

Lovrich's Joke: Authority, Laughter and Savage Breasts in an 18th-c. Travel Polemic

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The improbable image of a woman with such long, pendulous breasts that she could suckle a baby over her shoulder has haunted the European imagination. These attributes identified women who were inhuman, or scarcely human. German, French and Slavic folktales told of supernatural beings who breastfed in this way, or who threw their breasts over their shoulders to keep them out of the way.¹ Travelers gradually began to attribute the same exaggerated characteristics to human women living in the far corners of the earth. The story first appears at the beginning of the seventeenth century in accounts of West Africa. European travelers subsequently ascribed the ability to suckle over the shoulder to, among others, Hottentots, Tierra del Fuegos, Greenlanders and Tasmanian aborigines, differentiating them physically as well as culturally from their own kind.² By the mid-eighteenth century the image had become a commonplace in descriptions of primitive humanity, given scientific authority by Buffon's identification of hairiness of the body and limbs in males and long, pendulous breasts in females as features of savage man in a pure state of nature.³ In 1765 the *Encyclopédie*, in its article on 'mamelles', located its examples of such 'monstrous' breastfeeding at two geographical and civilizational extremes of the earth, the Cape of Good Hope and Greenland.⁴

The tale was reintroduced to the ethnography of Europe by the Italian abbé Alberto Fortis in his famous *Viaggio in Dalmazia* (1774), when he cited this physical quirk in his description of Europe's own noble savages, the 'Morlacchi' of Venice's Dalmatian hinterland. In turn, this was a canard that the young Dalmatian Giovanni Lovrich was determined to correct in his polemical counter-narrative attacking Fortis and describing the Morlacks from an indigenous perspective, *Osservazione sopra diversi pezzi del Viaggio in Dalmazia del signor abate Alberto Fortis* (1776).⁵ Whether or not Morlack breasts were indeed of such monstrous proportions and how the story was to be

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¹ S. Thompson, *The Folktale*, New York, 1946, p. 248; S. Kulišić, *Stara slovenska religija (Djela ANU BiH)*, vol. LVI), Sarajevo, 1979; Jean-Michel Doulet, *Quand les démons enlevaient les enfants*, Paris, 2003, p. 147.

² See especially J. L. Morgan, 'Some Could Suckle Over Their Shoulder': Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, LIV, January 1997, pp. 167-92. For an example of transmission of the topos, J. Crull, *Antient and present state of Muscovy*, London, 1698, on Greenlanders, repeated in Buffon, *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière*, vol. 3, Paris, 1749, p. 373.

³ Buffon, *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière*, vol. 14, Paris, 1766.

⁴ D'Alembert, *Encyclopédie; ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences: des arts et des métiers*, vol. 10, Paris, 1765, p. 4.

⁵ I use 'Dalmatian' as it appears in eighteenth-century sources, connoting both corporate status under Venice and a historical-geographical meaning. 'Illyrian' was used to denote both language and a wider Slavic community. Here I reserve 'Croatian' for the modern nation.

verified was one of the issues that was repeatedly discussed in the polemics that followed Lovrich's counter-blast – the reviews and pamphlets that Fortis published anonymously, pseudonymously and under his own name, and a final '*lettera apologetica*' by Lovrich, published just before his early death in 1777. The tale did not end there – the story of the Morlack women who could feed their young over their shoulders was recycled in many forms. The image is still current in Croatian popular culture, appearing in newspaper articles about foreign perceptions of the nation, in internet horror-stories about breastfeeding, or in self-deprecatory jokes about national character.⁶

Fortis's and Lovrich's remarks on the scarcely human abilities of Morlack women and the prodigious size of their breasts have been noted in passing in scholarly analyses. Larry Wolff has recounted, with some amusement, their exchanges on 'the endlessly interesting subject of the breasts of Morlacchi women' as revealing personal antagonism between the two men; Božidar Jezernik made the story the basis of a critique of Enlightenment empiricism in the face of *raison d'état* and entrenched prejudice.⁷ Here, however, I treat the topic as a means of examining disagreements between foreign travelers and the people whom they described in their travel accounts – 'travelees', to use Mary Louise Pratt's useful term.⁸ The dispute between Fortis and Lovrich is just one example of what might be dubbed the travel polemic, in which travelees responded angrily to outsiders' accounts of their societies, addressing their complaints to the wider European Republic of Letters. This was a lively genre in the second half of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. It reflected the greater circulation of printed travel texts, but also the growth of a new, particularist ethnology – the study of specific *groups* of men – that began to replace an older, universalist anthropology, the science of Man. When metropolitan travelers attempted not just to describe, but to account for the variety of humankind, often on highly determinist grounds, their 'travelees' in turn protested, and claimed the right to interpret their own cultures to the world.

In addressing these polemics, I focus on the reception of travel writing. We know a great deal about how travelers constructed Europe's others, but less about how their accounts were read and used. The problem, as always, is one of sources.⁹ Yet there are many examples of travelees answering back in the eighteenth century – from readers in Spain, Ireland, Scotland, Italy, Poland, Wallachia, and Greece, among others. Their responses say a great deal about the reception of travel accounts, not by the intended readers, but by the people they described; and about the role of the travelers' gaze, and

⁶E.g., Jasen Boko, 'Morlaci, Laponci i Hotentoti', *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 2.12.2003; <http://forum.roda.hr/archive/index.php/t-3863.html> and <http://www.forum.hr/archive/index.php/t-411420.html> (accessed 11.11.2011).

⁷L. Wolff, *Venice and the Slavs: The Discovery of Dalmatia in the Age of Enlightenment*, Stanford, 2001, p. 242, 254, 257; B. Jezernik, *Wild Europe: the Balkans in the gaze of Western travellers*, London, 2004.

⁸M.L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London, 1991.

⁹ Though for the skeptical reception of travel writing by reviewers, analysed to show contemporary limits to authority claims, see among others N. Leask, 'Francis Wilford and the colonial construction of Hindu geography, 1799-1822', in *Romantic Geographies: Discourses of Travel, 1775-1844*, ed. A. Gilroy, Manchester, 2000 (with thanks to Alex Drace-Francis for this example, which hinges on a travelee's contribution, and for his comments more generally).

the response to it, in the construction of identity outside metropolitan Europe. The picture that emerges from these travel polemics is scarcely one of authoritative traveler-subjects and their mute objects of description. But the subsequent reception of these exchanges demonstrates limits to the travelers' ability to get their story heard, and reveals the gradual ordering of Europe into hierarchically-arranged cultural spaces: centre and peripheries, North and South, West and East.¹⁰

A dispute over authority was at the centre of the polemic over the gymnastically breastfeeding Morlacks. The tactics of the protagonists, and the way their protests were received, emerge through the publications that prosecuted this controversy publicly, the backstage private correspondence, and the reviews and translations that circulated subsequently. Re-reading these sources, some well-known and others much less so, led me to a surprising discovery in a strangely ignored contribution to the exchange. In Lovrich's final *apologia*, the tale of over-the-shoulder breastfeeding, initially appearing as a traveler's topos of otherness, is refigured as a travelee's joke. Lovrich revealed his jest in a bid to establish his own ethnographic authority and undermine his opponent's, but the joke draws attention to the mocking laughter that pervaded this polemic and many others. This laughter throws into relief claims and counter-claims to authority, exposes the writers' relations to various audiences, and evokes widely differing responses among subsequent readers, including modern ones. Listening to this laughter complicates earlier interpretations of their exchanges. Europe's development of internal alterities only very slowly prompted corresponding reactions from the targets of these prejudices. Ultimately, the story of the Morlacks' breasts is a tale not just about eighteenth-century discursive authority, but also about twentieth-century cultural cringe.

The outlines of the debate are well-known. Both men viewed the Morlacks through the lens of primitivism, though Fortis leaned towards a pre-Romantic sentimentalism, while Lovrich's position was that of an Enlightenment rationalist.¹¹ Beyond that, their attitudes to Dalmatia and its inhabitants were very different. When Fortis looked at the people of Dalmatia's hinterland, he was reminded of primitive peoples whose lives seemed to exemplify all that the civilized Europe of the eighteenth century had left behind: Lapps, Tatars, Hottentots and American Indians or wild Highland Scots. Lovrich, in contrast, compared the Morlacks to Europe's ancestors, to the ancient Greeks, Romans and German tribes, or to the equally civilized Brahmins and Chinese.¹² Fortis saw the Morlacks existing in a timeless state of nature; Lovrich insisted on their history as a measure of their capacity to change. For the Italian Fortis, Dalmatia was divided religiously, ethnically and civilizationally. Each group had its own essential characteristics, determining the population's potential as human capital

¹⁰ The current article forms part of a projected book on the subject; elsewhere some such polemics have been discussed as individual cases, e.g. M. Calaresu, 'Looking for Virgil's Tomb: The End of the Grand Tour and the Cosmopolitan Ideal in Europe' in *Voyages and visions: towards a cultural history of travel*, ed. by J. Elsner and J.P. Rubiés, London, 1999.

¹¹ B.W. Maggs, 'Three Phases of Primitivism in Portraits of Eighteenth-Century Croatia,' *Slavonic and East European Review* 67/4, 1989, pp. 546–563.

¹² Ivan Pederin, 'Ideološka i književno putopisna pitanja Lovrićevih "Osservazioni" 1776.god.', *Radovi Zavoda JAZU u Zadru* 27-28, Zadar, 1981, pp. 203-214.

for the Venetian empire, and demanding different modes of rule. The hinterland Morlacks were noble savages, whose simplicity should be preserved while their disorder was tamed by a 'salutary violence'. The common people of the coast, who spoke the same language as the Morlacks, were nonetheless of different descent, a mixture of Romans and later migrants; they were lazy and degenerate, and required harsh discipline. The urban elites (among whom Fortis had friends) were Italianized and surprisingly civilized – 'as cultured as could be desired in any respectable city of Italy'. Lovrich, on the other hand, insisted that all these people made up one single Illyrian or Slav nation with shared language and origins, despite their social and religious divisions. All equally shared a capacity for improvement and enlightenment, to their own benefit as well as that of Venice. However all, in different measure, were denied the possibility of achieving that potential, incapacitated by historical circumstances (especially long-term warfare on the frontiers with the Ottomans), by Italian disdain and, among the elite, by a lack of self-esteem, as demonstrated by their adoption of Italian dress and language. Fortis thought that he was paying the Morlacks a compliment when he labelled them primitives and savages; Lovrich knew that such a compliment could easily be turned to insult.

There was clearly more at stake here than the size and uses of women's breasts. Still, the way each treated Morlack breastfeeding gives a sense of the way he thought, wrote and polemicized about the character of the nation. Fortis introduced the tale in a section on marriage, pregnancy and childbirth which focused on the simplicity of the lives of Morlack women and children. The women gave birth with none of the fuss of civilized societies; they fed their children at the breast, sometimes for four or six years, until they again fell pregnant. Consequently, Fortis felt disposed to accept the '*favola*' that Morlack women had 'dugs' (*zinne*) of such 'prodigious length' that they could fling them over their shoulders or pass them under their arms to give suck to their infants (*Viaggio*, I, 81). Or perhaps, looking at Dalmatia with his head full of Hottentots and Lapps, he was predisposed to believe that Morlack women, too, were constructed in the same way. It was a revealing passage: for Fortis, the physical attributes and behaviour of the women marked the limits of what was 'noble' about the Morlacks' primitive existence.¹³

In his response, Lovrich stressed that 'before judging a people, one must have the precise particulars of their customs' (*Osservazioni*, 67). His discussion of Morlack breastfeeding followed this principle, rebutting Fortis's vision of the Morlacks as Europe's internal Others. Lovrich broached the subject by emphasizing the way that Morlack women breastfed their own children: like the ancient Germans, they thought that to consign a baby to a wetnurse was worse than bestial. Nature, and the next

¹³On Fortis's ambivalent disgust towards Morlack women, Wolff, *Venice and the Slavs*, pp. 166-67. In this respect, it is worth noting that Fortis took a Morlack girl, Anastasia Vukossich, to live with him in Italy, eventually making her one of his heirs. Comment on this relationship still circulated in the mid-nineteenth century (C. Ugoni, *Della letteratura italiana nella seconda metà del secolo XVIII*, 1856, vol. 3, p. 45); did fear of gossip underpin Fortis's printed expressions of repulsion for Morlack women? Lovrich made a sly comment on Fortis's behaviour when he compared an (un-named) Italian who carried off a Morlack woman to the Turk who abducted the hajduk Sočivica's daughter for his harem, and rhetorically demanded of his readers 'who was the more barbarian?' (*Osservazioni*, 236).

pregnancy, determined how long a child remained at the breast, but three years was the usual limit and, while this may have extended to five or six years in the remote past, Fortis was wrong to claim the longer duration was the contemporary custom. Lovrich criticized Fortis's use of the word 'zinne' for breasts (the equivalent of teats or dugs, more often used of animals) as 'very bad', and noted in a footnote that the Illyrian word was *sise*.¹⁴ He expressed his astonishment at Fortis's claim that Morlack women could breastfeed over the shoulder: 'I would never have suspected that a Natural Historian such as Fortis would have embraced this opinion, which foreigners have invented as a fantastic story'. Lovrich placed the tale in the context of national and racial characteristics by recalling Juvenal's remark that no one would be surprised to see a breast bigger than the baby nursing from it in Meroë, in Ethiopia, but he emphasized that Morlack women were not of similar stock (*schiatte*), a term with connotations of racial difference. He considered the degree of variation in the local population: true, some Morlack women had huge breasts (at least 'to the eyes of a foreigner'), but there were also average-sized ones in the same territory. Lovrich here explicitly insisted on the European dimensions of Morlack breasts: they were exactly 'like the breasts of many women of other European nations'. Lovrich then considered the possible influence of climate, which was however the same on both sides of the Adriatic – the effects would be no different for Morlacks than for Italian women. The length of time that women spent breastfeeding was also irrelevant: otherwise similarly marvellous breasts would be seen among Italian wetnurses. Lovrich concluded by disclaiming any special interest in the subject other than the weight Fortis had given it: 'It would never have crossed my mind otherwise to write a dissertation on this point' (81-82). But his brief passage was a virtuoso performance, criticizing Fortis not just for error but for impropriety (and, in true primitivist fashion, getting in a dig at women who were too civilized to nurse their own babies), while applying ethnic profiling, empirical observation and logic in his defence of the Europeaness of Morlack breasts and breastfeeding.

Lovrich's *Osservazioni* provoked Fortis to publish at least three, and possibly five responses, in less than a year. Contemporary gossip and Fortis's own correspondence suggest he feared the effect of Lovrich's criticisms on his career, and particularly his hopes of being offered the chair of natural history at the University of Padua.¹⁵ All his replies follow the same formula, working through a selection of Lovrich's criticisms, disputing their validity, and identifying the Dalmatian's own shortcomings. The resulting quibbles obscure any larger differences between the two approaches. Fortis showed little interest in following up the Dalmatian's diagnoses of economic and social problems, let alone the character of its inhabitants and the perfectibility of the

¹⁴ G. Romani, *Dizionario generale de' sinonimi*, 1826, vol. 3, p. 496, 'zinne': usually applied to animals; 'linguaggio basso' when applied to humans.

¹⁵ C. Fisković, 'Josip Offner i Ivan Lovrić', in *Ivan Lovrić i njegovo doba*, Sinj, 1979, pp. 181-91 (rivalries over the chair of natural history); Arhiv Muzeja Splita (AMS), *Bajamontijeva pisma*, Fortis to Giulio Bajamonti, Easter Sunday, 1777 (*Viaggio* translated in spite of Lovrich's objections). Note that the excerpts from this correspondence published by I. Milčetić, 'Dr. Julije Bajamonti i njegova djela', *Rad JAZU*, No. 192, 1912, pp. 97-250, are incomplete and sometimes inaccurate. A recent volume transcribes these and other letters from Fortis: Luana Giurgevich (ed.), *Dall'epistolario di Alberto Fortis. Destinazione Dalmazia*, Piran, 2010 (my thanks to Luana Giurgevich and Kristjan Knez, of the Società di studi storici e geografici Pirano, for making this publication available to me).

Morlacks. The real issue in the polemic was the authority to pronounce upon the people and the province. Fortis feared, as he recognized in a private letter to J.S. Wyttenbach, a Swiss scholar, that ‘those fools who make up the largest number of those gentlemen who read prefaces would sooner believe that a Morlack should know his country without studying it better than an Italian who had occupied himself with it over several months’.¹⁶ His responses show the sorts of weapons he relied upon to ‘enlighten these fools’ and establish his own superior authority: detailed rebuttals, lists of the names of colleagues and assistants who had aided his research in Dalmatia, references to marks of professional esteem (membership of academies, publications in foreign journals, translations of his work) – but also ridicule of his opponent.

His first unsigned review in the *Nuovo Giornale d'Italia* praised Lovrich’s ambition but censured his execution, deriding the value of Lovrich’s work by focusing on the most trivial of his corrections of Fortis, and insinuating that Lovrich was not the real author of the book. Fortis raised the issue of authoritative knowledge directly with respect to Lovrich’s chapter on the customs of the Morlacks. He conceded that Lovrich, as a Morlack ‘co-national’, ‘ought to be trusted more than the Italian Fortis’, but also argued that Lovrich had generalized the customs of his own district to the whole of Dalmatia.¹⁷ A second review responded to praise of Lovrich in the Florentine *Gazetta universale* (15 June 1776: 383-84), among other things for keeping his promise not to insult Fortis while criticizing his opinions. This anonymous contribution in the *Efemeridi di Roma* (probably by Fortis, or someone very close to him) was more heated than the previous review: the criticisms made by the ‘pseudonymous youth’ were ‘insipid’, his book was ‘miserable’, the author was ‘as infelicitous an etymologist as he was a bad logician’, Lovrich was an apologist for a heretic and a friend to the highway robber, Sočivica, whose ‘detestable Life’, included in the *Osservazioni*, ‘has nauseated all good men’, and more. The reviewer was certain that ‘an adversary such as Sig. Lovrich will make our Sig. Ab. Fortis laugh. *Impar congressus Achilli* [i.e. Lovrich was no match for ‘Achilles’] and announced that a young Dalmatian from the island of Cres would soon prove that Lovrich ‘has in no way found the Italian traveler to be in error’. The review concluded: ‘We look forward to seeing the jest, if these two Slavs set to scratching one another!’¹⁸

This review by a ‘young man of Cres’, entitled *Sermone Parenetico* or ‘exhortative sermon’ was in fact written by Fortis himself and published in Modena in 1777 under the pseudonym of ‘Pietro Sclamer of Cres’ – after some delay, which Fortis attributed to Lovrich’s allies among the Venetian censors.¹⁹ The 28-page pamphlet listed

¹⁶Ž. Muljačić, ‘Iz korespondencije A. Fortisa s J. S. Wittenbachom’, *Radovi Filozofskog fakulteta u Zadru* 7, Zadar, 1968, pp. 113-118.

¹⁷*Nuovo Giornale d'Italia*, 20 July 1776, pp. 2-5; unsigned, but attributed to Fortis in the index.

¹⁸*Efemeridi di Roma*, 31 August 1776, pp. 274-78; not by a Dalmatian, since Fortis was still demanding that they contribute to the controversy on his behalf (AMS, *Bajamontijeva pisma*, Fortis to Bajamonti, 26 Sept. 1777).

¹⁹*Sermone Parenetico di Pietro Sclamer Chersino al signor Giovanni Lovrich, nativo di Sign in Morlacchia, autore delle Osservazioni sopra il Viaggio in Dalmazia del Sig. Abate Alberto Fortis*, Modena, 1777. Contemporaries assumed that it was by Fortis, but he stoutly maintained the pretence that it was by a Dalmatian. However, a hitherto unremarked slip of the pen in the text citing material published in an ‘English journal’ as ‘mine’

Lovrich's 'barbarisms in language, errors in fact, false interpretations, extravagant deductions, contradictions' (*Sermone*, 20) and assailed them with a vituperation unmatched in other reviews. Lovrich's comments on Morlack breasts reappeared in the context of claims to linguistic expertise. 'Sclamer', who allegedly spoke Illyrian as a native, defended Fortis's grasp of that language, while regretting that the Italian was too ready to concede authority to a Dalmatian such as Lovrich. Still, 'he could not have refrained from laughter, finding himself reproved for having called Morlack breasts *zinne*, and finding that you took this word, which is pure and simple Tuscan, for a mistake in Illyrian'. This – deliberate? – misreading of Lovrich's complaint shifted the reader's laughter from Fortis's lack of decorum to Lovrich's lack of linguistic skills: 'Sclamer' recommended that Lovrich purchase an Italian dictionary. 'Sclamer' went on to remark that he would happily leave to Lovrich the task of ascertaining the size of the 'dugs' to be found in Lovrich's native district of Sinj. However, not even Lovrich could 'stand on two feet and deny to one of your co-nationals, who treats you with such politeness, that the revolting long breasts which Abbé Fortis remarked were to be seen, with nausea, even in Croatia' and that children were breastfed even to the ages of four or five years. After all, 'Sclamer' had seen this personally in Fiume (*Sermone*, 24). The over-the-shoulder claims vanish unremarked in the ridicule.

Larry Wolff is right to point out the main weakness of Fortis's claims to base his conclusions on empirical observation: a foreign public had no means of verifying whether he was correct when he was challenged by a Dalmatian native.²⁰ By inventing 'Pietro Sclamer' to speak for him, Fortis effectively conceded greater authority to a Dalmatian who could adjudicate between his claims and Lovrich's at those points where he was most vulnerable – his linguistic expertise and local knowledge. But there was much more to this appropriation of a Dalmatian voice than simply borrowing authority. Fortis was anxious lest the silence of his Dalmatian colleagues be taken as evidence of their agreement with Lovrich: 'Sclamer' said as much, anxious lest Lovrich's readers think that 'the Dalmatians have shown no displeasure with your extravagant proceedings' (*Sermone*, 5). In private letters, Fortis had urged his Dalmatian friend Giulio Bajamonti to speak out against Lovrich, and chided the members of the Split academy for not taking up cudgels for him.²¹ Rather than waiting, however, Fortis took it on himself to ventriloquize his own idea of what the Dalmatians *ought* to feel and say. Thus, addressing Lovrich in the person of 'Sclamer': 'it seemed to me that you have done dishonour to the nation, which fully ought to be, and certainly is, grateful to Abbé Fortis, who was the first foreigner who conceived of making our provinces illustrious' (*Sermone*, 5). Lovrich's book, on the other hand, had 'distressed the good and grateful

indicates the true author (*Sermone*, 17). This refers to a letter from John Strange, quoting Fortis, in *Archaeologia, or, miscellaneous tracts relating to antiquity*, vol. 3, London, 1775. On the censors, see Ž. Muljačić, *Putovanja Alberta Fortisa po Hrvatskoj i Sloveniji, 1765-1791*, Split, 1996, p. 113; Muljačić, 'Iz korespondencije', 115; AMS, *Bajamontijeva pisma*, Fortis to Bajamonti, Easter Sunday, 1777.

²⁰ Wolff, *Venice and the Slavs*, 254.

²¹ AMS, *Bajamontijeva pisma*, Fortis to Bajamonti, Easter Sunday 1777 (the Split academicians should be honored 'to be beaten like a carpet by this madman', but 'those so honored should pay him a tribute'); 1 Aug 1777 (Dalmatian academicians 'should 'take a whip in hand'; why are they 'stupid' in the face of 'this ass who bites and kicks'?); 26 Sept. 1777 (Bajamonti should neutralize the 'stench of this shitty Morlack-Trogir writing').

Dalmatians' (*Sermone*, 27). In other words, Fortis felt that he deserved Dalmatian gratitude for having done their country the honour of having introduced it to the world; and that Lovrich had dishonoured Dalmatia, not only by commemorating the life of a bandit, but by not having been properly deferential to the eminent Italian. Fortis firmly believed that 'good Dalmatians' were 'grateful Dalmatians'.

Fortis's burlesque was also staged to entertain: it delivered the promised spectacle of a Slav-on-Slav cat-fight, with 'Sclamer' in the role of a *schivone*, a stock figure of the Venetian *commedia dell'arte* who served as an excuse for extravagant linguistic parody. While the tone of Fortis's signed responses to Lovrich is lofty and magisterial, that of 'Sclamer' is exuberantly abusive. The difference was important to Fortis, who made a point of it when sending copies of the polemical pamphlets to Wyttenbach: 'You will find that that my tone is not that of the seething Illyrians'. Indeed. Listen to the epithets used by 'Sclamer' in addressing his adversary, in contexts that render them entirely ironic: 'O young Sig. Lovrich', 'brisk Sig. Lovrich', 'O meek, thoughtful, poor, innocent, prudent, exact, tireless, most robust, inexpert, most diligent, modest, exasperated, learned, most erudite, truthful, most beloved, 'O honoured Sig. Lovrich!' 'Sclamer' lectured Lovrich on the tone a critic should take:

'the most civil possible. Insult, malign sarcasm, and impertinent mockery make a few people laugh, nauseate a greater number, and prove nothing. He who wishes to make known the imperfections of a book should not injure or bite the person of the author, nor can he do this without dishonouring himself. You have busied yourself biting and injuring Abbé Fortis, but he will not bite you nor injure you, as I have not, since I have only attended to the errors of your writing' (*Sermone*, 20).

So it was not impertinent mockery or malign sarcasm, when 'Sclamer' pretended, for instance, that breastfeeding would necessarily be cut short in Lovrich's district of Sinj if all the children resembled him, since 'mothers would be obliged to wean them right away, so as not to be bitten' (24). The contrast between the solemn rejection of insult and the actual abuse was just part of the comedy. Dragging up as a Dalmatian allowed Fortis to 'bite' and ridicule Lovrich at no cost to himself – his mask allowed him to maintain the fiction of Abbé Fortis as a civilized Italian. Perhaps the play-acting also allowed Fortis to indulge the 'savage self-esteem' he had felt when he had been praised by a Morlack and recognized (so he claimed) as one of them: 'Sir, you are not an Italian poltroon, you are a Morlacco!' (*Viaggio*, II, 87).

On the other hand, Fortis's Dalmatian masquerade – like that of the *commedia dell'arte schivone* – simultaneously depended upon and reinforced the stereotype of uncouth, violent, savage Slavs, some 'more civilized' and some less so. This in turn propped up a hierarchy of *coltura* among nations, running from the civilized Italian to 'the more cultured Dalmatian' to the savage Morlack. 'Sclamer' referred to this hierarchy with heavy irony, telling Lovrich that 'I have the disgrace to have been born and raised on an island in the Quarnero; and therefore feel myself to be inferior to you, who are a Morlack, and in consequence more noble, more valorous, and more virtuous than myself' (6). More noble, maybe, but 'Sclamer' lost no opportunity to remind Lovrich not only that was he a Morlack, but that he had been born in a 'wild' and 'uncivilized' district

(*Sermone*, 8, 18). And as such he was obviously inferior to the cultivated Italian: 'Examine yourself, Sig. Lovrich, and you will see that there is a great difference between an inhabitant of the fields of the Cetina, and Abbé Fortis' (11), just as there was between Dalmatia and Italy, 'which is certainly not a savage land, and in any part comparable to your Morlacchia' (9). An unremarked irony here was that the verbal antics Sclamer displayed as a travesty Slav were, in turn, precisely the sort of voluble excesses then being attributed to Italian 'poltroons' by the English, and which Fortis's patrons Hervey and Strange may have had in mind, when wishing that Fortis had 'less wind in his sails and more ballast in his bottom'.²² Perhaps this had some part in the vehemence with which the Italian insisted on the proper place of those civilizationally inferior to himself. In any case, this faux-Slav slapstick was far more abusive and personal than anything the Slav Lovrich had written about the Italian Fortis.

In the meantime, however, Lovrich had returned to the debate with his own *Lettera apologetica*, a text that is completely unread today.²³ In 16 unapologetic pages, Lovrich defended himself against the reviews by Fortis and 'a partisan of Sig. Fortis', by whom Lovrich appears to have intended Giulio Bajamonti.²⁴ He addressed his letter to the academician Antonio Maria Lorgna, on the grounds that Lorgna, as a 'profound philosopher, knowledgeable about the Illyrian language and our places', would be capable of adjudicating between the two adversaries. (Lorgna's father had been an officer, and Lorgna himself a cadet in the company of Croatian cavalry in Verona.) Lovrich began by placing the reviewers' criticisms side by side with his own and defending his claims. To the extent that their criticisms were petty and carping, so were his responses, something he admits. The larger issues raised in his *Osservazioni* are lost in the rough and tumble, just as in his critic's ripostes. Instead, Lovrich homes in on issues of ethnographic authority. Evidence rather than assertion, autopsy rather than hearsay – according to Lovrich, there was no dispute about these basic principles and the authority they conferred. But beyond that, whose view of a culture should prevail? By what principle did Fortis deny the validity of traditions preserved by the Dalmatians in the absence of other information? 'Should not the preferred opinion be that which has been handed down by the nation itself, as long as it is not repugnant to truth?' Lovrich goes on to confront one nation's civilization to another's tradition: 'if a writer of one nation, however civilized it may be, were to negate or correct the traditional and probable memories of another nation which preserves them, would that not perhaps render him the object of the other's laughter?' (6) 'Civilization' was not enough to confer the authority to know and to represent others; pulling rank was a form of arrogance and deserved laughter in response.

²²Wolff, 120; Muljačić, *Putovanje Alberta Fortisa po Hrvatskoj i Sloveniji (1765-1791)*, Split 1996, pp. 59 ff. For a contemporaneous travel polemic against English travelers' depictions of the Italians, J. Baretti, *An account of the manners and customs of Italy with observations on the mistakes of some travellers, with regard to that country*, London, 1769.

²³*Lettera apologetica di Giovanni Lovrich al celebre Signor Antonio Lorgna, Colonello degl'Ingegneri, Membro di varie più illustri Accademie di Europa, in cui confutano varie censure fatte al suo libro, che à per titolo: Osservazioni sopra diversi pezzi del Viaggio in Dalmazia del signor abate Alberto Fortis*, Brescia, 1777; my thanks to Stefano Petrungero for arranging for the Padua University Library copy to be copied for me.

²⁴Lovrich got their authorship back to front, attributing that in the *Efemeridi di Roma* to Fortis, and in the *Giornale d'Italia* to 'a partisan of Fortis'.

Lovrich was acutely aware that Fortis had attempted to discredit his own claim to authority by labelling him an uncivilized Morlack and not a 'more civilized' Dalmatian. This was a constant in Fortis's comments on Lovrich, private, public and pseudonymous.²⁵ But Lovrich, far from being ambivalent about his own relationship to the Morlacchi, made it a point of national pride, explaining to Lorgna: 'In case you have not understood, Sig. Censor informs you that the Morlacchi are my co-nationals, not because of the reason for which I pride myself to be so, but because he foolishly believes to do me an injury' (11): Fortis's idealization of the Morlacks did not extend to recognizing one of them as an equal. At the same time, Fortis had derided Lovrich's limited knowledge of these Morlack co-nationals: 'on the one hand I bravely deny facts known to all the province, and on the other I set as universal some usages and opinions solely pertaining to that tiny territory where I was born' (11). While in the *Osservazioni* he had observed that the knowledge of a people's customs needed to judge them could be acquired 'even while sitting down', in his *Lettera* Lovrich backtracked, stressing that he too had needed to gain his knowledge of the Morlacks empirically, not least by travel through Dalmatia. But travel was not everything: even while at home, Lovrich claimed, he had better reasons than others to inform himself about the Morlacchi (*Osservazioni*, 67; *Lettera*, p. 11).

By contrasting his own engaged interest with the investigations carried out by Fortis and his friends, Lovrich took the argument into his adversary's camp. While in his *Viaggio* Fortis presented his acquaintance with the Morlacchi as the result of personal encounters, he had also solicited help from a wide range of native Dalmatian informants. Fortis had drawn up a questionnaire to guide collaborators, entitled '*Preliminary notes believed necessary to serve to direct travels intended to illustrate the Natural History and the Geography of the Provinces adjacent to the Adriatic, and particularly Istria, Morlacchia, Dalmatia, Albania and the contiguous islands*'. The section entitled 'on the Men' went from the rise and fall of population through 'stature and general hairiness' to 'monstrosities', 'names of national heroes', 'distinguished families' and ancient statutes.²⁶ Lovrich's first point was that the urban Dalmatians Fortis relied upon for information did not know much about the peasants and shepherds of the rural hinterland, and their motives in seeking such information were less personal and urgent than his own, as someone who lived and worked with these people. Lovrich gave a glimpse of the means they used to collect material. One had tried to overawe his informant: 'with the exhibition of a watch he sought general details from one of our Franciscans who has spent his life as a priest in various villages, but who refused to give them to him' (11). The scene is reminiscent of the explorer-ethnographer dazzling a recalcitrant native with his stereotypical string of beads.

Another collaborator was 'the partisan of Sig. Fortis', believed by Lovrich to be the author of the review in the *Giornale d'Italia*. According to Lovrich, this fellow student –

²⁵ As well as the two anonymous reviews in *Efemeridi di Roma* of 1776 and 1777, identifying Lovrich as a Morlack, see also private letters to Wyttembach (Muljačić, 'Iz korespondencije', p. 113: '*jeune Morlaque*'); AMS, *Bajamontijeva pisma*, Fortis to Bajamonti, Easter Sunday, 1777, '*Morlacco energumeno*' ('possessed by demons'); 8 August 1777, '*il pastorello Lovrich*'; and in Sclamer, as above.

²⁶ Reprinted in Muljačić, *Putovanja*, pp. 181-88.

identified by Fortis as Giulio Bajamonti – had solicited information on the customs of the Morlacchi, perhaps on the basis of Fortis’s ‘preliminary notes’:

A few years ago, the partisan of Signor Abbé Fortis importuned me several times in my rooms in the College of San Marco in Padua, to give him general notes on the usages of the Morlacchi, in order to fatten up the book of his friend Sig. Fortis. But now what? At that time I knew enough to provide universal notes, but now he leaves me the full liberty to determine only the customs of my own territory?

Lovrich then moved on to the motif of the gullible traveler, and the temptation to feed him the tales that he expects to hear. His self-justification turns on a jest:

It so happened at that time that, having filled a page with these customs, one of my closest friends, my dear friend Sebastiano Salimbeni, dissuaded me from the thought of writing more, telling me, ‘Why should you fatigue yourself for others, who will perhaps not even thank you?’ And he then later added, ‘Write that the breasts of the Morlack women are so long that they throw them over their shoulders, and see whether the writer on the customs of the Morlacks will print as true even this fable’. I wrote it for a laugh [*per ridere*], and found it printed by Sig. Fortis in all seriousness in volume one of his *Viaggio in Dalmazia* on page 81.

Lovrich presents the story primarily as a means of establishing his own authority to write on Morlack customs in general and in particular. He concluded: ‘If the partisan of Sig. Fortis had recalled this matter, he would have sought some other flaws, I believe, in order to defend his friend’ (11).

This explains Lovrich’s comment, in his *Osservazioni*, that contortionist Morlack breastfeeding was a tall story ‘invented by foreigners’ – who here turns out to be a sceptical Italian university student well versed in the natural history of savage man. It is impossible to know whether Lovrich’s account is true, but it is certainly plausible that he wrote it ‘for a laugh’. It is easy to imagine the two young men laughing at the Paduan abbé’s eagerness to see the Morlacks as savages, betrayed by his questionnaire’s interest in ‘stature and hairiness’. Their amusement might have been increased by Fortis’s exoticizing attitude to Venice’s overseas possessions, which were ordinary and everyday to both of them: while Lovrich was a Dalmatian, the Veronese Salimbeni had family ties on Corfu. That Fortis made such play of his sceptical attitude to hearsay only improved the jest. And as with most jokes, even private ones, the ensuing laughter defined a boundary: in this case, excluding the Italian traveler who was so keen on empathising with his Dalmatian subjects; even, when it suited him, with those savage Morlacks (not an ‘Italian poltroon’, but ‘a Morlacco’). Lovrich kept this joke private in his *Osservazioni*, instead attempting to persuade the naturalist – with observation, logic and comparison – that Morlack breasts were not at all savage or non-European. He only invited readers to laugh along with him at the gullible naturalist when his reviewer questioned Lovrich’s ethnographic authority, and promised that Fortis would make *him* a laughingstock. Lovrich’s conclusion to his pamphlet displayed some heavy-handed irony on the subject of laughter: ‘To confess the truth, I don’t think so highly of myself as to confront such an Achilles, but if fraternal charity were not so close to my heart, I

would like to offer Sig. Fortis such motives for laughter that he would be in danger of suffocating from laughing so much' (13-14).

In his open letter rebutting Lovrich, *L'Abate Fortis al signor Giovanni Lovrich* (Brescia, 1777), Fortis took a haughty tone, denying that such an adversary made him laugh: 'rebukes written honestly and reasonably against my affairs' prompted 'joyous laughter', but Lovrich's 'waste of time, of talent, and of good opinion' made him weep. But, characteristically, Fortis tried to have it both ways: 'do you know who was laughing, a little maliciously? [...] A young man of Cres was laughing' and he warned of the consequences should this laughter turn to anger (viii). Both the laughter and the anger were, of course, Fortis's own. As far as Morlack breasts were concerned, Fortis denied that he had fallen for Lovrich's joke: 'As concerns the notes which you claim to have had the delicacy to communicate to Sig. Bajamonti, to make mock of him, and of me, I have not the honour to recognize them, and I assure you that I made no use of them whatsoever' (v). Fortis went on to assert that what he had originally described as a 'tale' was nothing but the unvarnished truth, personally witnessed by himself and by others – though he quietly dropped the over-the-shoulder claims. 'I said that the Morlack women have very long, repulsive breasts because I have seen this, and because many honest people, incapable of jesting with anyone whomsoever have confirmed it; and I am able to add that the Croat women, the Wallachian women and the Gypsies of the Banat have the same defect. But Your Lordship, as long as you can relish the pleasure of contradicting me, will deny even the facts' (v). Fortis also abandoned his argument from causation, no longer mentioning long periods of breastfeeding as a reason for this physical anomaly. Instead, he called on the authority of unnamed 'honest people' distinguished by their straitlaced gravity, unlike Lovrich (or 'Sclamer'?). And when he looked for other examples, he passed over Hottentots and Lapps and pointed to European nations that were being identified as equally primitive and savage – an Eastern Europe *avant la lettre*. But *how* was he able to add these 'facts'? Fortis had never visited Wallachia or the Banat. It is tempting to imagine the abbé searching through just-published books by Jean-Louis Carra and Ignaz von Born, and seizing gratefully on passages about the revealing costumes of the women of Moldavia and Wallachia, or the half-naked gold-washing gypsies of the Banat; or noting down lines on the uncorseted women of Croatia as he arranged the translation of Balthasar Hacquet's *Hodeporic Letter* from 'Illyrio'.²⁷ None of these writers, however, include tales of extravagantly pendulous breasts, let alone gymnastic breastfeeding. Why was Fortis so reluctant to concede that this inhumanity might be a *favola* after all? Perhaps he felt that he had to face down Lovrich's laughter in order to preserve his own credibility.

In a final salvo, styled as a review of the *Sermone Parenetico* in the *Efemeridi di Roma* of 26 June 1777, the same anonymous author gave an approving summary of Sclamer's denunciations as an excuse for another blast at Lovrich, concluding by asserting that

²⁷Jean-Louis Carra, *Histoire de la Moldavie et de la Valachie*, Paris, 1777, p. 214; Ignaz von Born, *Briefe über mineralogische Gegenstände, auf seiner Reise durch das Temeswarer Bannat, Siebenbürgen, Ober- und Nieder-Hungarn*, Frankfurt & Leipzig, 1774, p. 89; Balthasar Hacquet, 'Lettera odeporica[...] fatto pell' Illirio Ungarese e Turchesco da Lubiana in Carniola sino a Semlin nel Sirmio' in C. Amoretti and F. Soave (eds), *Opuscoli scelti sulle scienze, etc.*, 1778, I, p. 14 (sent to the editors for publication by Fortis).

the Morlack women would always be grateful to him for having ‘defended their long, disgusting dugs with great energy’; ‘if he had done nothing else than this, he would have been more sensible’ (238). Whether Lovrich was right or wrong about Morlack breasts, his words on the subject could still be made a matter of laughter. Lovrich never had the chance to respond. By the end of 1777 he was dead of tuberculosis, still in his early twenties. Subsequently, bibliographers in Italy and Croatia spread a rumour that Lovrich had died of sheer pique at Fortis’s final letter – though still others put the blame on Fortis’s ‘sanguinary words’.²⁸

The confrontation between Lovrich and Fortis posed questions about ethnographic and autoethnographic authority in ways that anticipate debates in the contemporary social sciences.²⁹ What positions and experiences confer the authority to represent and judge cultures and peoples? What power relations underpin claims to this authority? What textual devices authorize the claims made? How are challenges resolved? For all Fortis’s claims to rely solely on a sceptical empiricism, he was unwilling to rest his case on his own observations when it came to confronting a Dalmatian challenger. This emerges from his pseudonymous *Sermone Parenetico*. By inventing the Dalmatian ‘Sclamer’ to support his claims, Fortis in effect conceded authority to an indigenous observer – pandering to those ‘fools’ who believed that natives were better placed to speak about a culture. Publicly, however, he emphatically denied that locals were *ipso facto* better qualified to represent themselves: one of his main complaints about Lovrich was that he imposed on ‘good people who believed that a Dalmatian must know the matters of his fatherland even without having studied them, more than a foreigner who had busied himself about them for some time’ (though they were ‘good people’ only in print).³⁰ In his final letter, he completely rejected the notion that popular tradition could be of any value: ‘the word of a stupid people is not to be confused with the venerable tradition I have mentioned elsewhere’ (*L’Abate Fortis*, v). This is not simply a matter of Fortis’s real disdain for the people he claimed in print to admire. His dismissal of Lovrich as an uncivilized Morlack was clearly intended to undermine his adversary’s authority as a scholarly interpreter of his own nation (as was the constant harping on Lovrich’s youth, and the insinuations that he had not, in fact, written the book that bore his name). Ultimately, where he could not refute Lovrich, Fortis based his authority on his own superior claim to ‘civilization’.

In his turn, while Lovrich unhesitatingly agreed that he and the Morlacks were of the same nation, there are limits to Lovrich’s claim to autoethnographic authority. He nowhere uses the phrase ‘we Morlacks’ – a mark not of ambivalence about his identity, but of his reluctance to speak for an entire culture. In his *Osservazioni* Lovrich had carefully noted the social connotations of the term ‘Morlacco’, which was applied only to peasants and shepherds (72), and in his *Lettera* he presents himself as an

²⁸ B. G. da Bassano, *Serie dei testi di lingua e di altre opere importanti nella italiana letteratura*, Venice, 1839, p. 688; G. Valentinelli, *Bibliografia della Dalmazia e del Montenegro*, Zagreb, 1855, p. 25; cf. G. Vedova, *Biografia degli scrittori padovani*, Padua, 1831, I, p. 417; E. de Tiplado, *Biografia degli Italiani illustri nelle scienze*, Venice, 1835, II, 241.

²⁹ See, for example, J. Clifford, ‘On Ethnographic Authority’, *Representations* No. 2, 1983, pp. 118-46; J. Buzard, ‘On Auto-Ethnographic Authority’, *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 16/1, 2003, pp. 61-91.

³⁰ *L’Abate Fortis al Signor Lovrich*, viii; Muljačić, ‘Iz korespondencije’, pp. 113-118.

engaged investigator of Morlack life, as well as their co-national. But like Fortis he too found that empirical evidence and reason, even bolstered with expert local knowledge, were not always enough to convince. Where Fortis resorted to a hierarchy of civilization, Lovrich responded with derisive laughter.

In his *Osservazioni* Lovrich had objected to the way in which Fortis joked that pine-smoke was what turned the moustaches of the Morlacks black, protesting that the Italian 'wanted to make his readers laugh at the expense of others' (88). The exchanges that followed were laced with references to laughter: laughter anticipating the confusion of an inadequate adversary; the laughter to be had from two Slavs clawing at one another; the malicious laughter of a supposed co-national; laughter at the arrogance of a foreigner, 'no matter how civilized'; a practical joke written for a laugh; laughter that suffocates; honest witnesses incapable of jesting; joyous laughter at enlightenment and tears at fruitless animosity; laughter that turns to anger. It is telling that the participants choose the vocabulary of laughter over that of ridicule. Laughter at the ridiculous is involuntary and blameless, but ridicule relies on false, reprehensible laughter. Yet this laughter did function to humiliate and discipline opponents. Some of it clearly aimed to assert a superior authority; some of it challenged hierarchy and exposed its weakness. From this perspective, the polemicists' laughter exposes Europe's lines of fracture in a familiar form: centre against periphery, natives against foreigners, East against West.

Mocking laughter runs through many travel polemics of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But the cross-cultural context imposed distinctive requirements upon polemical laughter, and complicates our understanding of its functions and consequences.³¹ It is not enough to ask who laughed at whom. We must also ask for whom. Jeering at foreigners assumed an audience of compatriots, for the the outraged travelee as well as for the mocking traveler. But many travelees invited a cosmopolitan readership beyond their native province to share their laughter at the pretensions of ethnocentric 'experts'. Lying behind this use of humour may have been the recognition that they needed to catch the attention of distant readers, even to amuse them, in order to get their counter-evidence heard. But in the process they constructed the Republic of Letters as a community of laughter that dissolved national or cultural boundaries, rather than reinforced them. Fortis's polemical laughter ultimately pitted civilized Europeans against Slavs, not just the savage Morlacchi (and it is telling that not even his Dalmatian partisans were willing to share his mirth in public). Lovrich's laughter placed no cultural or geographical boundaries on his implied audience: patriotic Dalmatians, learned Europeans, even Morlacks confronted with examples of Italian 'philosophical curiosity' could all join in.

The cultural differences that lay at the base of these polemics also encouraged the use of laughter as a weapon. Both travelers and travelees assessed the moral and

³¹Dissatisfied with a historical, universalist approaches to humour, historians have begun to examine its techniques and functions in socio-cultural context. In practice this has usually meant within a single national framework (e.g. A. Richardot, *Le rire des Lumières*, Paris, 2002, for eighteenth-century France). However, for an approach explicitly problematizing multi-cultural audiences, see *Cheeky fictions: laughter and the postcolonial*, ed. by S. Reichl and M. Stein, Amsterdam, 2005.

civilizational character of a people from their own subjective, culturally relative perspectives. But how were they to agree what conformed to truth and reason in their interpretations when even physical facts – the size of women’s breasts – could be a matter of dispute? Under such circumstances, winning the argument was more feasible than agreeing where the truth lay, and laughter at one’s opponent could be more effective than rational criticism. Hence the popularity of the *ad hominem* attack more generally; here however incommensurable cultural perspectives prompted the resort to laughter. Still, the jester ran the risk of undermining his authority with the jest. ‘The biter bit’ is a familiar moral; what is notable in these cross-cultural polemics is that the risk was, in fact, greater for some than for others. Was mocking laughter compatible with civilization? After all, Fortis found it expedient to arrange for a Dalmatian stand-in to do his laughing for him, while Lovrich’s joke was used to prove that he was an uncivilized Morlack.

All the talk of laughter in the Fortis-Lovrich polemics wasn’t, of course, the same as actually laughing. Like television’s canned laughter, it was a way of bullying the reader to respond as desired. Did it work? Initial reviews show that the reception was mixed. One 1777 German review, promptly translated into English, remarked that Lovrich’s objections to Fortis ‘seem rather trifling, and uninteresting to readers of another country’, though it commended ‘some interesting or entertaining remarks of his own’. The reviewer was most entertained by the oddity of the customs attested by Lovrich, however, thus making laughable the protests of this ‘Morlacchian gentleman’. (The derisive oxymoron suggests a source close to Fortis.)³² An anonymous 1778 Dalmatian appraisal of the Fortis-Lovrich polemic, on the other hand, dismissed spurious claims to authority and queried prompts to laughter. It was irrelevant whether the adversaries were ‘learned or ignorant, young or old, noble or plebian, or of one nation rather than another’— the sole issue was whether their claims were true or false.³³ In assessing the character of the polemic, the writer aimed to judge whether ‘crass ignorance’, ‘hidden passion’ and ‘the evil talent of biting, and falsifying the writings of others’ were finally ‘deserving more of laughter or of tears’ (5-6). Lovrich and Fortis were equally in the dock in this pamphlet, the trial carried out on the basis of systematically compared claims and counter-claims – with the exception of the ‘Pietro Sclamer’ sermon, since it had not been published under Fortis’s name and thus ‘the writer cannot be distinguished from the writings, nor the wit from the fancy dress’ (6-7). This arbiter weighed the evidence about a variety of issues in dispute, including the debate over Morlack breastfeeding. He found ‘indisputable’ Lovrich’s assertion that he had communicated to Fortis’s friend ‘the truly ridiculous anecdote that the breasts of the Morlack women are so long that they let them hang over their shoulders’; and concluded ‘that Sig. Abate Fortis had sipped from them also’ since he repeated the story in his *Viaggio* (11). The image of a breastfeeding abbé suggested that laughter was an appropriate response to this aspect of their quarrel, at least.

³² *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen*, vol. 2, 1777, pp. 716-18; *Critical Review*, 1778, v. 46, pp. 385-86; see also *L’Esprit des Journaux*, Nov. 1776, pp. 37-44, based on a review in *Giornale enciclopedico*.

³³ *Saggio diviso in due parti, sopra le controversie letterarie della Dalmazia, e di alcuni pezzi dell’ opera intitolata Riflessioni economico-politiche del Sigr. Pietro Nutrizio*, Venice, 1778, p. 5; my thanks to Jelena Bulić for arranging the HAZU Library copy to be copied for me.

This anonymous author pointed out that the Dalmatian literary controversies over the Fortis-Lovrich polemic were motivated more by a spirit of factionalism than by the matters ostensibly at stake. But note that these factions did not reflect a foreign/native division: both protagonists had partisans and enemies across Italy and Dalmatia.³⁴ However, the subsequent circulation of the works of the two writers was more uneven. Once the image of the primitive Morlacks caught the imagination of Europeans, both Fortis's and Lovrich's works were plundered and adapted as part of a literary Morlaccomania. This had little to do with the ethnographic authority either writer commanded, and much more to do with the fuel their writings offered to the Romantic imagination. It is not true, as sometimes claimed, that it was only Lovrich's biography of the bandit Sočivica that was translated for a foreign audience in search of exoticism; his *Osservazioni* were also translated into German, commended as an improvement on Fortis, though the editor noted that his objections to the Italian were 'somewhat presumptuous and unreasonable'.³⁵ But it was Fortis's work that reached an audience of natural historians of mankind, with his remarks on Morlack breasts cited as authoritative evidence for over-the-shoulder breastfeeding (including, in a nicely circular move, in a revised edition of Buffon's *Natural History*). Lovrich's rebuttal went unremarked. This is not simply a reflection of the greater circulation of editions of the abbé's work. The scholarly reception of the tale confirms a new predisposition to accept savage characteristics in what had come to be a savage region of Europe.³⁶

In Croatia, Lovrich's work was only rediscovered by scholarship in the early twentieth century, with his *Osservazioni* translated in 1948 and incorporated into the national canon.³⁷ What is surprising is that his *Lettera apologetica* has gone unread and, more astonishingly, the tale of his practical joke on Fortis is completely unknown. The Croat Marijan Stojković, writing the first modern account of the polemic in 1932, appears to have seen Lovrich's *Lettera* but if so he suppressed any mention of Lovrich's joke about Morlack breastfeeding to emphasize Fortis's greater accuracy, using the tale to score points in nationalist controversy with the Serbs. Stojković went so far as to state that some 'Vlachs' (i.e. Serbs) probably *could* suckle over the shoulder – and cited oral poetry about the mother of the Serbian hero Miloš Obilić from Vuk Karadžić's *Rečnik* as evidence.³⁸ Later scholars seem not to have known of Lovrich's *Lettera*, or not to have read it.³⁹ It seems extraordinary that Lovrich's final work should have been neglected so

³⁴For contemporary gossip, C. Fisković, 'Josip Offner i Ivan Lovrić', 181-91. Bajamonti nursed a grudge against Lovrich long afterwards, for example demanding that his name be dropped from a work listing eminent Dalmatian writers; AMS, *Bajamontijeva pisma*, Bajamonti to G. Ferrich, 1 Apr. 1799.

³⁵J. Fabri (ed), *Sammlung von Stadt- Land- und Reisebeschreibungen*, vol. 1, 1783, viii.

³⁶Buffon, *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière*, Paris, 1798, p. 367; J.F. Blumenbach, *De generis humani varietate nativa*, 1795, p. 237; J.-J. Virey, *Histoire naturelle du genre humain*, 2 vols. Paris, 1800, I, p. 367; Sir William Lawrence, *The natural history of man*, London, 1819; reissued 1848, p. 416.

³⁷*Bilješke o Putu po Dalmaciji opata Alberta Fortisa i život Stanislava Sočivice*, tr. M. Kombol, Zagreb, 1948; on Lovrich's canonization, T. Shek Brnadić in *Discourses of collective identity in Central and Southeast Europe*, ed. B. Trencsényi & M. Kopeček, Budapest, 2006, I, p. 61.

³⁸M. Stojković, 'Ivan Lovrić, pristaša struje prosvjetljenja u Dalmaciji: prosvjetne kritike i književne polemike u XVIII vijeku', *Zbornik za narodni život i običaje* 28/2, 1932, pp. 1-44.

³⁹M. Kombol, the translator of Lovrich's *Osservazioni*, and the *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*, 1962, identify the *Osservazioni* as Lovrich's sole publication, as does Wolff, *Venice and the Slavs*, p. 258.

comprehensively. The Australian concept of 'cultural cringe', or excessive deference to foreign authority, seems appropriate here. Until recently Croatian historiography has tended to follow Fortis's guidance in expressing gratitude for the way that his book made Dalmatia and the Croats known to Europe, while betraying a slight embarrassment at the tone of Lovrich's criticism, even though valuing the information he collected. Only occasional critics have pointed out the way a national image aligned with Fortis's vision of the noble savage could so easily backfire.⁴⁰

Lovrich himself has been made to stand as a symbol of very different positions. Larry Wolff has interpreted the young Dalmatian as the quintessentially ambivalent colonized subject, discovering himself and his people through western eyes, but internalizing these perspectives to his own detriment. The fashion for primitivism is supposed to have awakened him to the value of the Morlacks as a discursive resource, but at the same time to have afflicted him with a fear of being tainted by barbarism through association.⁴¹ This is excessive deference to particular strands of postcolonial theory, generalizing the power relations and discourses of high colonialism to other, very different circumstances. Lovrich's *Lettera apologetica*, in which he embraced the label of Morlack while pointing out that it was only his opponent who treated it as an insult, makes that interpretation untenable. Those educated Dalmatians who feared to be thought barbarian when they spoke the Illyrian language didn't demonstrate colonial ambivalence either, though Lovrich might have preferred it so. But they didn't need to, not yet. The division between Italian and Dalmatian was not so absolute in the eighteenth-century Venetian world. It was perfectly possible to be Slav in origin and even in loyalties but Italian by culture, without needing to choose one or the other. It was really Fortis – uncertain whether the epithet 'Morlack' was praise or insult – who was ambivalent. It would take an exclusive national consciousness on the one hand, and a morally-loaded distinction between civilization and savagery on the other, to create the absolute divisions needed for self-abnegating Croatian cultural cringe.

Contrariwise, the Croatian ethnologist Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin has used Lovrich as an emblem of the engaged native ethnographer confronting the detached foreign anthropologist. For Rihtman-Auguštin, Lovrich's attempt to demonstrate that the Morlacks differed from Hottentots and that the Italian was wrong about their breasts illustrates a persistent stand-off 'between *us*, the natives, and *them*, the sophisticated foreign European intellectuals in search of *the innocence and pastoral liberty of the pastoral centuries*', whose judgements carry 'the intellectual authority of the times' whether pre-Romantic primitivism or up-to-date theories of nationalism.⁴² Her article went on to call for 'a dialogue between *their* authoritative theories and *our* insights',

⁴⁰ E.g. M. Krleža, 'O nekim problemima *Enciklopedije*', *Eseji*, V, Zagreb, 1961; see also N. Markulin, "'Priatelj našega naroda": Prikazbe Drugoga u djelu *Viaggio in Dalmazia* Alberta Fortisa', *Povijesni prilozi*, No. 38, 2010, pp. 213-33.

⁴¹ In *Venice and the Slavs*, pp. 246-49; more categorically in 'The spirit of 1776: Polish and Dalmatian declarations of philosophical independence', in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe*, ed. M. Cornis-Pope and J. Neubauer, vol. 3, 2004, pp. 294-306.

⁴² D. Rihtman-Auguštin, 'Etnoantropolog na domaćem terenu: promatrač ili svjedok', in *Etnologija i etnomit*, Zagreb, 2001, pp. 181-97.

though without much optimism that such a dialogue could escape the weight of disciplinary and cultural authority. Rihtman-Auguštin's analysis, and her citation of Lovrich as the model for a contemporary dilemma, assumed an unchanging polarization between *us* and *them*. But Lovrich's *Lettera apologetica* reveals rather different relationships at play in the eighteenth century, with the Dalmatian Lovrich and the Italian Salimbeni collaborating to thumb their noses at the sophisticated abbé's pretensions to scientific authority.

Both Wolff and Rihtman-Auguštin, in different ways, take for granted a radical imbalance of power and authority and the perpetual hegemony of Western discourses. But Lovrich's laughter makes us question just how far these particular eighteenth-century polemics can be interpreted in terms of authoritative Western centres and subordinated cultural peripheries. His practical joke exposed Fortis as predisposed to see differences that separated not just long-breasted Morlacks but even good, grateful Dalmatians from his own world. The Italian believed in a hierarchy of civilization and strove to maintain his own position in it: his malicious laughter as 'Sclamer' depended on a system of cultural ranking. But Lovrich's punchline – the young Italian and Dalmatian concocting their story 'for a laugh' – toppled these defences in a gale of mirth. In 1776, Lovrich's laughter was less subaltern subversion than cosmopolitan hilarity, just as his writing was less a declaration of 'philosophical independence' than a statement of belief in philosophical *interdependence* in a Europe-wide Republic of Letters. The polemic between the Italian and the Dalmatian resembles other controversies of that time in that self-confident travelers felt no hesitation in defining their own identities for Europe-wide readerships, and inviting readers across Europe to laugh with them at the foolish pretensions of self-satisfied travelers. What happened afterwards was another matter. The reception of these polemics at a distance – in space and time – depended on factors beyond the travelers' control. They may have taken up their pens as equal members of the Republic of Letters, but in the late eighteenth century this polity, like Europe itself, was becoming a far more differentiated and hierarchically ordered territory. It is in the subsequent reception of these polemics, or even in the unexpected trajectory of Lovrich's joke about Morlack breasts, that we can trace the slow evolution of Europe's cultural centres and its peripheries.