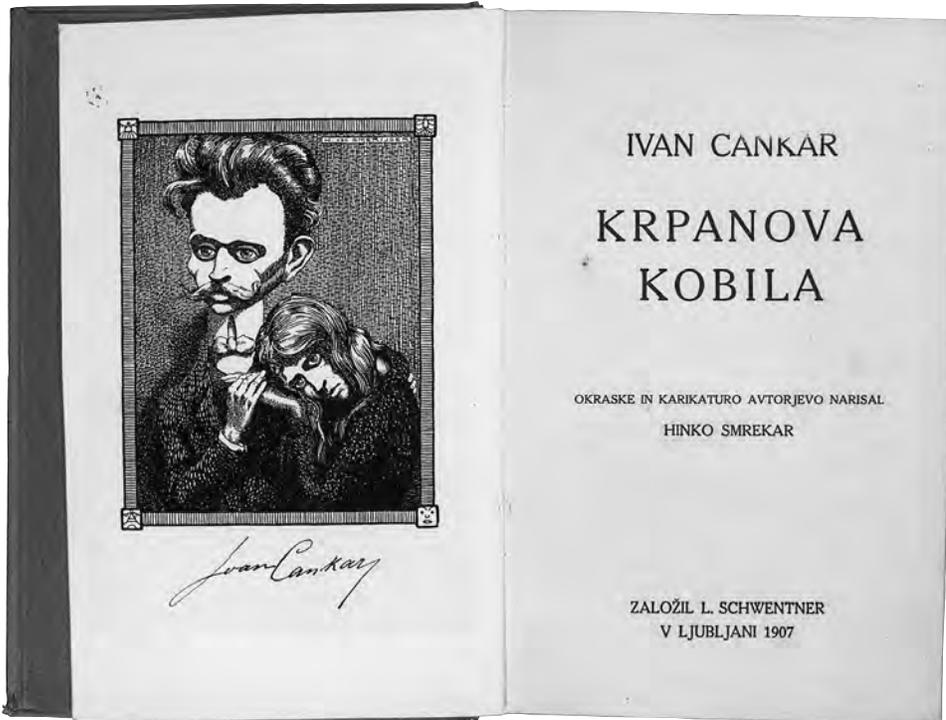
Cankar's poems, stories, novels, plays, satires, and essays deal thematically with the disintegration of provincial values at a time of growing industrialization and the advance of capital, while at the same time they reveal Cankar's preoccupations with his own inner problems. The works reflect both the fate of a small nation in the chaos of the contemporary political and economic struggle, and his personal fate within that nation—the fate of a creative artist working in the pettiest provincial atmosphere. He was a victim of this atmosphere throughout most of his life. His first book of poetry *Erotika* (1899) which expressed his quest for love and truth

was bought up and burned by the bishop of Ljubljana. Cankar's plays and prose fiction were often received by critics with anger, shock, or incomprehension. They declared his works blasphemous, cynical, ugly, and corrupt, his characters unreal, his style affectatious, and his themes indecent and hallucinatory.

In 1907 Lavoslav Schwentner (1865–1952), Cankar's principal publisher, issued his *Krpanova kobila* (Krpan's Mare), a collection of polemical articles and stories that are the culmination of lengthy exchanges between Cankar and one of his most vocal critics, the writer and playwright Fran Govekar (1871–1949). In 1905 Govekar adapted Fran Levstik's tale *Martin Krpan* (1858) for the Ljubljana stage. The audience welcomed it with enthusiasm; not so much for its quality, but because of a mare that appeared in the play, around whose neck they even hung a garland after the performance. This event provoked a reaction by Cankar, who in *Krpanova kobila* criticized Govekar and his folk plays as well as his theatre management (he favoured his own plays over those of Cankar). Cankar's work considerably influenced Slovene reception of Govekar. He had to resign from his position as the city's theatre manager in 1906 due to negative public opinion.

Though Cankar's writings were misunderstood by most critics during his lifetime, he was a central personality in a small Slovene literary and artistic circle. This is reflected in his long collaboration with Schwentner, the founder of modern Slovenian publishing,

and his chief book illustrators, Matija Jama (1872–1947) and Hinko Smrekar (1883–1942). This partnership coupled with their collective experience living and working in Vienna resulted in beautifully produced books with lovely Secession or Art Nouveau graphic elements. Jama, a representative of the Association of Free Artists known as Sava, illustrated Cankar's *Knjiga za lahkomiselne ljudi* (Book for Frivolous People, 1901), *Za narodov blagor* (For the Good of the People, 1901), and *Ob zori* (At Dawn, 1903). Smrekar, a member of the Vesna Group of artists who drew their inspiration from Slovenian folk art, designed many frontispieces and covers to Cankar's works, including his most widely



Bottom left and right: Frontispiece (caricature of I. Cankar by H. Smrekar), title page, and illustration from I. Cankar's *Krpanova kobila* (Ljubljana: L. Schwentner, 1907). Above right: Cover to I. Cankar's *Hlapec Jernej in njegova pravica* (Ljubljana: L. Schwentner, 1907) by H. Smrekar.

recognized and finest work, the socio-political parable *Hlapec Jernej in njegova pravica* (Farmhand Jernej and His Justice, 1907).

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and Petro Jacyk Central
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Documenting the Klan in Canada

The words “Ku Klux Klan” evoke images of white-hooded night riders, burning crosses, racial and religious intolerance, violence, and hatred. And, typically, we think of the KKK as being an American phenomenon. Few Canadians may realize that at one time in the early twentieth century the Klan also had a considerable foothold in Canada.

After the birth of a revived Klan at Stone Mountain, Georgia, in 1915, influenced in large part by the romanticization of the Reconstruction Klan in D.W. Griffith’s film *Birth of a Nation*, the organization’s tentacles began to creep across America and, eventually, into Canada. By the 1920s, local Canadian branches of the Klan had found fertile ground in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and, particularly, Saskatchewan. The 1920s, the years before the Great Depression, were the heyday of Klan organizing in Canada. With organizing came the printed word, in the form of pamphlets, broadsides, and newspapers, which espoused

the KKK’s goals, documented its structure, and announced rallies and meetings.

These physical reminders of the Klan’s early life in Canada are today extremely scarce. Recently, the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library was able to acquire two excellent examples of early Canadian Klan literature. The first is a simple, single-sheet broadside, published by the Ku Klux Klan of Kanada, announcing a Klan field day for Sunday, July 31, 1927, in Kingston, Ontario. The programme, likely passed out to the crowd at the rally, listed the order of events (with prayers, hymns, and the singing of “God Save the King” much in evidence). On the bottom two-thirds of the sheet are printed the words of standard Protestant Christian hymns that were sung that day: “Onward, Christian Soldiers”, “O God, Our Help in Ages Past”, “Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus”, and “O Come, All Ye Faithful”. The most interesting of these, the one printed first, is the Klan’s own hymn, “Let the Fiery Cross Be Burning.” The opening verse raises the mystical, and chilling, call of the burning cross as a sign of Klan devotion and power:

*On the hilltops, on the mountain,
Brightly gleams our mystic sign,
Calling Clansmen to the fountain —
Filled with drops of love divine.*

The other item acquired by the library is the second edition of the *Kloran*, published in Toronto by the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in 1928. The first *Kloran*, written by William J. Simmons in 1915, was a handbook of the Klan, detailing rules and regulations, ceremonies and procedures, and the roles of different members in a Klavern (a local branch of the KKK). The Toronto publication is no doubt very similar to dozens of other versions of the *Kloran* published in localities across North America during the 1920s, and today offers the reader a first-hand look at the beliefs and organization of the KKK at the time.

Most Canadians today find the beliefs of the KKK to be abhorrent, and view the Klan’s presence in Canada as a blight on our history. But history, of course, has both good and bad elements. This is exactly why we must preserve at least a representative sampling of these publications. It is only through the serious scholarly study of documents such as these that historians will be able to understand and interpret some of the darker corners of Canada’s past.

Don McLeod
Order Section, Roberts Library

Degenerate Art—An Anti-Exhibition

There has never been anything like it before or since. In 1937 the Nazi Regime in Germany opened an exhibition of avant-garde art in Munich. The 650 works displayed were chosen from among some 16,000 works of art that had been removed from



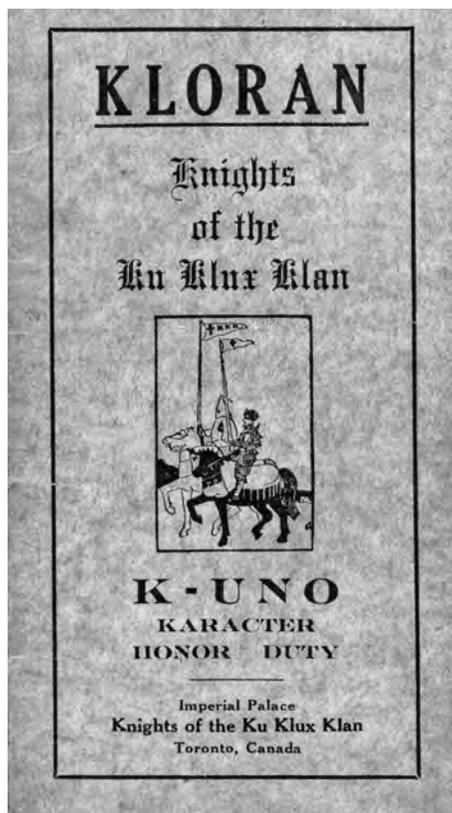
Cover of the Catalogue *Entartete Kunst*. The sculpture shown is by Otto Freundlich and is entitled *The New Man*. Freundlich was one of the earliest abstract artists. An anarchist of Jewish origins, he divided his time between Germany and France. He died in the concentration camp Majdanek in 1943.

German art museums because they had been deemed degenerate—corrupt manifestations of sick minds, not worthy of nourishing the spirit of the new German people which was being cultivated by the Nazi propaganda machine.

Some of our readers may recall the article I wrote for *The Halcyon* (no. 32, June 2003) about Otto Schneid and his monograph on modern Jewish art, which he wrote in an attempt to persuade the Nazis that Jewish art wasn’t degenerate. I was particularly touched by the poignancy and futility of this noble act. Schneid was obviously an optimist and an idealist, who thought that if only the Nazis would read his work, or perhaps, if they could have a pleasant chat over a cup of tea, he could convince them that their views were mistaken. Of course, Schneid never had the opportunity to do either of these things, as his book never saw the light of day and he was forced to flee Austria ahead of the advancing German army.

My acquaintance with the Schneid collection raised my awareness of the art scene in inter-war Germany and the rejection of modernist trends by the Nazis. My interest was further piqued when I recently had the opportunity to purchase for the Fisher Library a copy of the original catalogue of the infamous “Degenerate Art” exhibition, *Entartete Kunst*.

The whole purpose of the exhibition and the catalogue was to hold up to ridicule the



The cover of the *Kloran*, second edition, published in Toronto in 1928 by the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.