

## ITALY IN THE WORKS OF IVO ANDRIĆ

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## ABSTRACT

*In this paper we discuss the presence of Italy and the Italian spirit in the works of Ivo Andrić. The analysis is based on the novels *The Bridge on the Drina*, *Bosnian Chronicle* and *The Damned Yard*. In these works Italy appears in the form of the characters of individuals who arrived in Bosnia accidentally, remained there; and, through their experiences of these regions, Andrić presents a mixture of East and West in terms of the understanding, conflicts and resistance between these two worlds. In his works, Andrić described Bosnia as the point of contact between the East and the West, firstly of the Byzantine and the Roman worlds, then of Islam and Christianity. This contact was the most strongly felt at the time of the Ottoman and Austrian rule, since this territory was on the border between the divided worlds.*

**Keywords:** Italy, Ivo Andrić, novel, the East, the West, culture, interpretation

## L'ITALIA NELLE OPERE DI IVO ANDRIĆ

## SINTESI

*Il presente contributo prende in esame la presenza dell'Italia e dello spirito italiano nelle opere di Ivo Andrić. L'analisi si basa sui romanzi *Il ponte sulla Drina*, *La cronaca di Travnik* e *La corte del diavolo*. In queste opere, l'Italia si presenta sotto forma dei caratteri degli individui che si sono trovati in Bosnia per caso e ci sono rimasti. Attraverso la loro esperienza di queste regioni, Andrić presenta un misto tra Oriente e Occidente in termini di comprensione, conflitti e resistenza tra questi due mondi. Nelle sue opere, Andrić descrive la Bosnia come il punto di contatto tra l'Oriente e l'Occidente, prima tra il mondo bizantino e romano, poi tra quello dell'Islam e del cristianesimo. Tale contatto è stato più fortemente sentito al tempo dell'impero ottomano e di quello austriaco, poiché questo territorio si trovava sul confine tra i mondi divisi.*

**Parole chiave:** Italia, Ivo Andrić, romanzo, Oriente, Occidente, cultura, interpretazione

The territory of Bosnia is a place of contact between the East and the West: firstly of Byzantium and the Roman Empire, then of Islam and Christianity. This contact was the most strongly felt in the Turkish and Austrian times, since Bosnia was situated not only on the border between the divided worlds, but had already divided itself from the inside with many borders. In Bosnian towns (Andrić mainly presents Travnik, Višegrad and Sarajevo), which were usually placed in narrow valleys and surrounded by hills which represented the walls of separation from the rest of the world, there are four different cultural groups living side by side but not with each other; each having its own specific faith and way of life; each in its own hermetic world separated from the others, without any desire to interfere with others; however, being forced to do so on a daily basis. "It was not only a clash between two religions, nations and races; it was a collision between two elements, the East and the West, and our destiny wanted that fight to take place on our territories and to halve and divide our national environment with its bloody wall."<sup>1</sup> (Andrić, 1982, 15) That picture of the wall and of the line between the two worlds represents the primary psychological tension for Andrić's many characters. Quoting Leonardo da Vinci, Andrić wrote: "From the East to the West there is division at every point." "Neither Rome nor Byzantium" was a formula of Miroslav Krleža. Ivo Andrić, in contrast, regarded Rome and Byzantium together, without losing sight of Islam - East and West, Europe and "the other Europe", the Balkans. Italy, representing the West, rubs shoulders with the East in Andrić's works.

In his novel *The Bridge on the Drina* (first publication: Andrić, 1945), Italy is represented by two characters: Franz Furlan and Pietro Sola. Franz Furlan is "a skinny, redheaded man with a gold earring in his right ear, a carpenter by trade, but too great lover of music and wine. Soldiers and foreign workers like to listen to him." (Andrić, 1997, 87) Franz Furlan comes to the tavern and spends his time in Višegrad playing the accordion. The other Italian in Višegrad is Pietro Sola, "an entrepreneur and builder, stonemason and painter, in short, the utility man and expert of our town." (Andrić, 1997, 200) *Master Pero* was a "small, bent, good-natured man, with blue, meek eyes and down-curved moustache. He worked nicely and earned well. In due course he became a real *kasablja* (*kasablja* meaning an unsophisticated provincial person), though he could never acquire the language and pronunciation... Because of his golden hands and good nature, they all loved him in the town, and his athletic strong woman led him through life strictly and as a mother does with her child." (Andrić, 1997, 200) Pietro Sola, the only Italian in Višegrad, came to this town during the occupation, and remained there by marrying Stana, "an orphan girl of not exactly the best repute" (Andrić, 1997, 200). Realism and psychology, objective and subjective perspec-

tives, the chronicle's records of external events and poetic stories of unrealistic states – they all complete each other in shaping human destiny. Thus the character of Pietro Sola was built on a real historical event: the murder of Queen Elisabeth in Geneva who died "by the hands of an Italian assailant, Lucheni" (Andrić, 1997, 200). When Pietro Sola read the news, "he struck his hat on his eyes and frantically grasped his thin pipe that was always between his teeth" (Andrić, 1997, 200). Andrić depicts a man who, because of his origin, alone in the town, projected the opinion of the majority about his guilt in this event. "And whoever he met from the respected and serious people, he argued with him that he, though an Italian, has nothing to do with this Lucheni..." (Andrić, 1997, 200) Of course, all that was his projection, as different from others in origin, with insufficient knowledge of the language, he felt different and not adapted, a little bit guilty for not being the same as others. "People listened to him, soothed him and assured him that they believe and, in fact, they had never even thought something like that about him..." (Andrić, 1997, 200) With his unreasonable actions and, above all, way of thinking, Pietro Sola caused *kasabljas* to laugh at him, and he became the subject of local children's mocking. His wife Stana "pestered him and tried to instil strength and determination into him, and to teach him how to pass freely through the bazaar with his head up and not staring at the ground for anyone" (Andrić, 1997, 201). The news about the death of the Empress was current in the bazaar for a short time, and then "... the poster about the death of the little-known, foreign Empress had changed under the influence of sun, rain and dust, until it was finally torn up by the wind and piece by piece blown down to the river" (Andrić, 1997, 202). During the Italo-Turkish War in Tripoli, several decades later, *Master Pero* "... by some, for him incomprehensible logic, felt guilty again for something that his fellow-countrymen, the Italians did somewhere in the world, with whom he has had nothing in common for ages" (Andrić, 1997, 226). He causes laughter in the bazaar again. "And *Master Pero*, so tired and bent, with a tool under his arm, strikes his hat more on his eyes, frantically grasps his pipe with his teeth, and hurries home by *Mejdan*." (Andrić, 1997, 226) But Andrić gives it a broader framework: "Thus passed all those years in small and big thrills and in constant need of them" (Andrić, 1997, 226).

In *Bosnian Chronicle* (a.k.a. *Chronicles of Travnik*; first publication: Andrić, 1945a) Italian characters are more common, and it could be said that some of them express the deepest thoughts of Andrić about people's fate in the Balkans. One of the main characters in the novel is César d'Avenat, called Davna, originating from Piedmont, a native of Savoy, "and an innate Frenchman" (Andrić, 2006, 20). After his education in Montpellier, somehow he found himself in Constantinople, where as a surgeon and a medical assistant he entered the service of the

1 Citations were translated by the author.

great Capitan Pacha Hussein Kuchuk; and from the Capitan Pasha he was brought to Mehmed Pasha in Travnik as a doctor, a translator and a man needed for any occasion. Andrić describes him as a short and strong man, dark-skinned and black-haired with bright eyes. "Davna approached work with sincere well-intention and tried to be truly useful to his highly respected fellow-countryman." (Andrić, 2006, 20) Davna possessed the combination of the East and the West in himself, since he remained in the East from his early youth and took on many traits of Levantines. "A Levantine is a man without illusions and scruples, having no face, that is, having several masks, forced to act sometimes with condescension, sometimes courage, sometimes melancholy, sometimes delight." (Andrić, 2006, 35) A man from the West may spend ages in the East, but he gets to know it only partially, one-sidedly and incompletely. Davna, uniting in himself the East and the West, combining the audacity of a Levantine, the diligence of a doctor, the clarity of a Piedmontese; he knew how to say and tell anything in detail, briefly and genuinely.

Another interpreter, who arrived in Travnik with Von Mitterer, the second consul, was Nikola Rotta. "It is a small man, humpbacked, but without conspicuous humps, with strong chest, with a powerful head fallen backward and plunged among his raised shoulders, on which his big lips are striking, with bright eyes and naturally curly, greying hair. His legs are short and thin, in low boots with legs turned up or in silk stockings and flat shoes with large, gold-plated buckle." (Andrić, 2006, 104) Rotta was born in Trieste, as the twelfth child of a poor shoemaker called Giovanni Scarparotta, who died of alcohol. Andrić describes his desire to escape from this poor environment and enter the world that opened up in front of him when he began working in the office of a shipping company. "There the weak and reticent child... saw for the first time what noble life looked like in large, clean rooms, the life of polite world in stable and good conditions, where people talk quietly and treat each other in a nice manner, where food, clothing and all other everyday needs are never in question, as things that are self-evident, and all thoughts and efforts go beyond that, towards other, further and higher goals. This boy was comparing to himself the life that he could obtain just an insight into during the day while he toured the offices, with the misery, dirt and poverty of the paternal roof, with the quarrels, malice and cruelty in the family and the neighbourhood." (Andrić, 2006, 104) Nikola Rotta comes to the place of an interpreter in Zemun with hard work, where he marries "a Levantine, the daughter of an exporter from Constantinople, who was to visit her relatives in Zemun. Her father was born in Constantinople, but originally Dalmatian, and her mother was Greek." (Andrić, 2006, 110) In order to describe Rotta's marital experience, Andrić uses a Mediterranean proverb: *Chi vuol fare la sua rovina prende la moglie levantina*. (Who wants to destroy himself, let him

take his woman from the Levant.) The woman was lazy, sickly, wasteful. "If Rotta had not cut so sharply and completely all ties with the life from his childhood, he would have perhaps remembered a Mediterranean proverb, often heard as a child in family discussions." (Andrić, 2006, 111) After a failed marriage and the death of two children, and hard work in Zemun, being somewhere in his forties, Rotta understood that the oath of a sensitive boy was not enough, that even twenty years of hard work were not enough for someone to go from a world into which he was born to another that he had desired when he had seen it. "And what is worse, that new world actually does not exist as something separate, fixed and motionless, which can be achieved and won once and forever, as it had seemed for him in the first years; and similarly, that old world of misery and baseness, from which he fled at the expense of the greatest efforts, may not be so easily and simply shaken off, as he had shaken off his brothers and sisters and those rags from his parental home, but it has followed him invisibly and as a fate through all the apparent changes and successes." (Andrić, 2006, 112) Every abstract consideration was foreign to him, but he still felt deep disappointment in himself, as well as loneliness. "Having lost faith in the sense of a further rise on the road where he had devoted so much effort, but did not bring what he had expected of it, Rotta was let downstream, not wanting anything other than a life free of disease and poverty, with less work and headache and more tiny comforts, stability and profits." (Andrić, 2006, 112)

In *Bosnian Chronicle* there appears another Italian Levantine, Giovanni Mario Cologna, titular doctor of the Austrian General Consulate. "This was a man of indeterminate age, of uncertain origin, ethnicity and race, indeterminate beliefs and views and also uncertain knowledge and experience. Altogether, there was not much given on the whole man what could be defined clearly." (Andrić, 2006, 234) He was the son of a physician, born on Cephalonia. His father was a Venetian, born in Epirus, and his mother was Dalmatian. He spent his childhood with his grandfather in Greece, and his youth in Italy, where he studied medicine. "He spent his life in the Levant, in Turkish and Austrian service." (Andrić, 2006, 235) He knew only Italian well. Though, "his big mouth with few and uncertain teeth were pouring words, the rain of words, rich, heavy, angry, brave, kind, sweet, stunning words. And those were in Italian, Turkish, Greek, French, Latin and 'Illyrian'." (Andrić, 2006, 235) He even wrote his name differently; depending on the service and the type of work, he signed as: Giovanni Mario Cologna, Gian Colonia, Joanis Colonis Epirota, Bartolo cavagliere d'Epiro, dottore illyrico. Mario Cologna once confessed to Defose: "It is the fate of a Levantine man, because he is the *Poussière humaine*, the human dust, which promotes painfully between the East and the West, not belonging to any of them, but beaten by both. These are people who know many languages, but none of them is their own; who

know two faiths, but are not convinced of either. They are the victims of fatal human detachment from Christians and non-Christians; eternal interpreters and mediators, who in themselves carry so much ambiguity and vagueness; good scholars of the East and the West and their customs and beliefs, but equally despised and suspect for either side. [...] These are people from the border, spiritual and physical, from the black and bloody line, which had been, due to a severe and absurd misunderstanding, drawn between people, God's creatures among whom there should not and must not be borders. This is the edge between land and sea, condemned to perpetual motion and disquiet. This is the third world where all the curses had settled due to the country's division into two worlds. It is..." (Andrić, 1982, 368-369) Andrić, the child of a divided and controversial world, where different interests and conceptions of life and the practical effects clashed, will have the opportunity to develop and put in correlation, to be placed opposite each other, several completely different worlds. Mario Colonna expounds Andrić's thought about the need for harmony in this region: "At the end, the real and final end, all will still be well and everything will be resolved harmoniously. Although here everything seems really out of tune and hopelessly complicated. [...] For why should my thoughts, good and right, be worth less than the same thoughts that originate from Rome or Paris? Because they were born in this deep valley called Travnik? And is it possible that this idea is recorded nowhere, is not put down anywhere? No, it is not. [...] It does not lose a single human thought or effort of the spirit." (Andrić, 1982, 368-369)

One more Italian occurs in *Bosnian Chronicle*, small and perky man Lorenzo Gambini. A native of Palermo, along with his wife, a tall, stout woman with the appearance of an actress and a twelve-year-old daughter found themselves in Travnik on their return from Romania. Andrić outlines the character of this Italian, we learn that he was returning to Italy, to Milan, because he cannot sustain life in the Orient, where he was plundered and destroyed, and where he lost his health. Gambini is an Italian from the south, chatty, persistent; who swears and threatens with suicide, and easily shifts from threats to tearful expressions of love.

In *Bosnian Chronicle* Italy appears in the metatext, some details directly point to a rich cultural tradition and the Italian influence in educational, cultural and social spheres in Europe of that time. Defose and the Franciscan friar Julijan Pašalić communicate in Italian (Andrić, 2006, 83-85), but the Italian that is taught in French boarding schools; the wife of Von Mitterer, the Austrian Consul, Anna Maria "spent most of the day by the harp relentlessly exhausting her rich repertoire of German and Italian songs or losing herself in endless variations and fantasies. Her strong and warm, but fickle voice, in which one could feel constant threat of tears and sobbing, filled the small room and penetrated into other parts of the house.

From his study room, the Colonel listened to Anna Maria's singing, accompanying herself on the harp.

Tutta raccolta ancor  
Nel palpitante cor  
Tremante ho l'alma" (Andrić, 2006, 253).

(All entranced  
In the restless heart  
I hold my trembling soul.)

In *The Damned Yard* (First publication: Andrić, 1956) there are no characters of Italians, but Italian does appear as the language of culture and of communication between Father Peter and Čamil. "They found that both of them were reading in Italian. More as a joke. But still, that somehow delimited them from this world around them and linked them mutually. They were conversing about various cities and regions of the world, about books..." (Andrić, 2005, 52) We learn indirectly that Italian is the language of culture; educated strata of society communicate in it. Italy was the place of exile of Sultan Djem, when his brother sent him into exile, away from the throne. "In February 1489 knights boarded Djem with a small escort to his boat in Toulon, and after a long and difficult voyage they arrived in Civitavecchia, where they were greeted by the large delegation of the Pope. Djem entered Rome with a great escort..." (Andrić, 2005, 98) Djem died in Italy, in Capua, on his way to Naples.

In his meditations on the problems of creativity, Andrić touches on the ontological essence of art and thus joins the very modern and sophisticated treatment of such questions. His essay *Conversation with Goya* from 1935 is inevitable in the interpretation of Andrić's vision of art. The dialogic form in which the essay was written has a very important role because it is really about the importance of the formulated questions and the different options for throwing light on them, and not about the certainty of some solid and final answers that could resolve and cease the permanent life-importance of these issues forever. The conversation with the painter of bygone era touches on "general matters of human destiny", as well as the eternal problems of art.

What is this call like? What is this irresistible urge to be out of the darkness of non-existence or the prison, which is represented by the connection of everything with everything in life, to get out of that nothingness, or from the shackles that are, bit by bit, abducting life and dream of the human, and to formulate and determine "forever" with brittle chalk on a piece of fleeting paper? (Andrić, 1977, 25).

This is one of the questions in the essay expressing the constant dilemma of the artist before the meaning of his calling, but also a step to overcome it. This overview of

his own route in the context of a broader generality makes it possible to detect in that effort a little "of that great instinctive stubbornness with which the ants build ant-hill on a busy place, where it is pre-destined to be destroyed or run over" (Andrić, 1997, 25). The act of creation comes from real life, but it is not a mere act of reproduction. Art creates forms as any other nature; Andrić's Goya would repeat the words of his friend Paolo, an Italian man of Slovenian origin. Creating a work of art aspires to go higher, to be durable, and as such it is the evidence of a human's attempts to overcome the conflict between materialism and spirituality as component units of the world's unique appearance.

The beauty is that which opposes transience; it can overcome the time and can thus be a constant source of joy in life. It is the personification of eternal youth, which in one segment may determine the fate of humans and humanity. Art is the constant to which an artist comes who, like Andrić's Goya, "has broke with God, with the world and with himself" (Andrić, 1997, 25). In art and in beauty there is the *perfect harmony* by which humans succeed to serve intermittently, and so come into contact with a better, dreamed, brighter world. The right path of human activity is creation, from which everyone benefits, in contrast to struggles and conflicts between people. Accord-

ing to Andrić, these are primarily bridges that bring people together connecting distance. Describing the bridge on the Žepa, Andrić says: "In this wild region, among thin cattle and dull people, it was like a lost, solitary representative of a distant, brighter world." (Andrić, 1963, 38; first publication: Andrić, 1931). Andrić believes that only such beauty is salutary that can be shared among all the people, and which is made for all, because life without beauty and art is pointless for Andrić. Life devoid of these highest possibilities becomes a meaningless void, usually filled with hatred that threatens the lives of others. Once created, a work of art connects different people with its beauty, inspiring them to live together, encouraging them to create new works. Its beauty is something that constantly affects people and it always presents the moral force of humanity. Andrić presents the representatives of foreign nations, in this case Italians, with all their virtues and faults, filtering them through good-natured irony, devoid of negative emotions. Italians appear quite rarely, and they are almost always random, lost passers-by, individuals who have been accidentally found in Bosnia. Italy seldom appears, only cursorily, and it is somewhat understandable, because it has been too far away and unfamiliar with the agony of the Bosnian land.

## ITALIJA V DELIH IVA ANDRIĆA

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### POVZETEK

*V prispevku obravnavamo odnos Iva Andrića do Italije, ki ga analiziramo na podlagi romanov Most na Drini, Travniška kronika in Prekleta dvorišče. V teh delih se Italija izraža skozi značaje posameznikov, ki so po naključju prišli v Bosno in tam ostali; skozi njihove izkušnje s temi deželami Andrić predstavlja mešanico Vzhoda in Zahoda, razumevanje med obema svetovoma ter njune konflikte in nasprotovanje. Andrić v svojih delih opisuje Bosno kot stičišče Vzhoda in Zahoda, najprej bizantinskega in romanskega sveta, kasneje islama in krščanstva. Ta stik je bil najizrazitejši v času otomanske in avstrijske oblasti, saj je omenjeno ozemlje predstavljalo ločnico med obema svetovoma.*

**Ključne besede:** Italija, Ivo Andrić, roman, vzhod, zahod, kultura, interpretacija

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