

# Reading the Ironic Layers of the (Re)construction: The Colony and its (Colonial?) *Others in the Construct of "Austrian Bosnia" in The Bridge on Drina River* BY IVO ANDRIĆ

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**Słowa kluczowe:** Andrić, tożsamość, historia jako konstrukt, postkolonialne/postimperialne umiejscowienie czytania

**Key words:** Andrić, Identity, Hi/story as a Construct, Native Informant, Post-colonial/Post-imperial Positioning of Reading

**Abstrakt:** Boris Škvorc. ODCZYTYWANIE IRONICZNYCH WARSTW (RE)KONSTRUKCJI KOLONII I JEJ (KOLONIALNYCH) INNYCH W KONSTRUKCIE „AUSTRIACKIEJ BOŚNI” W MOŚCIE NAD DRINĄ IVO ANDRIĆA. „PORÓWNANIA” 16 (2015). T. XVI. S. 71–88. ISSN 1733-165X. Artykuł proponuje lekturę powieści Ivo Andrića *Most na rzece Drnie* (1945), kładąc specjalny nacisk na ekonomię wypowiedzi i (re)konstrukcję opowieści (mitu) produkowanej na poziomie autorskiej intencji z perspektywy różnych natywnych informatorów. To dowodzi, że pozycja kolonialnego podmiotu/przedmiotu w powieści, wypowiedziana i uwydatniona przez Andrića, może być najlepiej odczytana z perspektywy post-kolonialnej. W ten sposób otwierają się dwie możliwości czytania Andrića i, w ogóle, południowo-słowiańskiej narracji stereotypizowanej jako przestrzeń imperialnych/kolonialnych gier władzy. Drugi jest konsekwencją poprzedniego założenia i zawłaszczenia historycznych realiów, które rządzą przestrzenią narracji w związku z różnymi wtórnymi naturalizacjami tekstu(ów). Nacisk zostaje tu położony na powieści Andrića. Jednakże czytanie konstrukcji tekstu otwiera również drogę do ponownego odczytania innych „historycznych” powieści oraz ich ideologicznych konstruktów w południowo-słowiańskim i szerzej środkowo-wschodnioeuropejskim kontekście/dyskursie.

**Abstract:** Boris Škvorc. READING THE IRONIC LAYERS OF THE (RE)CONSTRUCTION: THE COLONY AND ITS (COLONIAL?) OTHERS IN THE CONSTRUCT OF “AUSTRIAN BOSNIA”

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IN *THE BRIDGE ON DRINA RIVER* BY IVO ANDRIĆ. "PORÓWNANIA" 16 (2015). Vol. XVI. P. 77–88. ISSN 1733-165X. This text offers a reading of Ivo Andrić's novel *The Bridge on Drina River* (1945) placing special emphasis on the economies of utterance and the (re)construction of story/myth produced from the position of various native informants at the level of authorial intent. It argues that the position of colonial subjects/objects in the novel, as uttered and emphasised by Andrić could best be read from a post-colonial perspective. That opens two possibilities of reading Andrić and South Slavic historical novels in general. The first one concerns the understanding of space of the South European narration/stereotyping as the space of imperial/colonial power games. The second one deals with consequences of that presumption and appropriation of historical realms that deal with the space of narration in connection with various latter naturalisation of the text(s). The emphasis is put on Andrić's novel. However, this reading of the text's constructions also opens the way of re-reading other "historical" novels and their ideological/political constructs in South Slavic and wider Central European/Eastern European context/discourse.

## 1. Introduction

The novel's authorial intent has produced a number of various »textual authorities«: characters, storytellers, witnesses, constructed "participants of events" and fictive narrators who are embedded in the text and who pretend-to -belong to different cultures, religious orders and colonial powers/subaltern positions (ideologies and economies of textual positioning). The positions of these native informants in the text are considered here in relation to the processes (narrative and authorial tactics) of truth production, myth construction and sharing authority (focal points of narration) in a connection with both authorial intent and reader expectation (imagination; at the level of intention production). The aim is to decode and read anew economies of the usage/manipulations of mythical realms and "truth (hi/story) production" as they were determined in the environments of two colonial administrations (Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian) along with the position of the "in between" (cultures, religious orders, understanding of economy and »progress« as well as dominant power games). In respect of reading the macrostructural ironic layers of the text, the relationship produced by the text between the time narrated and the time of narration is central. This later narrative tactic is especially important in reading the employment of the sublime ironic textual layers produced by authorial intention in order to economize utterances and continuously make the readers/agents of the text aware of this position of in between (world and power games, economies and religions; but also: history and present, fiction and hi/story as is constructed and reconstructed in and by the text)<sup>3</sup>. It is my intention to argue here that Andrić's history is a construction rather

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<sup>3</sup> Although the term in between and the positioning in between (worlds, cultures and firm language paradigms) is derived from Homi Bhabha (1994) and applied on the case of Anglo-colonized

than a reconstruction and that in the process of decoding his subtle ironic layers (which are macrostructures rather than micro-structural “figures of speech”) one can come closer to answering why this world of fictive Bosnia is constructed in such a reconstructive manner (and on the surface why it appears to concern itself with mimetic poetics – authorial intent). As far as the culture(s) of economies produced in text are concerned, this question of irony is of utmost importance, not as a described realm of history, but as an important element of power games produced in a form of a (constructed) story. In this respect one can ask himself/herself: is the fictive nature of the story of the colony also a metonymic option for reading the nature of economies of culture as a realm of (fictive) agreement/consensus? And also: if every fictional text is a particular type of power game (construction), how important is it to assign its narrated time to the realm of both readers and authors power game distribution (hegemony) of the time of reading and the time of narration? The danger of the (possible) complete loss of agreeing and finding an interpretative consensus in this diachronically charged mis-understanding process is discussed as a central problem of the novel in the final part of this work. It deals with the problem of historicizing the process of interpretation within the two frames provided by contemporary critical discourse. These are the frame of provided hegemonic expectations of the time of interpretation within the frame of united European space and the second one is concern with both the discursive hegemonic order at the time of narration (1942–1943), time of publication and critical receptions (1945–1952) and interpretative practices during the era of self proclaimed liberal hegemony of Communistic rule (1952–1989) and afterwards (from 1990–2010) in independent South Slavic countries.

## 2. Native informants of (the novels) power games (economies of myth)

In his novel *The Bridge on Drina River* (*Na Drini ćuprija*, 1945) Ivo Andrić constructs the world of a Bosnian city (*kasaba*) at the border between cultures and nations as well as being located between different models of economies, both real, historically engaged and those produced as obvious fictional constructs. Insight into a historic space/place is based on the inclusion of different ways of living and colliding religious orders which are all considered elements of this fictional world and, at the same time, a mimetic space of re-constructive potential where other worlds are standing in silent opposition towards the uttered (described) one. The

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area, here it is used in connection of post-imperial positioning on the edge of two former empires: Austro-Hungary and Ottoman Empire. All of the references from Bhabha are appropriated in that context and the openings of places in between East and West within European discourse have somewhat different connotations for the process of *historicizing* (Hamilton 2002) the reading anew of already agreed upon (canonized) readings (in histories of literature and curriculums).

space of this imaginary world is itself positioned as a place in between cultures (Bhabha 1994) and simultaneously it represents an authentic space of reconstruction and the imaginary place of the construct/ion of hi-story (culture, economy of utterance and production as well as power games). If one follows this second path, that is "a world of hi/story as a construct", it is possible to say that this *place* of imaginary Bosnia is constructed as a *space* where complex identity issues co-exist and are narrated from the positions of different native informers (Spivak's term)<sup>4</sup>. The inter-textual network of their voices and the fictive textual authority produce a polyphonic re-construction of the past, while simultaneously alluding to how this very reconstruction might in fact be an ironic construction of a possible world, which is not a chronicle but is in fact imagined (by the author) and fictional (through textual realisation). This means that the reader simultaneously reads the reconstructed plot of what she should imagine as a history while at the same time finding indicators which openly suggest the fictive nature of this very reconstruction.

In the text of the novel this is intended in concrete fictive scenes but at the same time it aims towards questioning the very basic concepts of the humanities: the concept of history, the concept of myth and the concept of culture and economy as power and language game relation (in Foucault's sense). A novel's mimetic potential, stipulated as a fictive realm of possible (historic) reference points (pretending-to-be an escape from a position of narration to a position of fact-reconstruction), in fact offers a picture of the alternative culture of power games, cultural stereotypes and economies that presents itself as fictional much as are the very ideas of culture or economy (in contemporary theory). This provides the novel, and the idea of historical novel as such, with strong metonymic potential. That also indicates the fact that the irony will be dominant over the allegory, regardless of the tradition of interpretative practices that stipulate allegoric potential of the text.

What is in fact constructed as symbolic value, symbolic representation of power, cultural value and nation (the religious-mythical "order of belonging") pretends to be a "real", tangible driving force of the novel's "order of things" (agreed upon hegemony). This asks for a comparison between the fictional world of the (re)constructed history with the "real powers" of contemporary discourse or hegemony. Obviously, it can only be done on the level of "truth construction mechanisms" (in Athusser's sense of this phrase), not on the level of the treatment of myth, either on according to ironic deconstruction or allegoric stipulation. While

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<sup>4</sup> The term is best described in Spivak's book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999). It insists on the innocence lost in regard to natives possibility to tell the story, or provide the media of telling the story of themselves without being re-produced by the text, context and/or discourse. This puts the writer in a position to use this voice for advancement of her/his own economy of (ironic) utterance and the production of various appropriations of historical/fictional re-production.

in this respect Andrić's novel-myth is a constitutional force of continuity (one can only remember the Turkish longing for *holly silence* in both this novel and in *The Chronicle of Travnik*; 1945), it also takes into consideration the perspective of the contemporary hegemonic order of the day. In this respect the principle of forgetting the historical deconstructive power of myth-stipulation, hidden beneath the text's surface, becomes a major contributor to its (destructive) power of survival. What remains stable are the economies of power positioning and its embedment in nation, tradition and the values of fate<sup>5</sup>. However, these concepts are based on re-reading and re-positioning stereotypes from the position of various native informants, rather than on the stipulation of the mythical realm as "the truth of the historic imagination" (in Frye's sense).

This means that the novel in question (world famous; one of the very few in the South Slavic context) is narrated from a number of unevenly spread and not equally authoritative perspectives. While uttered from a point of resignation (the authorial intent is aware of the destructive power of the "space and place"), they still process the economies of myth and pseudo-historical continuity according to the stereotypes of power-positioning (priests, traders, subaltern original voices, armies, colonial authorities, far away centre/s of power). The powers of the voice(s)/narrative position are assigned to a number of textual instances all of which belong to pseudo-authentic voices rather than to represented fictive witnesses of events (native informants). This position is constructed in such a way that it becomes simultaneously stipulated by the authorial instances produced in text and undermined by an ideal reader's competence (produced at the level of awareness of text's *narratee*) as a possible fraud. In other words this is a textual device which points to the fictional character of narration and its constructed nature. This would be particularly obvious if authorial intent was tested at the level of competence, or the position from which every possible definite standpoint towards the interpretation of myths, both metaphysical or power/economy driven, was tested in relation towards the time of narration – and not the time narrated. From that (fictive, constructed, very often agreed upon) point of view it is also important to notice that these authentic textual constructions (focal positioning, so called "truth producing" agents) are also constructed as textual *difference* by belonging to different religions, cultures and classes. Sometimes they are subaltern in relation to their own group/historical, class positioning (like the character of Ćorkan), or in relation towards the dominant other (Christian, or what Andrić's narrator calls *our women* in relation to the Ottoman, con-textually constructed privileged group). They also often represent conflicted points of view, not only in

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<sup>5</sup> I have underlined these three ideologemes in order to stipulate their normative character in most of phenomenological approaches especially in Serbian interpretative practice in a period from 1960s to 1990s (Vučković, Leovac, Džadić).

a particular situation (narrative sequence) but in general, as agents of the text that are testing others' culture, poetics of everyday, economy, beliefs, hopes, alliances, prospects and ideas of prosperity. In brief, the ideas of ideology and history are tested to their very cores.

All these contradictions are often stipulated in the production of opposite textual ideologies provided as background to native informants' pictures of the world/space/place. This provides tension in the plot and opens the text towards the unspoken possibilities of the unuttered (or what is "hidden beneath the surface", as White would put it). All these original voices of the past are set within the limits of an imaginary place (in between) and, from the position of narrative textual tactics, are, at least if interpreted on the textual surface, well hidden from the imaginary reader's field of expectation (or the ideal reader's intentions, as Iser would put it). They also know much more than they are supposed to, if viewed from various local perspectives of the possible limit of their competence (for example narrator knowledge of what the Grand Vizier feel during the night in "far away capital of the empire"). This is one of the way in which textual (native informants or authorial competence) tactics of *not meeting expectations* provides tension that suggests text's *non authenticity* and a questioning of what is said in order to find out what is left unspoken (which represents a *dissimulation* - as a "higher level" of ironic communication).

While these expectations aim for suggesting the types of textual usage - reconstruction of history and description of colony-economy-cultural power games - the network of intentions offered by constructed "informants" produces a number of different truths and versions of myth production/reconstructions (explanations of history/world/truth) and a number of versions of the same or similar story, that is hi/stories. This is reflected in the multiplication of culture and economy power games. I shall, for example, draw attention to a story about the gigantic carvings in stone near the Drina River that are the topic of the introductory chapter: for Muslim children they are traces of Alija Đerzalez (Gjergj Elez Alia), the famous Ottoman hero who "saved the empire from the non-believers /Christians/", and for "our children" (in the novel *our children* - /naša deca/, women and people are always Serbs) they are the traces of Prince Marko (Kraljević Marko), "the hero of all heroes". The narrator (one of the informants at a "higher level"), who knows about the "[...] passing of the past" argues: "They are so sure about their version of the truth that they do not even argue about that"<sup>6</sup>. This scene is paradigmatic not only for its "economy of reading" but also because of the possible "world openings" towards the *other* at the level of the imaginary reader, interpreter and the uttered world itself (as a phenomenon of the "time of reading").

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<sup>6</sup> All of the translations from the novel *The Bridge on the Drina River* are mine.

Thus it is possible to argue that the polyphonically narrated place which is produced in this fiction represents a space that is condensed, which represents a *pars pro toto* of an imaginary totality of “the world between the imaginary east and west” (Todorova 2009). What complicates the positioning of so called textual truths even further is the above mentioned fact that this metaphoric realm is at the same time pictured in the form of a juxtaposition towards the construction of the world as the metonymy of the “real world”, both as a diachronic and synchronic entity/fictional whole. The tension between metaphoric and metonymic concepts produces not only a conflict between different takes on history and myth but also different concepts of truth in relation to the power games of the past. This can be compared with Hayden White’s idea of history as an entity/discipline/fiction that is figurative (tropic) in its core.

It is possible to conclude at this stage of discussion that not only are there many facts are many and are to be considered from various perspectives, but also that the very perspectives (takes on the world produced) are/represent systems which do not overlap in re/presentations of the “truth” but do produce a number of (possible) presentations/takes. This includes the truth of colony and colonial, as well as the construction, usage and abuse of the myths of colonial power games: or, in other words, of truth, myth and the economies of heritage production/preservation. Even the culture of economy has at least three different takes: Orthodox, Ottoman and Jewish ways of living, as well as interpreting (textualizing) the way they live and their ways of doing business/surviving and identifying themselves. Obviously, there are narrative paragraphs where overlapping takes place in the centre of authorial attention, but this will only provide more material for the repositioning of stereotypes according to which this book was often read.

From this point of view the first and the second colonisations are viewed in the novel in the form of a series of events stipulated by textual indicators that are mimetically constructed as the appearance (reconstruction) of real and documented historical events (and uttered from different perspectives). While closely reading the textual instances that figure to inform the author of various positions towards foreign colonisation, and *others* in general, the novel, as well as other of the author’s works (such as *The Bridge on Žepa river* /Most na Žepi/ or *The Rzaovski Hills* /Rzaovski bregovi/ short stories) can be read as the construction of history as well as the deconstruction of a traditional reading of Bosnia, its history and “the order of things as they were originally imagined” (Bhabha). The stereotypes of Ottoman rule and those of Austro-Hungarian “modernisation” and its “administrative order” are here always viewed from the position of local *others*. Native informants are in the first instance mostly of Serbian background and secondly usually from Ottoman background. While during the time of first colonisation the “higher authority” “informants” were usually Serbs, and only occasionally “local

Turks" (as Andrić's narrator calls the local Muslim population) in the second colonisation the "local Turks" also are occasionally attributed as "our Turks". The position of *others*, therefore, is always destabilised from the position of the presumed (constructed) witness of events. Viewing the constructs of history and its deconstruction in an ironic destabilisation of the modernist order can shed some new light not only on Andrić's work but also on authorial intent as it is usually suggested by professional readers. The "ultimate book" that provides "comprehensive insight" into the history of Balkans in this reading is rather seen as a construction that opens more questions about history and identity than a reconstruction of history which provides definite answers about *us* "as we were" so we "can better understand each other" *now*.

Good examples to support this position are found in two scenes about behaviour of the local women during the two intakes of soldiers from young local population that is conscribed to the serf colonial *others*. The first one is a forceful taking/kidnapping of young boys into the Ottoman administration (service) and the second one is the first taking of conscripts into the Austro-Hungarian army (first one in second chapter and the second one in chapter thirteen). Here I am only considering the positions from which these scenes (narratives) are looked at, not the moral/ethic value/consequences of two different issues/histories re/constructions (as far as the moral aspect of the process is concerned, and the role of these scenes in the production of a "moral/moralizing context")<sup>7</sup>. The forceful taking of seven-to-ten year old kids in second chapter is uttered from the perspective of a native informant who is set as a fictive voice in a specific time period (the 16<sup>th</sup> century) and is taking the side of the subaltern victims in the Ottoman colonial setting. The second one from the thirteenth chapter is written from a perspective which is very close to the authorial textual intent. Its' ironic description of the first intake of conscripts for the Austro-Hungarian army in annexed Bosnia simultaneously is ironic account of the history of the warfare (the mothers and sisters behave in very similar manner in 1870s as they did in 1520s) and the ways the new colonizers (the liberators of the nation from the first colonial rule) use similar methods in conquering the space. In this second colonisation both Christians and Muslims are in similar positions towards the new authority: only now, in 1870s the real, typical western colony is being established in the space that remembers the centuries of Ottoman colonization. Only now will change take place in this "quiet

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<sup>7</sup> This aspect is often in a centre of disputes between three contesting national interpretative practices/identification processes: Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian. The emphasis is of ten placed on the national construction of moral and national hi/story (circumstances) and the aspect of constructing the zone in between is usually neglected in yhe process. These issues are fist addressed by Tihomir Brajović in Serbian tradition of interpreting the text and in some texts by Krešimir Nemeć in a form of introduction to various recent issues of the Croatian edition of Andrić's Collected Works.



place". The positions taken up during the time of the first colony are now only reconstructed in the stories of the new and newly empowered native informants. In the power structure of the uttered world this only produces the ironic naivety of the informants rather than their positioning in the new order of things.

### 3. The place/space in between and its native informants

As it now becomes evident, what is central to the interpreted scenes of construction of Turkish and Austro-Hungarian occupations/colonisations of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Andrić's novel are the textual stipulations of positioning in between (both geographically and culturally; but – what is most important – also imaginary level, that is at the level of producing the ethnically charged story realms) and the construction of events as they "may have happened" which rely very much on native informants who are themselves also constructions. I have already mentioned that it appears from a reader's point of view that these voices are constructed as authentic yet fictional inhabitants of a constructed world. This needs to be elaborated further. In this respect it has to be emphasised that most of the interpreters of this novel have not placed enough emphasis on two important aforementioned factors: firstly, the metonymic potential of the text that provides room to be read in any *other* space "in between" and, secondly, the fact that the authorial perspective intentionally stipulates the position in which the native informants provide polyphonic perspective(s) on life which echoes global trends in this condensed space presented as a concrete and basically insignificant place (a city at the crossroads of Worlds, but only in the minds of its constructors/narrators – a '*kasaba*', namely Višegrad). So there are metonymic and allegoric as well as ironic and metaphoric levels of deconstructing the history as it unfolds in textual patterns.

This tropic, figurative potential of the text has also deflected most of the readings of the novel's ambiguities, pointing towards the indicators which would enable the detection of ironic textual potentials on both levels: the universalisation of the plot and the possible decoding of power play/games that eventuate at the space "in between" textual instances (at the level of plot, usage of plot in extra-textual practices/readings and at the level of the power distribution of "meanings" between the unequally distributed narrative positions in the text). At the same time the metonymic and allegoric potentials represent indicators that may become (are or were) directly (allegoric potential) or indirectly (metonymic displaced environment; Jackson's term) related to (any) contemporary identity politics, economic order(s) or political hegemonic power-games-to-be. In my opinion these discursive tactics are applicable in three different discursive situations: at the level of constructed (narrated) time, at the level of the time of narration, and in various

contexts of the time(s) of reading the text (in the complex dynamics between the time of reading and time that unfolds as “read”).

If one follows this (basically narratological) argumentation, it is possible to say that the aim of this particular reading of history-construction (which unfolds in front of our eyes as “the novel”) is to explore these textual tactics/practices further and start deconstructing the texts effect which “pretends to be” a reconstruction of concrete historical “circumstances”, while at the same time claiming this (re)constructed fictional world to be one of the most valuable interpretative potentials in the novel and its position in history (the history of reading). In this contradictory and controversial position, as a reader, I cannot do much else but rely on the notion by Walter Benjamin who said that “[...] it is not about representing literary works in relation to their own time, but (is about the possibility that) in the time of its writing to present the time that is acquainting them”. So, from the perspective of my position here, this would mean that in the process of using the text (which more or less happens in every reading) the emphasis has always been on *our time*, the time of reading. *We* (as interpretative practitioners) are the ones that still *see* this place of Bosnian “kasaba” /provincial city/ as the (imagined) space placed in between. We start from the position that, as readers, *we* have the knowledge that is always greater than of seventy years ago (the writer’s “time of narration”) or two, three, even four hundred years ago (as is the one of fictive writer’s/authorial intent’s “textual informers” in the long period of historical construction lasting from the time of Mehmed Pasha’s youth – the 1520s – to the time of bridge’s destruction in 1914).

In Andrić’s text there are two colonies. When we start reading we are aware of the various positions of the colonized: those who were positioned as subaltern in the first colony, and the two groups who have a different subaltern position in the second colony. The first situation is the one in Ottoman Bosnia, whose history in this novel starts from 1516, the year when Mehmed Pasha was captured by the janissary and taken from his orthodox family to become Muslim and government servant (slave; subaltern subject?, and later Grand Vizier). This colony is narrated from two perspectives: *our*, that is the perspective of the local orthodox population, and *their* perspective, Turkish, not Ottoman. That is the position of the local Muslim inhabitants of “kasaba”/local city. Both perspectives, from the very first year narrated (constructed) in the text, have their own “truths” uttered as the re-creation and interpretation of local myths, legends and ideological positioning. Furthermore, both perspectives are local and positioned “in between” the firm paradigms which makes their “non-negotiable” stances even more complex. The first novel’s example of this non-inclusive position of non-negotiable difference, that of the “traces left in stone” around the bridge (on Drina River), is already mentioned above. That sets the stage for stereotyping this non-negotiable type of positioning continuously, but it also produces an ironic layer of interplay between

nations and myths, power-games and cultures as well as possible “different takes” on hi/story. This also eventuate dynamic proceedings/protocols at levels which can be denoted as interplays between authorial intents and (at least) two ideologies (identities) constructed. Furthermore, the position of the imagined author (Eco’s term) is displaced throughout the text and the world narrated: *his/her* knowledge “of the world uttered” is superior to the one of the myth re-creators and identity policy stereotypes produced in text as its internal authorities/negotiators. Simultaneously, however this textual instance is well hidden so it does not appear to be either widely acknowledged or obviously present in the text. This means that the real place/narrative space of ironic destabilisation is not the one produced in the interplay between narrative authorities and their often opposite characters’ interpretation or re-creation of hi/story; it is about the position from which history is created as a “self sustained” world of fiction that can “stand on its own” in relation to both: history as we read it outside the fictional setting (so-called “real space” and the place in this historical setting) and in the enclosed, self-sustained world of the novel (that only indirectly is connected with real space and Višegrad as a geographic rather than fictional location). In the so-called real world of longing *for the truth of the fiction* this Višegrad will be viewed as the real historical setting of the chronicle regardless of all the indicators that suggest reading the text on both levels of combinations of tropes: metaphoric and ironic; as well as metonymic and allegoric. This needs to be agreed upon if history is to be read as a story, and stories as (one of the possibly imagined) histories.

In this respect there are a number of episodes in the novel that represent indicators of the processes that are taking place at levels of hi/story reconstruction and/or construction. They provide a possible insight into the intentions of both, the implicit authorial instant and a concept of a “real” author as an imagined fiction of the text. While implicit authorial appearances in the text closely cooperate with fictive construction of various native informants (they are the focal points of various episodes; from insight into Mehmed Pasha’s account of feelings as they unfold to the narrator as if he and his “inner self” are “present” from some particular here and now; all the way to the episodes of Alihodža’s re-creation of the “sweet silence” (srb. *Slatka tišina*), the period of nostalgic loss that is the imaginary in-textual reconstruction of the “first colony” (Ottoman). It is produced as simulacra of the fictional “safe haven” created at the level of native informants’ competence and set in a period during the time of the aggressive expansion of the second colonisation (Austrian).

In this context native informants are recreating the possibilities of fiction while at the same time simulating their commitment to historical time, which is the “real” past as readers would like to think of it (and reconstruct it in their individual takes on the text). This is a textual tactic that appears to be crucial for decoding the ironic multiplication of textual possibilities and the application of textual manipu-

lative options/possibilities at the level of post-structurally understood process/denotations of "signification" (Derrida)<sup>8</sup>. Here in the text of the novel the position of "in between" is not only applied in the contemporary, postmodern sense of "being in between self-proclaimed strong cultural paradigms" (Bhabha 1994), but also it appears to be constructed as simulacra of being historically in between, in the complex relation of two different powers of the authorities and their cultural discourses. This is both construction and the re/construction of a continuity of hegemonic order (as it unfolds in yet another complex hi/story drama) rather than history as a "random continuation of events" (Munslow 2006). What takes place here is the programmatic positioning between cultures, religious orders and different civilisations, but, more than anything else, this is the stipulation of the positioning of two colonizing powers and their power game which are applicable to the discourse that is narrated in the form of double exclusion. This is not the case only in the time narrated but also in the time of narration and the space/place of reading. This is the Orient that is now colonised by Occident, but also the Occident that was previously (not only in Bosnia and Serbia, but also in Slavonia and Hungary) not only conquered (as history-textbooks – that is reconstruction of history would like to teach us) but also colonized by the Orient. This represents the unique situation of *otherness*, one that produces not only irony at the level of plot, but also at the level of undermining the authority, competence and ideologically privileged position (imaginary/fictive readers trust) both in the text and in textual consequences (that is, the readings which read the construction as reconstruction). This is how an allegoric space of "possible different meanings" of historical reconstruction becomes a place of ironic deconstruction of any metaphorically imagined "similarity". In this respect the concept of colony becomes a metonymic space of any neighbouring of other power games that include same or similar power-players (agents of the textual space/power).

#### 4. Colonies and ironies

When carrying out a closer reading of the text, in the traditional sense of the word, it is at the formal level of decoding figurative layers and tropes that the influence the line of understanding (plot) that one comes across the ironic plurality of textual potential *in absentia*. This fact is not so obvious while one is following the plot(s) and reading the book as hi/story but she or he also needs to consider what and from which perspective narratives are uttered or left unspoken in previous

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<sup>8</sup> Here I read Derrida's concept as it was presented in the chapter „Force and the Signification“ (*Writing and Difference*, pp. 1-35; London and New York: Routledge 2005, translated to English by Alan Bass.

and later narrative paragraphs (especially in relation to the way the native informants are given the authority of “uttering the truth” or “hiding something”). This is especially the case when emphasis is put on the ironic layers produced as a testing ground of potential meanings from the authorial perspective. In this respect it becomes obvious that Andrić’s authorial perspective is using various narrative positions (both ideologically marked and perspective driven) to achieve the appearance (fictional positioning) that the world constructed in the novel is not a fictional construct but that it rather represents the world reconstructed as history (and not a story or even a hi/story; to use the new-historicist term). While all hi/story may, from a narratological perspective look like fiction (Munslow 35), the attempt to “reconstruct history” rather than to “construct a story” represents a dominant position in the tradition of readings of this novel and especially its identity politics. In this respect I suggest that every deconstructive reading should closely examine very idea of the construct of native informers which represent a collage of textual voices and value positionings as novel’s dialogical options (in Bakhtin sense of the word). I have claimed above that while they are produced from the authorial perspective in the text they nevertheless acquire the power of authentic voice. For this very reason they should be read/decoded as central focal points, as indicators of the ironic destabilisation of the textual imagined unified whole<sup>9</sup>.

In the text there are many of them and they have different positions in the novel’s composition. The first indicator of this sort of positioning and “order” of power distribution in text are the positionings of the informers that help the narrator in formulating the ideological positioning (polyphonic order) of the narration. At first glance this ideological issue is obvious, as is its purpose in the novel. From the very first chapter the narrator identifies with local Serbs (“our women”, “our people”). However, this is the positioning of “the fictional value order” in the first part of the novel, until chapter thirteen. Nevertheless in the process of uttering the second colonisation intentions are starting to take more direct roots in the wide spread local community and the evenly spread distribution of the value positioning of the native informants becomes important for identifying various ideological stands and their interference. Now “our people” start to include “local Turks”, how this part of local population was also signified before (in opposition to local Christians). However, in the first part of the novel which describes the Ottoman colonization they are considered as total *others*, never a part of *our* world. Simulta-

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<sup>9</sup> While all of the relevant interpreters were considering this novel as a compact story with the bridge as central focal point, very few considered the idea presented by Andrić himself in his collection of notes on writing (*The signs beside the Road – Znakovi pored puta*) where he stipulate the fact that he had never been writing a book. Instead, he had been writing stories that later became books, novels and novelas.

neously, even in the constructed world of the first colonisation and the distribution of the value system suggested in it, while being *the others* the "Turks" are also positioned as one of the sides that produce and distribute the value system of the local informants and interference of their points of view. That means that not only *our* position is the one that develops the economies of utterance and world-construction. For example, the story of the Grand Vizier's pain and his inner struggle is uttered from the privileged position of an inner knowledge that only may belong to a native informant ideologically close to the Ottoman point of view. The same goes for a number of "Muslim stories" placed in and uttered from the fictive position of the first colony (stories of Avdaga's Fata or Salko Ćorkan for example). Only occasionally does the narrator in charge of filtering various perspectives disclose his position as the organizer of the chronicle (for example this is visible in the sentences such as: "As we will see later", or "As it was already described").

In a period when a change of power distribution took place and the "loss of sweet silence" (of Ottoman rule) occurred, one of the perspectives very important for the novel becomes that of Alihodža Muteveliċ, the character who belonged to the traditional local Turkish environment and the successor of the original care takers of the bridge and its *Kameniti han*, the building originally built to complement the bridge as a stopover for potential travellers journeying from the Ottoman "West" to the *more central* "East". These native informants of the first and second colonization not only are of different religions, different classes and different positions in the power play (Orthodox priests, Muslim celebrants, businessman of all confessions and value systems, subaltern of all groups that live in the "kasaba"), but they also have a crucial effect on how the world in between firm paradigms of East and West will be viewed and interpreted from inside the parameters provided by their (fictional) moral, religious and stereotype-driven boundaries. The irony relies on, and prevails as a possible reading because of the fact that *we* as readers become able to identify with the position on the historic realm of the informants who are only a product of the story and manipulated by an authorial intent that organises their positioning within the plot/world/hi-story. Authorial intent wants us, as readers, to both identify with them and to destabilize the non-negotiable positions in the world (and ideology) that they create (utter). Their ironies represent stereotypes and non-stable truths regarding their colonies and their unsettling, de-centralizing demise(s). In this context it would appear that the fictive world produced from the authorial perspective is viewed from the eyes of these characters/functions of the text with a particular purpose (intention). This provides the view of the colony as fiction and the colony as construction. Ironic layers stipulate a reading which will secure indicators for double negation: this is only the stipulation of reality. Its constructs, culture, values, conflicts and economies, are the only possible models by which the characters (and people that stipulate the myth as reality) strived to live/be represented by. This also is stipulated by the

dominant perspectives in respective periods of history that represent their allegoric value as “systems” that continue to live as permanent features of the nation, origin and cultural preservation (both at the level of spiritual value and the culture).

While the first colony is viewed from the perspective of its subaltern (Serbs), it is also mimetically exposed as a picture of the imagined possibility of the things/power plays as they once were. The particular scenes simultaneously paint a picture of historical reconstruction and of the mimetic potential of displaced reading, provided in the form of the economies of (historic/mythic) survival. One of the first narrative paragraphs that provides this interpretative possibility is the one when Serbian (Orthodox) peasants are buying back the body of their “martyr” Radovan who tried (symbolically) to stop the building of the bridge. This is presented on two levels: as material for epic verses and as an historical event with deconstructive potential. It only depends on whether it is a metaphoric or metonymic reading.

The negotiation in the process of buying back the body of the subaltern peasant from the Ottoman servant is the mimetic simulacrum of the way business dealings were conducted in the Ottoman Empire as well as the deconstruction of the mythic layer of the plot (ironic deconstruction of allegory). It also stipulates the possibility of a displaced reading of any Balkan business negotiations, regardless of the situation (noble course of burying the body), moral issue (for the native informants on the Serb’s side he was a martyr, for colonisers he was a plain savage who obstructed the noble course of the Vizier’s Foundation), or the value of the act. Ideologically, this scene is very often read in a key of “recreating the suffering of “our people” under the Ottoman rule”, which is very often an over-interpretation and in itself a very much ideologically charged series of writing, especially in the Serbian history of literature. The scene is all about how a deal is struck in the Oriental style of negotiation while these very ways need to be undermined by the burial proceedings. What is awkward in this situation is that the negotiation is about the body of a martyr/criminal and that it is between “his people” and the executor who is a Gipsy employed by Ottomans, not one of the Turks. Nevertheless, he has the power of a double-play: the position of authority “in between the Ottomans and the local subaltern population”. It all ends up as any other business deal of the Orient (or Levant): both sides are equally satisfied but also aware that they should have scored better in the negotiations. The real issue is not what happens at the level of the plot and myth deconstruction. What is much more important in reading the intention of this novel is who is seeing the story unfolding and who is telling the events to the *narratee* and to the imagined text’s readers. This is the position from which Andrić’s text can be deconstructed and a reading of sublime irony opened as another potential of the text.

An even better example of this interpretative “avenue” is the aforementioned archetypal situation that is re-constructed twice in the novel. The first scene is from the early period of the first colonisation (in a form of a “tax in blood” where young Christian/Serbian boys are taken from their families by Turks/Ottomans to become soldiers/Muslims). As already emphasised before, the same scene, in structural frame of narration, repeats itself in the second colonisation (when the first generation of conscripts from all nations/religions/traditions are drafted into obligatory Austro-Hungarian military service). But while the first story is uttered from the position of an imaginary Serbian native informant, or at least from that ideological point of identification, the second one is clearly ironically positioned from the position of authorial intent. This level of textual authority figures to re-create the scene from the first colonisation, now from the position of knowledge that is superior to the agents that participate in the plot itself (so called “ordinary” native informants). While the first scene of kidnapping, women crying and being dragged by soldiers asks for a readers identification with the native informant (fictive witness of events) and is not effective without this firm identification (at the level of authors intent), the second scene is ironic in its core. It does not only refer to the imaginary scenario possible as a real historic event in the period of the 1880s but it is also structurally related to the scene from the first colonisation, that is, it has a strong inter-textual and auto-referential charge. What is important for my reading here is not so much the circling of history, in Nietzsche’s sense, as is the ironic deconstruction of how textual instances are positioned in a power play of the presented world and in ideologies that are dominant in *The Bridge on Drina River*. In this respect what is ironically destabilised here is not only the position of the narrator and his ideological stance towards the construction (of the world) that would like to reassure readers in thinking that it represents the world-reconstruction but also regarding the point of view from which the power plays between subaltern and powerful, privileged and disposed, are seen and organised. Clearly, this time there is no doubt that it happens from the authors’ perspective.

What becomes more and more obvious in the second part of the novel is that the position of authorial authority not only constructs the world that appears to be “real history” but also reads/constructs this world from the position of its own time and ideologically charged interests produced in this time/space. In a process of decoding this authorial intention I see the native informants as crucial to this interpretative practice. My reading follows how they reveal themselves in the novel taking these moments as possible reference points (as interpretative signs). They (the native informant/textual spies, or displaced voices of *difference*) appear throughout the novel and may be clearly detected from indicators provided by authorial intent, very often in a most open manner. The example of the presence of the voice that sees how Mehmed Pasha was killed, or the voice that tells the story of how Radovan is captured, represent a few good examples of the “absent”



authorial instance in chapters dealing with the first colonization. The informants of the second colonisation are more subtle and much closer to the authorial intent, which in itself is a value statement. However, even though they are interviewed with authorial instance, at the same time the authorial intent itself reveals their intentions and ideological positioning while ironically destabilizing the “unifying whole” of historical reconstruction.

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In conclusion I shall say that by following the patterns of the novel’s construction it becomes obvious that the most direct appearance of these destabilizing agents can be detected in the chapters where a second colonisation (Austrian) takes place in Andrić’s construct of Bosnia. This is why this paper focuses on an examination of the tactics where authorial intention either uses or, with a particular (ironic?) purpose, constructs instances of native informers. The idea was to reproduce the story out of various aspects/narrative “cut offs”, which represent sketches of the “first colonisation” and the “second colonisation” in order to provide comprehensive simulacra of possible history, as it unfolds in front of our eyes has order to destabilize possible straight forward decoding of authors positioning towards both narrated time and the time of narration.

The emphasis of the process, from the authorial point of view, would be on re-writing identity politics, economic (dis)order and narrative tactics that re-construct circling the historical circle. But, as already stipulated, this is an ironic situation in its core: authorial intent at the same time constantly provides indicators which suggest that this world is not reconstructed, but constructed by his informants. The author does control his chronicle (the general idea of space and time) but not his informants who make this time/space alive. This position is most obvious in the construction of the period between 1878 and 1914, which is found in chapters X to XXIV.

This opens a final question(s) of this text which is (are): if the chronicle is constructed, rather than being a reconstruction of history, what does this say about history, its re-presentation in the novel and the native informants that are produced by/in it? And in this pseudo-allegoric situation, what can Andrić’s subtle irony tell us about the outlook of this world “between east and west”? And also: is this world then, just as one of his main characters – Alihodža Mutavelić – “dying in short spasms” (“*umirao u kratkom trzajima*”), now not in its third (Kingdom of Yugoslavia), but forth colonizing-imperial-occupying situation (Second World War)? And, at the very end of this textual construction, what can one say about its “space of freedom”, both at the level of identity politics and (the cultural) economic openness? Is it something that can be documented as a historic reconstruction, or is it only constructed as a fiction that only lives in “a world of its own”? The

possible answers to these questions are not only a contribution of reading Andrić's novel anew. In my opinion these answers are important for the contemporary (displaced) reading of most of the text that are embedded in the space in between two cultural paradigm and two discursive formations: East and West; Modernism and Postmodernism. Reading anew of these texts will pave the way for repositioning textual practice of Modernism in the national canon with clear understanding of their ironic stance toward the ideas of history, hegemony and belonging to a particular cultural circle. This goes not only for South Slavic literatures, but for most of the texts that circulate in the so called "Other Europe", the one that once was considered barbaric and alien, the one east of Berlin and Wien, north of Venice and west of Russia and Ottoman Empire.

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