

Why Ivo Andrić is Important for Croatian Literature

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There are many links connecting Ivo Andrić to Croatian literature: his ethnic origin, his education in Zagreb and the cities of Austria-Hungary, his literary beginnings in the anthology *Hrvatska mlada lirika* (Croatian young lyrics) (Zagreb 1914). It is interesting that Andrić, although a declared Yugoslav nationalist, did not in 1918, like numbers of other young Croatian writers (Miroslav Krleža, Tin Ujević, A. B. Šimić, A. Cesarec), go over to the ekavian variant, which was at the time a sign of a wish to eliminate the differences between Croatian and Serbian. Andrić wrote in ijekavian until 1920, and on language criteria his earlier works could be considered an integral part of Croatian literature.

It is not the purpose of this anthology to show that Andrić was in fact a Croatian, and not a Serb, writer. He chose his own ethnic and cultural context, and his personal wish has to be respected. Andrić's best books were printed in Serbian and in that

language today are considered a model of good literary style. But for Croatian literature, Ivo Andrić is more interesting than any other writer. His works have always evoked an enormous response in Croatia, among both critics and the wider reading public. He has had a direct influence on contemporary writers (on Ivan Aralica, for example, and on the younger Ivan Lovrenović and Miljenko Jergović). The themes of Andrić's works are also connected with the Croat cultural inheritance: numbers of his tales deal with the Bosnian Franciscans; the turbulence and ferments of Bosnian history are often depicted through a vision powerfully imbued with their philosophy of life and their religious teachings.

The events in ex-Yugoslavia, especially the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, have made the semantic dimensions of the novels and tales devoted to Bosnia very current, and there has been a revival of interest in

his works in the world. His ability to analyse in depth the historical currents, conflicts and interweaving of various spheres of culture and civilisation that occur in Bosnia has come to the fore, and the fascinating wisdom of this great writer has been shown yet again. It should also be borne in mind that Andrić is a great stylist, that he structures the composition of his tales quite brilliantly, being a master of the entire art of narrative.

This section of texts devoted to Ivo Andrić coming out in the series of thematic numbers of the journal *The Bridge* devoted to major Croatian writers shows the great interest in Ivo Andrić that there has always been in the Croatian literary and intellectual public; it is because of this interest that we consider him an integral part of the Croatian literary tradition, not denying the while his being rooted in Serb literature, in which he is the most important figure of the 20th century.