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Studies

Sigrid Rieuwerts (General Editor)

What to Do with Folklore?
New Perspectives on Folklore Research

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Marjetka Golež Kaučič (Ed.)
The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids: 
The Animalistic, the Wondrous and the Childlike in 
Croatian Literature of the Second Half of the 19th Century

Abstract: This article deals with the issues involved in determining the genre of the oldest story about the wolf and the seven kids in Croatian children’s literature: “Priča o kozičić” [The Tale of Kids] by Ljudevit Tomšić, which was published in 1877. Is this story a fairy tale, as claimed by Vladimir Propp? Or is it a cautionary tale, as has been claimed more recently based on the research done by Marianne Rumpf and Paul Delame? Perhaps it is an animal tale, as had been claimed by Antti Aarne? In this article a constructivist view of literary and folklore genres is adopted. After presenting the three central genre classifications of this tale, we shall compare them with selected ethnological, historiographic, literary studies and animalist insights, focusing primarily on the image of the wolf as well as various reader, listener, pedagogic, publishing practices, etc. characteristic of Croatian society at the time of the publication of the “Priča o kozičić”.

Keywords: genre, fairy tale, animal tale, cautionary tale, Children’s and Household Tales, The Wolf and Seven Young Kids.

In the early stages of the production of children’s fairy-tales in Croatia, translated fairy tales have played a prominent role. The very first issues of Croatian children's magazines published in the second half of the 19th century featured fairy tales from Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm’s collection Kinder- und Hausmärchen i.e. Children’s and Household tales. For instance, in its first year, the oldest Croatian children’s magazine (Bosiljak [Basil] 1864-1868) anonymously published a variant of Robber Bridegroom (ATU 955) that could be a chain translation (a rewriting or the translation of a rewriting) of the Grimm’s tale with the same name (KHM 40).


According to available data, no fairy tales were published as a part of Croatian children’s books before the publication of Tomšić’s book, so as a result these two tales by Tomšić could be said to be the first fairy tales in Croatian monographs for children. Naturally, in order to claim this title, they should belong to the fairy-tale category, which they do not. For instance, according to Antti Aarne’s international catalogue of folk tales and its updated subsequent editions (Aarne-Thompson; ATU), both tales are animal tales.

Nevertheless, as Vladimir Propp already pointed out at the beginning of the 20th century, Aarne’s, and consequently, the Aarne-Thompson and Uther distinction between animal tales and fairy tales is unreliable because of its logical incoherence. Very often animal tales contain elements of the magical and the wondrous, and animals are the principal or critical characters in many wondrous fairy tales (Propp 100-1). Therefore, as Propp notes, researchers are in fact left to rely on their own instincts when they decide tale is an animal tale and which is a fairy tale. Nevertheless:

Scarcely anyone will be mistaken in placing the tale about the firebird and the grey wolf among the animal tales. It is also quite clear to us that even Afanas’ev was wrong concerning the tale about the goldfish. But we see this not because the animals do or do not figure in the tales, but because fairy tales possess a quite particular structure which is immediately felt and which determines their category, even though we may not be aware of it (Propp 6).

According to Propp himself, the fairy tale structure of “The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids” is usually not immediately recognised, but may become evident if the tale is analysed using the fairy tale functions proposed by Propp. Using Propp’s symbols, the structure of “The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids” could be shown as follows: γ | β′δ′α′β′₁β′₂ | C | A′ | B | K (Propp 101). As in magic tales, in this tale the initial situation (the goat and the kids) is also followed by the interdiction (kids are warned not to open the door to the wolf - γ') and the absolution (the mother goat is leaving home - β'). Then the villain (the wolf) tricks the kids, they open the door and the interdiction is violated (δ'). The villain causes harm (the wolf eats the kids - A'). After the mediation (the mother finds out what happened - B'), the counter-action begins (C); departure (the mother leaves the home in search for the wolf - I) and victory (the mother kills the wolf - II) follow. The kids are rescued (from the wolf’s belly - K') and all happily return home (I).

Although the approaches to defining this tale’s genre adopted by the Aarne, Aarne-Thompson and Uther (ATU) catalogue and by Propp are clearly fundamentally different, they share a remarkable similarity. Notwithstanding their dif-

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1 For details about the pedagogical and literary work of Ljudevit Tomšić (1843-1902) see Crnković 193 and Kobilar.
ference in theoretical interests and legacy, both focus entirely on the text. For Aarne-Thompson and Uther as well as for Propp, it is completely irrelevant who, where, when and in which circumstances “The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids” is told or published. Folklorists today, when exploring these questions put by Paul Delarue (as cited in Soriano, “From Tales” 26) and Marianne Rumpf, usually speak about the tale of the wolf and the seven young kids as a cautionary tale (see Dêgh 91; Rôhrich 157). In other words, they describe it as a cautionary tale “whose purpose is to divert children from menacing dangers such as water, the forest, etc.” (Soriano, “From Tales” 27).

A Fairy Tale or a Cautionary Tale?
The different classifications of “The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids” attest to the fact that genres are cultural formations entangled in specific social and historical circumstances (cf. Frow). More precisely, they remind us that the definition of a genre depends on the perspective, on the researcher’s (or, more generally, the reader’s) aims, on the methods, the corpus, the focus, etc. (Cohen 89). Thus, when the tale of the wolf and the seven young kids is categorized as an animal tale according to the Aarne, Aarne-Thompson and Uther (ATU) system, this is based on an attempt to employ a thematic and motif-based classification to Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm’s Children’s and Household Tales. Its classification as a fairy tale by Propp rests on his efforts to determine the common structure of one hundred tales published in Afnasiev’s collection. Finally, Paul Delarue’s characterization of the tale of the wolf and the seven young kids as a cautionary tale results from his focus on Perrault’s collection and the issues concerning its relationship with the past and present oral tradition and folk culture.

When attempting to resolve the question of the genre of Tomšić’s “Priča o kozličić” we may apply the same logic. Thus, following Propp’s argumentation, Tomšić’s tale could be elevated to the position of the first fairy tale in Croatian children’s monographs. But, what if structure was not the only parameter determining the fairy-tale status of a text in Croatian children’s literature during the second half of the 19th century? Should we still think of “Priča o kozličić” as the first fairy tale that was included in one of the Croatian children’s monographs if in 1877 it was not considered to be a fairy tale at the time when it was published?

As it has already been pointed out, until 1877 no fairy tales were published in Croatian books for children, and they appeared only sporadically in Croatian children’s magazines (cf. Hamersak 2010). Therefore, to put it in structuralist terms, it seems reasonable to suppose that readers of Tomšić’s book were not sufficiently familiar with the fairy-tale genre to extract or even immediately feel the deep fairy-tale structure of “Priča o kozličić”.

The fact that Tomšić’s “Priča o kozličić” was aimed primarily at children, shifts the debate about its genre to a cautionary tale about it being one of the few genres that were, according to Marc Soriano, aimed principally at children in the largely oral cultures of pre- and early-industrial Europe and the final institutionalization of children’s literature (Soriano, “From Tales” 27; Soriano, “Djetinjstvo umjetnosti”). Moreover, the structure of prohibition and its violation that is characteristic of cautionary tales (cf. Tatar 42) also points to the reception of “Priča o kozličić” as a cautionary tale.

On the other hand, the literature offers no definitive answers to the question of whether cautionary tales were indeed told at the time when Tomšić published his collection. Although we cannot offer an exhaustive analysis of the issue, we can suggest a possible answer by examining seemingly unconnected primary sources. Perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, collections of oral stories are a particularly unreliable source of cautionary tales. This is because they primarily contained other tales (legends, fairy-tales, etc.) for a number of methodological but in fact ideological reasons that cannot be discussed here. Nevertheless, regardless of the (non-)existence of records, we can still attempt to answer the question of whether cautionary tales were a part of 19th century Croatian oral folk repertoire by looking at texts about everyday life at that time. We can also do this by accepting the claim that telling cautionary tales was inextricably linked to the fact that children from the lower and socially disadvantaged classes in Europe were left to their own devices as soon as they could walk. This led to “the sad catalogue of accidents affecting the very young” (Heywood 97). Parents attempted to reduce the number of accidents by regulating their children’s behaviour “from a distance”: scaring children with various creatures, and telling lengthy stories where potentially dangerous places (forests, lakes, fires, open roads, dark rooms, etc.) and actions (jumping, climbing, etc.) were associated with scary creatures, thus advising caution. In the area of Prigorec near Zagreb “they used to [...] scare children with the creature rza, saying to the child ‘rza bi te!’ [rza will take you away]. They say that the rza lives in the bushes” (Rožič 100).

Judging by ethnographic, historiographic and folklorist literature, in the second half of the 19th century, village children in Croatia were also commonly left to themselves (cf. Ivanšević 500; Sehović 106). Even 1930s preschool children in north-western Croatia children were not “looked after” as they are today: “Children would go to the village, some of them might hurt themselves, and bleed, but they would deal with it. Children would go around the village, and they would play. Adults did not use to say ‘You can’t go here, you can’t go there!’ They were glad that the children left!” (Leček 386).
In addition to reflections about everyday life and living conditions, attempts to proscribe cautionary tales can also be used as a way to determine their prevalence. Numerous writings by pedagogues, priests and schoolteachers from the 19th century were deeply critical of the telling of cautionary tales (and lengthy stories ending in cautionary statements), which warrants the conclusion that they were a part of the oral repertoire. For instance, in his column on how to raise the spirit and bodies of children of the bourgeois class, Juraj Matija Šporer (425), a prominent Croatian intellectual of the time, strongly denounced telling stories which “scared children” – “stories and tales about shadows of the dead, specters and other night ghosts” that “only weaken the hearts and souls of youth” (Šporer 397). Primary school reading and writing primers of the time were also set on eradicating cautionary tales. Thus, many of them contained stories that would demystify them and criticize them (cf. Imen 56-60; Kratka 42; Male 35; Sto 15-16).

Proscribing literature and ethnographic records suggest that children were told cautionary tales in Croatia in the 19th century. Nonetheless, this in no way implies that the story of the wolf and the seven young kids used to be told, or if it indeed was told it was necessarily interpreted, as a cautionary tale.

Furthermore, as has already been mentioned, key 19th century Croatian collections of oral tales do not contain the tale of the wolf and the seven young kids (cf. Mikušić; Ploh-Herdvigo; Stejnović Priče pripovedke and Šala i zbilja; Strohal Hrvatskih narodnih pripovedaka knjiga II-III; Valjič). However, several collections include a number of stories which are geographically and thematically related to the “Priča o kozlici” (cf. Karadžić 156-58; Kasunović 230; Vuletić-Vukasović 17-18). Nevertheless, these tales do not contain the functions of violation of the prohibition or punishment, which are an essential part of cautionary tales. Those of them that do have these structures have a much more complex structure than cautionary tales. Hence, it seems that, at the time when they were recorded, these stories were recognized as fables or animal tales rather than cautionary tales. In the same vein, this may be the case with Tomić’s “Priča o kozlici” when it was published in his collection.

**Of the Wolf and the Listeners**

Folklore genres are variable and multifunctional (Ložica 115-27), and their records are necessarily incomplete and adapted to the cultural and historical context (Apo). Therefore, the absence of the tale of the wolf and the seven young kids from major 19th century collections of oral literature in Croatia or its lack of cautionary tale structure cannot be taken as definitive proof that it was not told in Croatia at the time. The fact that the tale of the wolf and the seven young kids does not appear in 19th century collections of oral tales merely means that it was not recorded. It does not mean that it was not orally narrated.

In our examination of the status of this tale as a cautionary tale at the time of its publication in Tomić’s collection, one possible line of inquiry concerns the notion of the wolf and its status as a threat to people. Under this interpretation, the tale of the wolf and the seven young kids could function as a cautionary tale only if the wolf was seen as a menace, a danger to people and children.

At first glance, the image of the wolf as a beast posing a danger to humans seems to have dominated folk imagery in the past. According to Nikola Visković, a Croatian cultural zoologist, this is hardly a surprise given that “once the destruction of the habitat of their natural prey began, numerous packs of wolves and strong, often starved, individual animals […] used to cause severe damage to cattle and were a major threat to the livelihood of shepherds and farmers, at a time when societies were exclusively or largely agricultural. Despite the fact that humans found (more or less successful) ways to fight against the hungry wolf with the help of dogs or by studying its behaviour, it is quite understandable that the menacing wolf caused hate and a desire for revenge against the cattle killer” (Visković 310). A change in lifestyle and priorities unfortunately did not eliminate the hatred and the desire for revenge: as late as 1973 The Act on Hunting in Croatia contained the stipulation that “the wolf may be killed by anyone by any means” (as cited in Visković 315). However, the issue is whether the 19th century absolute hatred for the wolf was indeed a grassroots movement, as described by Visković, or whether it was bestowed “from above”.

Regarding the perceptions of the wolf in Croatian 19th century folklore we are faced with both “hate” and “adoration”. According to Gardner Wilkinson, an English travel writer, peasants from Imotski on the South of Croatia would kill wolves primarily for a 20 forint reward for killing a male wolf and a 24 forint reward for killing a female wolf (Wilkinson 146), but they also considered certain parts of their bodies (e.g. the tail) to be particularly beneficial (Wilkinson 146, 159).

It should also be kept in mind that wolf hunting along with some other factors (deforestation, etc.) led to the extermination of wolves and their move away from populated areas. This suggests the following line of argument. If wolves had already moved away from populated areas in the second half of the 19th century, then the tale of the wolf and the seven young kids (if it was indeed told at all) was probably not told to warn children about the threat posed by the wolf.

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2 The description of how wolves in 19th century moved away from populated areas is available in Kata Jajnčerova’s article from 1898.
And if it was told, in the tale the wolf could have been a metaphor for a thief, an impostor, a stranger or some other real threat. However, for this to hold, the wolf, as I have said, should have been seen as a blood-thirsty animal par excellence, as a metaphor for evil, death and bestiality. For the western imagination in general, according to Gilbert Durand, this was indeed so (as cited in Visković 310), and the same views seem to have been held in Croatia, judging from the surviving Croatian ethnological and folkloristic literature (cf. Belaj 91; Dragić 373; Vukasović 5; Sešo 270). However, more recent works by folklorists and ethnologists Jadranka Grbić (2007), Mirjam Mencej (Gospodar volkov and “Uloga predaje”) and Pieter Plas (“Simbolična antropologijska” and “Vučja imena”) offer elaborate attempts to challenge this thesis about there being an entirely negative folk image of the wolf in Southeastern Europe.

For instance, Plas claims that “the symbolism of the wolf in Serbian and Croatian folklore – and in Slavic folklore in general – is very complex, being a compression of many various meanings (Plas, “Simbolična antropologijska” 75; cf. Mencej, “Uloga predaje” 157).” Thus, in addition to the practical level of vučari mentioned by Belaj, Grbić rightfully sees it as “a clear expression of apotropaic and prophylactic magic” (Grbić 230). “Children, girls and young women would jump over the wolf three times (and this act includes the magic of the number three) hoping that the wolf and the songs they sung would have a healing effect on each of them, demonstrating that vučari is a clear expression of apotropaic and prophylactic magic” (Grbić 230-31).

Interestingly (and importantly for this study), “positive” ideogenomes of the wolf were particularly numerous in relation to children and childhood. As noted by Plas, ethnographic records related to childhood almost unanimously show that “the wolf is associated with health and that it has prophylactic and apotropaic characteristics” (Plas, “Simbolična antropologijska” 75). Here is what Plas says:

Names and nicknames with the stem vuč- [wolf] used to be [!] very widespread in Croatia, which reflects the former desire to identify young children with the wolf. […]. According to one source, in Korčula a newborn child was named Vuč [Wolf] ‘to prevent witches from eating his heart’. In Samobor young children would be protected against the mora by drawing a pentagram on their crib which used to be called ‘murska capa’ or ‘vučja capa’ [wolf’s paw]. Women [!] from Bukovica in Dalmatia would sew wolf hairs into their children’s clothing to protect them against witches, moras and spells” (Plas, “Simbolična antropologijska” 75; cf. Plas Plas “Vučja imena”).

The belief that the wolf has beneficial powers is also evident from the practice of “women referring to children’s first teeth” as baci (plural of bak), and “sometimes instead of bak they say banik or bančak, and in Boka also vučić [little wolf]” (as cited in ARJ I: 158). The verses of the lullaby “nini sine, vuče i bače” [sleep, my son, wolf and bauch] (ARJ I: 211), vuč [wolf] and banik were also probably apotropaic.

On the other hand, imaginary boogey banik is in fact a derivative of the wolf (ARJ I: 211). Children were regularly scared by saying ban or bauch which were “an imitation of a wolf howl” (ARJ I: 211; Skok 123). In the description of life in the villages of Šušnjevo selo and Čakovac published in 1906, we find the following description: “if the child cries at night then they scare him by saying: ban, bav, he is coming to get you, oh-oh oh-oh… here he comes… Be quiet now, shush, I will not give you my child, no, I will not, the child is alright now…” (Božičević 90). This last example, just like the previous two, shows that the meanings assigned to the wolf in 19th century imagery connected with children and childhood were ambivalent and contradictory. On the one hand, the wolf and its derivatives (bak, banik, etc.) were supposed to protect children based on their apotropaic function, and on the other they were supposed to scare them, albeit not directly, but more commonly onomatopeiotically (ban, bauch, bauch etc.) or euphemistically (banik, etc.).

Thus, considering that in Tomšić’s time the wolf was used to scare children in a “disguised” manner (by using euphemisms and onomatopoeia), it seems hardly likely that a cautionary tale (such as the one about the wolf and the seven young kids) would be told at the same time, where the wolf would personify characters as “commonplace” as an impostor or a thief. It seems more likely that such a character would be represented by an animal which is more unmarked, less contradictory and has less apotropaic potency.

Of Books and Animal Tales

All of what has been said leads to the conclusion that Tomšić’s “Priča o kozličićih”, at the time of its publication, was probably not conceived as a fairy tale, nor as a cautionary tale but as an animal tale, or more exactly, as a moral animal tale. This

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3 It should be noted that, for Visković, the wolf is not just in diametric opposition to humans. He also mentions that “the wolf is not only evil and a deadly foe – when his relation to the man is more natural and undisturbed. Just like other animals, it has opposite symbolic meanings – of darkness and light” (Visković 312).

4 The words banik, bau bau and its derivatives such as banikac regularly appear in contemporary Croatian general dictionaries as well as dictionaries of Croatian dialects, regiolects and other varieties. In all of them they refer to scaring children.
is corroborated by the fact that in 19th century Croatian children’s literature, moral tales about animals and/or fables “were considered a particularly suitable reading for the uneducated folk and children” and occupied “pre-eminent position in books for children, and also appear in children’s magazines (there is hardly an issue without a fable) and as separate booklets (typically reissues) until the end of the period” (Cnković 150).

Furthermore, “Priča o kozličić” could be classified as a moral animal tale because the other tales in Tomšić’s volume and the volume’s visual appeal, title, preface, etc., suggest that animals in the volume were not conceived in accordance with premodern notions of children and nature that were characteristic of the “pedagogy of fear”, as Marc Soriano (“‘From Tales”) calls it. In fact, the context and the paratext of Tomšić’s book push his “Priča o kozličić” away from the premodern notions of children and nature. Chandru Mukerji explains these notions in the following way: “With Reformation and Counterreformation fervour for spiritual reform, the child, who was associated with postlapsarian nature, was deemed to need and respond to forms of discipline (like land could respond to tilling), which could transform wildness into goodness” (Mukerji 167). Mukerji proceeds to say, “The older ‘nature’, transplanted into the untrained, untamed child, then needed to be battled and broken” (Mukerji 167). In order to break the child’s natural nature, which Chris Jenks (70-73) summarizes under the notion of the Dionysian child, cultural products such as tales, and especially cautionary tales (with or without animals) were used. Based on the assumption that children have an affinity with animals, animals being closer to nature than adults, cautionary tales were populated with wild and tame, dangerous and domestic animals. In order to facilitate the containment of Dionysian children’s innate tendency to get into trouble, adults would tell them tales where the very nature that they sought to contain was highly exploited, at least at the level of the characters. The readers will remember that the goat from “The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids” behaves like a worried middle-class mother who lives in a house with doors, windows, a table, chairs, a wash basin, a case clock, quilts and pillows, but on the denotative level of the story she is still a representative of a goat, an animal. Since tales such as “Priča o kozličić” or Grimms’ “The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids” embodied both nature (animals), with which children supposedly felt a special affinity, and culture (children’s literature), to which they were expected to aspire, they were recognized as suitable candidates for training and taming a child’s nature.

Croatian children’s literature in the second half of 19th century was also partial to nature. This predilection for nature was embodied in the idea of a cultivated field or a garden. Thus, nearly all Croatian children’s magazines of the time were named after plants, e.g. Bosiljak [Basil] (1864-1868), Bršjan [Ivy] (1873-1876) and Smilje [Immortelle] 1874-1945, to name just a few. Many Croatian children’s books from the period (children’s collections, to be more precise) featured plants or agricultural concepts in their titles, including, for instance, Mali tobolac raznog cvetja [A little knapsack full of flowers] (Filipović 1850), Jaglaci [Primitives] (Lopašić n.d.), etc. Tomšić’s book, Djetinjji vrtić [Children’s garden] is a case in point.

These agricultural titles and metaphors came from the notions of childhood and nature which were completely different from those characteristic of cautionary tales and the “pedagogy of fear”; and as such they were being adopted, or rather popularized, in Croatian culture. Here is how Mukerji sees their origins and characteristics: “By the eighteenth century […] goodness was once again to be sought and found in nature because it was now evidence of God’s hand. Just as God’s will had been evident in his Word (the Bible), now it was evident in his works (Creation). The word of the creatures was no longer felt to be tainted by the Fall, but taken as evidence of Creation itself” (Mukerji 167). Interestingly, children, who were still conceived to be closer to nature than adults, in this worldview “took on new stature as creatures who were closer to God’s plan. Parents could now find his desires for human perfection in the natural goodness in their children, and were now burdened with trying to keep that spirit alive in their youngsters” (Mukerji 167). In the context of Tomšić’s book, “keeping that spirit alive” meant the careful nurturing, or, to use a metaphor of the time, the cultivation of children’s innated nature. Precisely because the Grimms’ tale of “The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids” involved both nature (animals) and culture (children’s literature), it was once again recognized as a perfect candidate for the task of cultivation of the purported naturalness of the child (no matter how gentle this cultivation may be).

References


The Role of Animals in Conceptions of Death and the Afterlife in Croatian Ethnographic Data

Abstract: This article deals with beliefs about animals in ethnographic data from Croatia. More specifically, it explores the role of animals in traditional conceptions of death and the afterlife. Animals and conceptions of animals played an important part in all segments of the life of “the folk”. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that the connection between humans and animals was not only a part of everyday life, but also extended into the afterlife.

Keywords: animalistic beliefs, ethnographic data, death and the afterlife.

Introduction

Beliefs about animals, rituals and customs connected with them may be subsumed under the term “animalistic beliefs”. As pointed out by Jadrinka Grbić, they constitute an integral part of how people in Croatia interacted with the animal world in terms of tradition, accepted wisdom and world view (220). Jadrinka Grbić and Vesna Culinović-Konstantinović gave the first systematic analyses of animalist imagery in Croatian ethnography (Zaradja Kiš and Marjanić 15-16). Earlier ethnological, folklore and animal studies were published in the volume Zbornik za narodni život i običaje Jažnjih Slavena 1896 (Collection of Papers about the Folk Life and Customs of South Slavs). The volume includes a comprehensive overview of traditional conceptions of various animals by Dragutin Hirc written in 1896, and a number of shorter articles dealing with narratives and beliefs about particular animals (e.g. the bee or the snake or possible transformations of people into wolves) in a particular area (Banović 234-237; Biljan 145-148; Bučar 305-07; Hirc 1-26; Hirtz 243-54; Vuković 1-239, etc.). Ethnographic data collected according to the principles espoused in Antun Radić’s Osnove za sabiranje i proučavanje građe o narodnom životu (The Basics of Collecting and Studying Data about Folk Life) dating back to 1897 also abound with animalistic beliefs.

This article presents the analysis of the following eight Croatian monographs from the late 19th and the early 20th century: Otok by Josip Lovretić, Tvebarjevo by Kata Jajčerova, Bukovica by Vladimir Ardalić, Poljica by Father Fran Ivanšević, Prigoriće by Vatroslav Rožić, Lobor by Josip Koterski and Varoš by