

RESEARCH PAPER

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PAULUS RITTER’S “FALSE” ETYMOLOGIES IN  
*PLORANTIS CROATIAE SAECULA DUO*

Accepted: 29 March 2018

UDK 821.163.42.09Vitezović, P. R.  
821.163.42.09-1

Pavao Ritter Vitezović (Senj 1652–Vienna 1713), internationally known as Paulus Ritter, was an early modern age Croatian scholar and poet. His *Plorantis Croatiae saecula duo* from 1703 is a historical “epic” poem reviewing the previous two centuries of Croatian history, marked by Turkish invasion. The poem is both historical and poetic, and this article aims to contribute to an understanding of the extent to which it is the latter. It examines a dozen of the poem’s toponymic etymologies, so far neglected, showing the various ways they were deliberately used for poetic aims, rather than as academic etymologies to be understood literally.

**Keywords:** Paulus Ritter, toponym, poetry, poetic etymology, history, scholarly etymology, figure of speech.

Poetic etymology is distinct from folk etymology, though the two are clearly close, and occasionally overlap. While folk etymology seriously attempts to interpret individual words with the scarce scholarly means at its disposal, poetic etymology stems from a playfulness of the spirit, eager to make use of the various evocative aspects of a word, starting with the way it sounds (homophony, paronymy). On other occasions, its aim is simply to jest. In any case, unlike folk etymology, it is deliberate, and to be treated as a poetic figure in its own right. It is in even sharper contrast to scientific etymology, the only kind we normally admit. If we favour scientific etymology, however defective its exactness, over poetic, it is only because we believe that the truth about – and *of* – language is revealed by linguistics, understood as the academic science we know, rather than by poetry. This is an arbitrary

340 decision, supported not by any objectively valid criteria, but simply by its own focus of interest and preference. Poetic etymology can go as far as to openly contradict scientific etymology, not out of waywardness or spite, but from its necessity to reveal aspects of a word that are unreachable by scientific means, suggesting and sometimes even pinning down the essence of the concept to a far greater degree. We argue that the closest etymology to poetic is actually what we call speculative etymology, or *ἐτυμῆγορία*. The latter is a term probably coined by Proclus in the fifth century to designate the kind of etymologising presented in Plato's *Cratylus*, the pioneering text of such etymologising in the West. As early as this eminent Neoplatonist, etymology was attributed to the grammarians, as Proclus calls them. It should be distinguished from etymegory, which is argumentative and rhetorical rather than technical, and pays more attention to a word's "form of life" than to its sheer matter (note the second element of *ἐτυμῆγορία*, shared with *ἀλληγορία*, which means "to argue") and is closer, with its interpretative freedom, to the art of hermeneutics (Del Bello 2007: 34–36). A word is thus seen as a star within a constellation of kindred, suggestive words, to be deciphered as an allegory of its various, multilayered meanings. Every great classical culture has an allegorical, or even mystical way to analyse words (such as the Indian *nirukta* and *mīmāṃsā* traditions, the Jewish *midrash*, and the Islamic *ištiqāq*), and in the Western Middle Ages even puns (*calembours*) were credited as a valid form of metaphysical knowledge.

We suggest the principles and logic of poetic etymology have much more in common with this etymological tradition than with that of the "grammarians"; essentially, it is more etymegory than etymology. Once this is recognised, the unnecessary reproaches can stop, and the harmful ridicule can yield to a more useful appreciation of the strategies involved, and their final aim. It is wrong to say that poetic etymology acts in open violation of the rules laid down by scientific etymology; the latter may remain irrelevant in the process, since the aims of the two are different, at least while the revealing play lasts. And it is precisely this playful dimension that makes many poetic etymologies occasional, one-off events, in contrast to the permanence of scientific (or speculative) etymologies. Once the constellation triggering a particular poetic etymology is supplanted by a different one, another poetic etymology may prove more ingenious and useful, even if contradicting the one offered minutes ago. Here we are in the realm of poetry and art, not of logic. Poets bear no grudge about scientific etymologising. They know it occupies a certain space, and that it performs a function within this space. However, we continue to hear scholars railing

against the naive, unsubstantiated, whimsical elaborations of the poets, ignorant of the letters' proper space and function.

Early modern age Croatian writer Pavao Ritter Vitezović (1652–1713), internationally known as Paulus Ritter, offers a fine illustration of the meaningful coexistence of the two kinds of etymology, and a neat confirmation of their essential non-hostility. Besides history, his many interests encompassed disciplines such as genealogy, map-making, heraldry and the Croatian language – interests associated with antiquarianism, in its best sense. His lexicographic treatment of the Croatian language particularly proves his proficiency in scientific etymology,<sup>1</sup> *when scientific etymology is what he is aiming for, and when that is what his context requires*. At other times, however, in different contexts, he etymologises freely, and blatantly neglects his philological knowledge *when aiming at a poetic and dramatic effect*.

*Plorantis Croatiae saecula duo* (Two Centuries of a Weeping Croatia), published in 1703, is a Latin poem (that can only tentatively be called epic) in which Ritter gives a poetic account of the two preceding centuries of Croatian history. It is a first-person narration of and meditation on the various calamities, especially the Turkish invasion, conveyed by an allegorised, bewailing Croatia. The text has failed to impress either poets or historians; the former can find fault with historic intrusions into what purports to be a poetic text, and the latter can deplore the unwarranted poetic licenses in a text perceived as a work by a historian.<sup>2</sup> Ritter was both a historian and a poet, and this article suggests *Plorantis Croatiae* should be read as both history and poetry. After all, this is not a particularly odd precept to apply to an age that did not separate the domains of literature and scholarship with a sharp, insurmountable chasm. We shall concentrate on Ritter's etymologies of various toponyms in the poem as one of the means of signalling its double nature, since alongside serious "correct" etymologies are those that leave historians and academically trained philologists in despair, as

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<sup>1</sup> This can be concluded from Ritter's posthumously published *Lexicon Latino-Illyricum* (see Ritter Vitezović 2000–2010). Croatian linguists often praise his work in this field, and he is considered the first Croatian onomastician. Valentin Putanec assesses Ritter's onomastic work as excellent, stating that Ritter "managed to conduct his analysis of linguistic phenomena in a really unusually scientific manner, just as we conduct it nowadays when we study etymology" (Putanec 1968: 63, trans. ours).

<sup>2</sup> Croatian historian Zrinka Blažević contributed much to the affirmation of the *Plorantis Croatiae saecula duo*, claiming that "subjected to a new reading" the text "unexpectedly reveals a complex semantic texture at the level of both composition and thematics" (Blažević 2003: 202, trans. ours). See also Blažević 2005 (both in Croatian).

they are so unabashedly arbitrary, pretentious, tendentious and far-fetched. The fact that *Plorantis Croatiae* was meant to be, and has remained, a poetic text should alert us that many of its etymologies are poetically motivated, and sometimes made in open jest. The following examples shed light on the different strategies open to the poetic etymologist, *according to the specific need of the moment*.

## 1. VELIKA

Prosperiore tamen **Velikam** fato impetit **arcem**,  
**Magnanam Latio quondam sermone vocatam**,  
Quam longe Reges habitabant Bate priores,  
Ut nunc regalem Velikam voco – pluribus olim  
Praefectam vicis, pagis atque urbibus. Ipsam  
Subjicit imperio vis et fortuna tyranno.  
**Turcica nunc Velika est, mea Velika desinit esse –**  
**Ut jam, nil magnum, videam, mihi sorte relictum.**

(Ritter 1703: 18, lines 21–28)

With more luck does [the Turk] now charge **Velika Fort, once known in the Latin tongue by the name of Magnana** [...] There resided kings long before Bato, so I now name it Royal Velika: it heads many a village, hamlet, and town. Might and destiny subdued it to a tyrannical authority. **Velika is now under the Turks, Velika ceased to be mine, and so I see fate left nothing great for me.**<sup>3</sup>

This fairly simple example is a good start. Ritter states that Velika Fort (also known as Kraljeva Velika) used to be called Magnana, and establishes a direct link between the two names, understanding the former as a translation of the latter. While it is evident that *velika* is the feminine form of the

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<sup>3</sup> The Latin is from the electronic publication at *Croatiae auctores Latini (CroALa)*, *Collectio electronica* (see Ritter 1703). The transcription is by Violeta Moretti, and follows the original, printed in Zagreb in 1703. Since the lines are not numbered, we quote the page numbers and the numbers of the lines on each page in this paper. The translations in this paper are by the authors, and the punctuation has been normalised for the sake of clarity. Parts of particular interest to this article are shown in bold.

Croatian adjective meaning "big, great," the derivation that shows *Magnana* coming from the Latin *magnus* in the same meaning(s) is far from certain, given that the suffix *-ana* remains obscure in this particular case. Relevant for Ritter is only the sharp contrast between the fort's honourable past, contained within its name, and its present plight, which makes the name pitifully outdated. The opposition is not without a touch of historic irony, creating another instance of the *ubi sunt* motif, beloved by Baroque writers when explaining the sorrowful gap between things as they used to be, and the way they are now.

## 2. PANNONIA

Totque arces, pagos totque inter utramque jacentes,  
 Et tot Claustra capi! **Quanto jam tramite labat**  
**Pannonia, a proprio quae dicta valore Valeria**  
**Ante fuit!** Video quod casibus omnia subsint –  
 Caecaque et inconstans fortuna vagatur ubique.

(Ritter 1703: 17, lines 8–12)

So many forts, so many villages lying in between, and so many monasteries lost! **To see now the yoke under which Pannonia suffers! To think there was a time when, due to its value, it was called Valeria!** I see it all ended through misfortune: the blind and inconstant Fortuna roams everywhere.

The historical province of Pannonia is identified here as Valeria, though the latter was only the north-eastern part of Pannonia, and was actually called Pannonia Valeria. It was named after the daughter of Emperor Diocletian, who reorganised the province in 296. Even if Ritter had been aware of such etymology – and it is a long shot to assume he was – he would have resisted with difficulty the temptation to connect the name of the province with the Latin verb *valere*, "to be valid, vigorous, healthy". Homophony is the most striking and determining feature for establishing the etymological kinship of words in both poetic and folk etymologies, and Ritter is no exception to the rule. Here, too, we find the *ubi sunt* motif, contrasting the once prosperous province with its present suffering.

### 3. DUBOVAC

Ad Colapim Turci penetrant, veteremque **Dubovac**  
In cineres redigunt injectis undique flammis,  
Urbs ut aperta patet nullo circumdata vallo,  
**Lignea tota**, et opus primaevae simplicitatis,  
**Cuj aliunde idem formatur ab arbore nomen.**

(Ritter 1703: 34, lines 27–31)

The Turks advance all the way to the Kupa river and, setting fire on all sides, burn to ashes **Dubovac**, the ancient town made **all of wood**, a work of primaeval simplicity, thus leaving the town **that in its time got its name from wood** open and unprotected by any sort of wall.

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As we move towards increasingly poetic forms of etymologising, we come across toponyms whose origins are plain to see, ones that Ritter himself acknowledges, enriching them with interpretations that are clearly imaginatively rather than philologically motivated. Dubovac is an example that neatly illustrates Ritter's "ambivalence" as both poet and historian. The name of the town is derived from *dub*, a Croatian word of Proto-Slavic origin, meaning "oak" specifically, or "tree" in general (see Skok 1971). It is an etymology no scholar could find fault with. However, the recognisably Ritterian turn is in introducing the "added value" of making the stated etymology suggest, if not determine, the destiny of the town; named after such an inflammable material, it could not but attract the manner of its destruction. Rhetorically, this is a complex figure of speech, consisting of more than one figure. It starts from the classical realist tenet expressed in Latin as *nomen est omen*: the sign (nature) of a thing is encapsulated in its name.<sup>4</sup> This enables the equation *Dubovac* = *dub*, which in turn triggers a causal relationship: *wood burns* → *Dubovac* shall *burn*(, *too*). We further notice

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<sup>4</sup> Vitezović's collection of heraldic poetry *Stemmatographia, sive armorum Illyricorum delineatio, descriptio et restitutio* (Vienna 1701, Zagreb 1702) shows the same "procedure of 'mystic-poetic explanation'" (as formulated in Georgijević [1969: 131], and quoted in Kravar [1993: 180]). The principle of "reading" the meaning from a name is even more explicit in Vitezović's rich use of anagrams. An example of such a reading can also be found in the *Plorantis Croatiae*, when Ritter makes the anagram *atrocia* (atrocities) of Croatia: *Ut fato quodam perferre atrocia semper / Deberem; postquam sum dicta Croatia*, [...]. Ritter 1703: 52, 19–20). Blažević (2005: 40) refers to this "structural isomorphy between the sign and its referent," pointing to Westerhoff (1999).

that the "prophecy" about the burning of Dubovac was made *after* the event itself. In other words, Ritter's umbrella figure includes *vaticinium ex eventu*, predicting a future A (Dubovac burning) from a point in the past (naming the town), but actually from the comfortable position of a future B (the moment of Ritter's writing), in which the future A has already occurred. This enables an ominous redefinition of the past in question, which is pretence, and thus essentially false. The figure is well-attested in works of historiography and theology, where, applied in earnest, it represents a pseudoscholarly variant of the logical fallacy known as *post hoc ergo propter hoc*: since B happened after A, we conclude it happened *because of* A. When applied in poetry, (which is primarily a work of imagination) as it is in Ritter's usage (and, let us never forget, poetry is first of all a work of imagination) – the fallacy becomes a figure, meant to heighten the overall poetic and dramatic effect. The reader, a knowledgeable witness outliving the event, can rewind the unfortunate history of the perished town as a time bomb, whose ticking started at the very moment of its foundation, when it was given such a pleasing, natural and innocent name, but also such an uncanny one. What we shouldn't miss during the process is Ritter himself, mischievously winking at us throughout.

#### 4. CRVIVICA

**Cyrvivicæ** mons est, nomen **de vermibus** hausit.

Pauca hic pugnabat cum Turcis turba meorum

Et fato adverso – nam letho & sanguine multo

**Nobilitavit** humum, **despectaque** nomina montis

Erexit, praebens avibus se et **vermibus escam**.

(Ritter 1703: 4, lines 12–16)

**There is Cyrvivica Hill**, that derives its name **from worms**: here a small division of my people fought the Turks and lost; their death and spilt blood **ennobled** the soil and gave the hill its **despicable** name, becoming as they did **bait for** birds and **worms**.

Tracing the name of the hill (appearing here in its older orthographic form) to the Croatian word *crv*, "worm", seems convincing. However, Ritter expands on the etymology, much like he does with Dubovac. This is the hill on which a small Croatian division was defeated by the Turks. Their

dead bodies became food for the worms. If the etymology of Dubovac was a combination of metonymic associations (wood *causes* fire) and metaphoric (fire, in traditional physics, shares in the *nature* of wood), here we have an essentially metonymic connection: the worms (the consequence) stand for the valiant soldiers (the cause) who lost their lives in that place, and thus deserve to be remembered by its name. However, things have once again been chronologically inverted: the name antedates the event it is supposed to commemorate. And, again, it is no exaggeration to say that from Ritter's imaginative perspective, the name perhaps even causes the event, beginning to predict the disaster on the hill the very moment it is given, to anyone able to read things out of names. Here, too, the dramatic effect is enhanced by the contrast between the noble blood of the perished heroes and the despicable name of the hill.

## 5. OZALJ

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Ipsa mali tellus horret praesaga futuri,  
Mirando totum quassata tremore per annum;  
Quo motu permultae aedes et templa faticunt,  
**Arx Ozalí fatale malum de nomine sensit.**

(Ritter 1703: 84, lines 27–31)

The very earth trembles in predicting an ill fate, shaken as it has been by miraculous earthquakes for a full year – wherefrom many homes and temples have tumbled to pieces – **the citadel of Ozalj has experienced its misfortune through its own fatal name.**

Ritter derives the name of the ancient town of Ozalj (here spelt Ozalí) from the Croatian *zlo*, *zao*, "evil", and possibly (also) from *žal*, "sorrow", thus again offering a toponym whose *onym* in itself contains the future awaiting the *topos*. But there is a crucial difference here. Scholars generally agree that the name of Ozalj is non-Slavic and pre-Slavic.<sup>5</sup> In other words, it has nothing to do with Croatian. Ritter certainly did not know that, which

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<sup>5</sup> Whilst earlier historians assumed that modern Ozalj occupies the site of ancient *Asselia* (Šimunović 2009: 250), Skok (1971) derives the name *Ozalj* from the Germanic name *Anselmus* (It. *Anselmo*), where the consonant *n* had disappeared due to dissimilation (*n\_m* >



detracts from the boldness of his etymology. His next one, however, makes a substantial step forward.

## 6. MOHÁCS FIELD

En Muhaçinus ager (**de muscis nomen adeptus  
Omīne non fausto**) totum proclamat ad orbem  
Infandam caedem populi procerumque suorum,  
Regis & interitum [...]

(Ritter 1703: 9, lines 4–7)

Behold! the Mohács Field (**taking its name from flies, an ill omen**) cries out to all the world about the unspeakable slaughter of its people and noblemen, about the ruin of kings.

The Mohács Field, in Hungary (which at the time of the event described was united with Croatia under the crown of St. Stephen (Hung. *Szent Korona*), still reverberates with powerful historical associations in the ears of both Croats and Hungarians. It is there that in the year 1526 the Ottoman Turks, led by Suleiman the Magnificent, defeated Louis II and his army and ended the independent Hungarian Kingdom, thus opening the way for the Turks all the way west to Vienna. Ritter must have known that the name of the Hungarian town of Mohács, after which the field got its name, could hardly have been of Croatian origin. And yet he derives it from the Croatian word *muba* (Latin *musca*), or “fly”. This example greatly resembles that of Crivica. Instead of worms we now have flies within the name, which again presage death, coming in the guise of heathens from the East who turn the courageous native soldiers into martyrs of their homeland and Christianity, leaving their bodies to the heinous creatures of decay. The additional charm here, however, stems from the “objectively” impossible corroboration of a Croatian word read from a non-Croatian name, whose Latin variant – as if in another jest of poetic etymologising – contains the almost ready-made word Ritter needs.

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*0\_m*). Petar Šimunović reconstructs the following development along the same lines: (*sanctus*) *Anselmus* > (*santu*) *Assellū* > *Ozъl'ъ* > *Ozalj*. (Šimunović: 2009).

## 7. GROBNIK

[...] Grobnik (Castrum est Vinosa in valle, **sepulchri**

**Forma illi nomen dedit hoc, et campus**, in isto

Millia caesa olim sunt quinquaginta Getarum

Señonidum dextra pro Regis Bele salute)

(Ritter 1703: 50, line 31; 51, lines 1–3)

[...] Grobnik (a citadel in the Wine Valley and the field [below it], in which fifty thousand Gets perished from the right hand of the people from [the town of] Senj, for the sake of King Béla, **derive their name from the shape of a grave**) [...]

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Unlike the Mohács battle, the one referred to here probably never took place. However, according to a firmly established legend, in 1242 on Grobnik Field, close to the Adriatic coast, the Croats won a decisive battle over the Tatars. This stopped the expansion of the latter, begun under Genghis Khan, that would have forced King Béla IV, alluded to here, to flee his capital in Hungary and escape southwards to Croatia. Predictably, Ritter derives the name of the Grobnik citadel and its adjacent field from the Croatian word *grob*, meaning “grave”. We are led to imagine that “fifty thousand Gets”, metonymically represented by as many graves, would have been a sight formidable enough to be immortalised through the name. The etymology presupposes that the citadel and the field got their names *after* the supposed battle. What were they called before 1242? Although humans have lived in the area since prehistoric times, the first recorded use of the name Grobnik was in 1288.<sup>6</sup> There is nothing to contradict Ritter’s etymology historically; being *post festum*, it is at variance with his “prophetic” etymologies of Crvica, Ozalj and Mohač. The problem lies elsewhere. Although, theoretically, *Grobnik* may have derived directly from *grob* meaning “grave”, the etymology of *grob* is much more complex. For our present needs it suffices to say that it has (also) to do with scratching (*grebati*, *grepsti*),<sup>7</sup> in the widest sense of tearing away part of a surface. Fundamentally – and literally – *grob* is thus a pit, created by scratching

<sup>6</sup> Mentioned in the *Vimodolski zakonik*, the oldest completely preserved Croatian document recording local common law.

<sup>7</sup> Whereby *grob-* is the *o*-grade ablaut variant of the Proto-Slavic root \**greb-*, combined with the suffix *-nik*, used in the derivation of toponyms.

away part of the earth's surface, and the ritual of laying a dead body into a *grob* is known as *pogreb*, or "burial" (*po* functioning as a prefix). Through semantic shift (progression), *grob* in time produced the additional meaning of the mound of earth removed from the pit being dug. The word has also been involved in toponyms given to stretches of land cleared and prepared for cultivation (Skok 1971). Some or all of these factors are therefore the most likely explanation for *Grobnik* and *grob* (and its various ablauts) being the source of a number of toponyms in areas that saw no great battles, and thus contain no vast quantity of human remains with which to inspire awe. In all probability, *Grobnik* is the closest Ritter comes to the essence of folk etymology.

## 8. ZAGREB

Zagrabiae, [...]

**Forma tamen tristis nomen dedit ipsa sepulchri,**

Prosternit funesta pios contagio Cives.

Grande malum, fratri quo frater adesse, nec uxor

Audet in amplexus dilecta venire mariti!

Sic peccata hominum divina Astraea requirit.

(Ritter 1703: 16, lines 17–22)

In Zagreb, [...] which was **so named after its shape of a piteous grave**, a deadly plague destroys its pious citizens. A great evil, for which a brother dare not approach his own brother, or a beloved wife the embrace of her own husband! So does the divine Astraea require for human sins.

Though apparently recycling the previous etymological strategy, the perspective here is wider and multi-layered. The chronology we now find is simultaneously more realistic and a return to the *nomen est omen* idea. While *Grobnik* was so named after its great battle had produced its numerous graves, Zagreb – the Croatian capital – derived its name from the hill (mound) on which it was built: the hill looks like a grave. Once again, Ritter resorts to one of his favourite etymological practices: names tell the futures of their bearers. No wonder a place named after a grave has fallen prey to "a deadly plague destroy[ing] its pious citizens". However, the last line – drawing on a widespread belief in diseases as divine punishment for

human trespasses (the Christian God is here fashionably paganised, in accordance with a stylised reading of classical mythologies, popular from the Renaissance to Neoclassicism) – implies that the citizens have not always been so pious. Or are we to suppose that the sins of the fathers are being visited upon the children? The ominous connection between the name and the place lingers in either case. The "correct" etymology of Zagreb remains debatable, but the familiar *grob*, here appearing in its ablaut form *greb*, is probably the most reasonable choice. In the present case, however, *greb* suggests the meanings of "(stream) bank" – making *Za-greb* a place "beyond the brook (Medveščak)" – and "embankment", referring to that of the Sava river.

## 9. LIKA

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Nec posita in tumulis castella tuentur apricis,  
**Apta situ, sed pressa siti: licet arva salubres**  
**Excipiunt amnes: et toti nomina terrae**  
**Flumen Lika dedit, Latiis medicina salubris.**

(Ritter 1703: 10, lines 17–20)

They are no more protected by fortresses on sun-exposed hills. **Although nicely placed, they are harassed by thirst, even though these fields absorb healthy waters and the whole land is known by its river Lika, meaning salubrious medicine.**

By general scholarly opinion, the name of the Croatian province Lika comes from its eponymous river. This is explained in various ways, including by invoking the word's Greek origins, and tracing it to the Indo-European root *\*leik*, "to bend, wind".<sup>8</sup> Researchers seem to agree, however, that it is non-Slavic. For Ritter the name is transparent: in *Lika* he immediately

<sup>8</sup> The word's actual origin is unclear. The earliest uses date from the tenth century, in Porphyrogenetus' *De Administrando Imperio*: *τινὴν Λίτσαν*, and might be based on the Slavic locative singular form, and from the eleventh century, in a Latin manuscript: *Jupam Licche* (genitive singular) (see the reference in *Rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika*). An interesting theory relates the note *Por(tus) Epilicus* on Peutinger's map (Mayer 1957: 140) to the hydronym *Lika*. In conjunction with the Greek prefix *ἐπί*, the translation is "a brook flowing from Lika". For details see Šimunović (2010: 228).

recognises the Croatian word *lijek*, "medicine", which in the local variant appears as *lik*. There was a time, Ritters writes, when the river that infused the whole region with its healthy, life-giving waters could be used freely, but the Turkish invasion had rendered that history. Only its name remained, reminiscent of different times. The main problem with the author's Croatian etymology is the unusual *-a* formation of the onym. This is a modest example of an auspicious designation discredited by time. That is, a place is given an auspicious name, encapsulating and promoting its amenity, which history later inverts. In the next two names we can see fully fledged examples of the same historical phenomenon (or, in Ritter's case, of the same poetic procedure). Of particular note is the *situ-siti* pun, expanded into a quasi-logical paradox: *although* nicely placed (*[apta] situ*) they are *nevertheless* harassed by thirst (*siti*). The poetic effect thus produced is: if the two words are so similar, it is truly marvellous that the realities of their real-world referents are at such variance.

## 10. BLAGAJ

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Jamque a divitiis arx Blagaj dicta, Georgi

Ursini Comitis, cessit captiva tyranno,

[...]

**Divitiis mala signa meis!**

(Ritter 1703: 4, lines 17–20)

**Fort Blagaj, named after its very treasure** and belonging to Count Georgius Ursinus, **fell prey to the tyrant [...]** **What a bad sign for my treasure!**

Fort Blagaj, in today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, takes its name from the Croatian word *blago*, "treasure", for the riches contained within its precincts. Again, the name of the place attracted its destiny, and Blagaj was looted and destroyed by the Turks. The signifier that in happier times was perfectly consonant with the nature of its signified is belied by historical developments. At the rhetorical (poetic) level, a literal designation is ridiculed into a trope. The toponym now functions by contrast only, as a bitter reminder of an exactly opposite reality. In fact, the linguistically proper origin seems rather to be the adjective *blag*, which in its ancient usage primarily meant "good"

(unlike its prevailing modern meaning of "gentle, kind"). *Blagaj* would thus simply mean "a good place", suitably located: a *locus amoenus*. There is ample testimony to such etymology from other Slavic toponyms.<sup>9</sup>

## 11. RAKOVICA

**Urbs Rakoviciae Latiis Crescentia quondam,  
Nonnullis pravè jam nunc Hrastovica dicta,  
[...]  
milite pauco  
Tecta, hostile jugum subiit **Crescentia** tristis:  
Quae pridèm coepit **decrescere**: donec et ipsa  
Expertura sui casum, cognoverit olim,  
Aeternùm sub sole nihil persistere posse.**

(Ritter 1703: 39, lines 26–31; 40, lines 1–4)

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**The town of Rakovica used to be called Crescentia in Latin, but now, wrongly, they name it Hrastovica** [...] scarce in soldiers, **Crescentia** was sadly subdued by the hostile yoke; one that long since began **decreasing**, till at length, meeting its own destiny, it learnt there is nothing eternal under the sun.

Here Ritter develops his etymologising and again combines his poetic virtues and historical knowledge. He starts by correcting the current toponym Hrastovica, from *hrast*, "oak", to Rastovica, which is difficult to localise. In doing so, he is doubly justified. First, as antiquarian and historian, he knows the Latin name of the place used to be Crescentia (which we haven't been able to trace), which derives from the verb *crescere*, "to grow", thus corresponding to the meaning of the Croatian verb *rasti*, substantivised into *Rastovica*. Second, the sound /h/, being unstable in Croatian, can easily drop, especially in the initial position. The first toponym Ritter mentions, however, is Rakovica, and we are led to conclude that the place in question was known by two different Croatian names, at least in his time. There

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<sup>9</sup> A number of villages of the same name exist in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while in Serbia a village and a mountain are named Blagaja (see the reference in *Rječnik brvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika*).

is nothing unusual about that, and places are known to have more than one name even nowadays. It is not our business to conjecture on plausible connections between the two names (Rakovica manifestly comes from *rak*, "crab, Cancer"), but rather to concentrate on Rastovica, the one Ritter treats in his lines. We saw that it actually translated the Latin *Crescentia*, and we may presume that it worked as another prosperity booster, through a sympathetic magic in which things performed at one level (name) reverberate, by analogy, at another (actual fact). However, the name has since become another laughing stock of historical irony: *Crescentia*, Increase, has become *Decrescentia*, Decrease. The once auspicious and consonant toponym has by Ritter's time become an antonym, so that within the deteriorated circumstances we are now faced with etymology by contrast, *per oppositionem*, known since classical antiquity, where a thing is named in contrast to its nature. The best-known example is *lucus a non lucendo*, which explains the name of the wood (*lucus*) by the fact there is *no* light in it (a non *lucendo*). This is also known as reversal of etymology, deformation or unnamng, and its poetic potential should not be underestimated.

## 12. SISAK

Sic tandem infausto cecidit mea **Sissia** fato,  
**Fertilitate soli piscosisque amnibus uber,**  
**Atque uber verè, Sissak vernacula dicit;**  
**Ubertas** terrae bellorum incommoda gignit.

(Ritter 1703: 45, lines 30–31; 46, lines 1–2)

Thus finally my **Sissia**, rich [Lat. **uber**] in fertile soil and rivers full of fish, perished through ill fate. Indeed, its folk name is **teat** [Lat. **uber**], **Sissak** [Croat. **sisak**]. The fertility [Lat. **ubertas**] of its soil gave birth to the misfortunes of war.

This is one of Ritter's most ambitious and convoluted interventions. The cross-linguistic aspect, neatly limited to the needs of the moment in the previous case, flourishes here, and is outmatched only by the next and last example offered in the present article. Historically, the pre-Celtic settlement of *Segestica* was subsequently renamed with the Celtic *Siscius* (cf. *Siscianum* in Roman Gaul), which in Latin became *Siscia*, before finally

taking the Croatian form *Sisak*, the current name of the town on three rivers, which still exists today.<sup>10</sup> Ritter, however, takes its formal transparency for granted, reading the Croatian word *sis*, "teat" in the name. Not only does this concept *naturally* imply nourishment and well-being, but it *culturally* reinforces it by using Latin – the language of Ritter's poem, and a language of great importance for an early modern age writer living between the north-eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea and Central Europe – in which the word for teat is *uber*, also meaning *fruitful*, *rich*. What started as a happy homonymic correspondance, a double auspiciousness, again, in retrospect, is revealed as ominous. The very richness of the place, with its fertile soil and rivers teeming with fish, gave birth to its troubles, attracting enemies eager to possess its assets. Or at least we may suppose this is what happened, due to a signifier that ostentates the luxuries of its signified to all and sundry. Ritter was certainly familiar with the belief, very much alive even today, that openly praising the health or beauty of someone's child or cattle prompts evil forces to bring them deformities and diseases. This magic component is always to be reckoned with in cases of names etymologised to mean the opposite of what history had in store for them.

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### 13. MREŽNICA AND KUPA

**Retia Mrizniciae nomen fatale dederunt,**

Quae prope Karlopolim fluvio commixta Korannae

Efluit in **Kulpam: cum culpa tum sine corde:**

Nunc **homines capit illa meos pro Thracibus escam,**

Cùm mihi saepè neget petroso in flumine pisces.

(Ritter 1703: 50, lines 7–11)

<sup>10</sup> The Croatian name of Sisak is first seen in the sixteenth-century work "Quirinus, apostolski včenik v *Siske* (= locative) varaše" (see the reference in *Rječnik brvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika*). An alternative Latin onym is *Sisia* (a variant noted by Ritter in his *Lexicon Latino-Illyricum* along with *Siscia* [Ritter Vitezović 2000–2010, I:933 (465r), and II:417]). Skok assumes that the probable pronunciation in Pannonian Latin was \*Siskia (Skok 1971: 244). According to Holzer (2011: 148), besides the attested form *Siscia* (Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*) there may have existed the variant \*Siska (cf. *Mursa* : *Mursa*), which is more plausible as the proto-form of the Croatian onym (via. CSI \*Si:skъ), with the epenthetic *a* inserted into the consonant cluster \*sk.



**It was the nets [Croat. mreže] that gave their fatal name to the Mrežnica,** a river uniting its waters with the Korana near [the town of] Karlovac and flowing **into the Kupa [Lat. Culpa]: with as much blame [Lat. culpa] as lack of heart.** Now it is catching my people for the Thracians to use them as bait, though it often denies me fish in the rocky river.

The tour de force presented here is of proportions that allow us to view it as a worthy example of the etymological *conchetto*. Ritter operates along a number of lines that branch out into a complex image combining various figures. The protagonist of this etymological *conchetto* is the Mrežnica river, whose Slavic origins are self-evident; Ritter has no problems connecting it to the common Croatian word *mreža*, "net". Another recorded meaning of the same form (in the bibliography of *Rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika*) is "web, net-like membrane", something one can easily associate with a thin layer appearing on the river's surface. What Ritter needs for his *conchetto*, however, is a proper, solid net. Things are not as simple with the second actor: the Kupa river. A Slavic origin of this name can be ruled out, and Ritter is not tempted to try one. The various hypotheses include a Greek, Illyro-Celtic, or even pre-Indo-European etymology. Perhaps the most attractive is the one that recognises in this hydronym a compound of the Proto-Indo-European root *\*kwel/\*kul*, "to bend" and the word *\*ap*, "water" (Šimunović 2009: 292), motivated by the turns of the river's bed. The Proto-Indo-European root is more transparent in the Classical Latin hydronym, *Colapis*, which became *Culpa* in Vulgar Latin, finally giving the Slovenian *Kólpa* and German *Kulpa*.<sup>11</sup> Ritter, however, takes the Latin *Culpa* at face value: "guilt". At this point we seem to have a plot, a river named Guilt receiving the waters of its accomplice named Net, in a narrative poem told in the first person, through the mouth of a personified, bereaved Croatia. We have been transported into the world of allegory, in which rivers act of their own accord. First a river took its name from (supposedly) nets (supposedly fishing). Once defined in character, by its name, the river itself became a net, enmeshing no longer fish, but, once again, hearty Croatian

<sup>11</sup> In Croatian, *Kupa* < CSI *\*Kьpa*. In Skok's opinion, the form *Κόλαπις* (attested by Strabo) yielded Vulg. Lat. *\*kolepis* with the lenition of the penultimate a > e, which can be affirmed by such examples as *racanu* > *\*rakenu* > *rakno*, *Arbanum* > *\*Arbenum* > *Рабѣнь*. (Skok 1971: 237). Holzer, however, claims that the Vulg. Lat. form of this hydronym was *\*kolpe* (Holzer 2011: 119), which was transformed in CSI into *\*кьpa* and hence into the Croatian *Kupa*, and the Slovene *Kolpa*. The ending *-a* can be assumed to have been added by analogy, since names of rivers are grammatically mostly feminine in Croatian.

soldiers, defeated there by the Turks (often called Thracians by Ritter) and then drowned, or at least pulled down, by the river. The move here is from metonymy to metaphor; even rivers have joined the "unbelievers". At a time when the Turkish invasion of Europe seemed to be unstoppable, when many believed they were witnessing the imminent arrival of Doomsday, it was as if Nature itself, created by God but perverted by the Devil, were fighting on the side of metaphysical darkness. The names were revealing their true meanings, the true characters of rivers, hills, provinces, and human settlements, ingenuously raised in their midst. Turning back to strictly stylistic considerations, this is a case of double personification: the personified Croatia now herself personifies the rivers. And since in later Latin rivers are no longer masculine in gender, but feminine – which is also the case with Mrežnica and Kupa in Croatian – the two rivers are personified as women (see *illa* in line four of the extract). Neither of the two rivers is *it*, but *she*. The final act is thus to make of them not traitors, but traitresses, a touch fitting the typical (masculine) view of women, with ample corroboration from the Bible, from Eve onwards.

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## CONCLUSION

An age that has deadened words into (c)rude signifiers of even deader signifieds can hardly be expected to intuit, let alone appreciate, a hidden life of words pulsating and intertwining within a world of their own: a logosphere. But this is an exception to historical practice, even in Western terms. The seminal *Cratylus* has it that names (words) also have an allegorical sense, one that the "man of sense" (ἔχωντος ἀνθρώπου; 440c) must acknowledge and interrogate. Today, commenting on this pronouncement from Plato and the whole tradition it initiated in the West, Davide Del Bello is among the few who warn that "[w]hat is neither obvious nor beyond question is the claim that modern historicism is the proper perspective and ought to be applied as a corrective yardstick to the 'fanciful' etymologizing of the past" (Del Bello 2007: 44). Suspending the historical perspective of his own age, Friedrich Ohly (1985: 263) notes that our modern etymology would sound dubious to mediaeval scholars, limited as it is to the *littera*, without "the forms of life". Besides, as Del Bello is also quick to note, the classical and especially mediaeval allegorists seem to have been aware of the fiction inherent in their *historiae*, but there was no fiction as opposed to a faction. The literal part,

in its historical or denotative scope, does not counter, but rather echoes the senses involved at the allegorical, typological and anagogical levels (Del Bello 2007: 44): the three higher stages of hermeneutics. Even when we know some etymologies are false at their literal level (the only one appealing to ancient grammarians and modern linguists), we can still allow for their truthfulness in the realms of suggestivity and associations, intersecting and overlapping as *ideas* within words. We find *idea* connected to *deus/dea* as early as Dante, and the link became commonplace from then onwards. Isidore of Seville, the greatest mediaeval etymologist (i.e. etymogorist), joins *ars* and *ἀρετή* (in *Etymologies* I,1), because art is the virtue of creating. It is possible that both Dante and Isidore were aware that hybridly connecting a Greek term with a Latin one in their binomials was likely wrong; but if so, they would have known it was wrong at only the most basic (base) level, while its rhetorical, argumentative, aesthetic and spiritual thrust was undeniable, and of a much higher order. Neither have twentieth-century Benvenistean linguists – to take an example from a monolingual fold – disproved centuries of deriving *religio* from *religare*, “tying up (the soul) fast (to God)”, when proving it actually comes from “going through again (in reading, thinking)” (Benveniste 2016: 527–532). Again, they may disqualify the literal connection, at the level of matter, but the allegorical authenticity and suggestive and religious thrust of the *religio-religare* kindredship remains as valid as ever, just as Einsteinian physics did not invalidate Newtonian: they simply describe and apply to two different levels of physical reality.

What holds true for speculative etymology must be true of poetic etymology too, since both operate allegorically (even symbolically, if one distinguishes the terms), not literally. The examples of Paulus Ritter's etymologies offered in this paper should suffice to corroborate their poetic rather than scientific motivation, which, after all, is the kind of etymology a primarily poetic text like *Weeping Croatia* is supposed to foreground. In poetry the practice of such etymologising is well documented as early as in archaic poetry, and is known as *narrativised etymology* (see Tsitsibakou-Vasalos 2007). The play on proper names can within its scope be “narrativized”, in accordance with narrative verisimilitude (in an epic), where the person manipulating the name is unconcerned with the objective meaning of the proposed etymology: it is enough that it fits the logic, syntax and especially semantics of the narrative fiction in question (Calame 1995: 178). This is the tradition into which Ritter fits, and even the modest selection presented here includes virtually all the features mentioned in this concluding chapter (including cross-language etymologising, like in Mohács

or Sisak). Instead of lightly dismissing poetic etymologies as fanciful trivia, it is wiser to consider them *contextually*, within their *genre*, and recognise their overall communicative role. They are part of a properly poetic function, with far-reaching effects that, not untypically, can involve intertextuality. As Tsitsikbakou-Vasalos (2007: 105) summarises: "Archaic and classical poets thereby enter a dialectic discourse with the literary, linguistic and religious traditions of their community. Etymology becomes a matrix of fermentation, in which past and present collapse into something new." Modern literary criticism remains aware of its importance. Distinguished critic Roland Barthes (1977: 60) encourages us to *play* etymology (he uses the verb *jouer*), *as one has always done (on l'a fait de tout temps)*, like deriving *panic* not from the god Pan, as is "proper", but from the Greek adjective meaning "all", if that is the proper need of the moment (as it is in his particular case). Even being "only" ludic is enough for poetic etymology, and for poetry. To reiterate: poetic etymology is a figure of speech, more precisely a trope. It is associated with poetry, not science, and, consequently, its domain is imagination, sometimes "mere" fancy, but never "objective", or factual. To use Roman Jakobson's distinction, its function is poetic, not referential. And even when it is at its most playful, verging on the banal or strained, it always retains at least one of the two: imaginative charm, and/or revelatory, creative impetus. When a poet etymologises, the point of his doing so is not necessarily (and is probably rarely) to uncover the historical roots of words. But it is always, in the happy words of K. K. Ruthven, getting "the reader to entertain more than one idea at a time" (Ruthven 1978: 19). And it is most likely only poets who understand how much that really is.

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