

Oral tale motifs in the novel *The Bridge on the Drina*

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<https://doi.org/10.31192/np.20.1.12>

UDK / UDC: 821.163.4Andrić, I.

398

Pregledni članak / Review

Primljeno / Received:

31. ožujka 2021. / March 31, 2021

Prihvaćeno / Accepted:

20. svibnja 2021. / May 20, 2021

*The novel *The Bridge on the Drina* (Na Drini Čuprija) by Ivo Andrić is a chronicle about Višegrad and the bridge that spans the Drina River. The storyline revolves around numerous oral tales that the writer incorporated into the novel. The subjects of these oral tales include the bridge, its surrounding area, and the local inhabitants. In terms of genre, they may be categorised as historical, mythical, demonological, aetiological, eschatological oral tales and tales from everyday life. The genres of the tales often intertwine. In the novel *The Bridge on the Drina* all types of tales are present. The tales in the paper are interpreted in a historical, ethnological, and anthropological context. These oral tales narrate the story of a traumatic life experience on the territory imbued with conflicts, while at the same time serving as didactic tools, which is in line with the predominant function of oral literature. The tales have an exceptional aesthetic and social function.*

Key words: *fate, folk beliefs, heroes, oral tale, water fairy.*

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Introduction

Oral tales are a type of oral stories which the narrator recounts without questioning their authenticity. They are hybrid in nature and serve various artistic, aesthetic, and vital functions. They consist of specific material (historical and geographical information, prominent individuals, etc.) and are used to transfer knowledge and experience. Oral tales interpret the causes of cultural and historical events; they usually draw material from the environment where they are perpetuated, and they serve to encapsulate the local heritage at all levels. They are based on popular customs and folk beliefs. Oral tales are divided into historical, aetiological, eschatological, mythological, and demonological oral tales and tales from everyday life.¹ Andrić² refers to them as *legends* and they assume an important position in the lives of the characters in *The Bridge on the Drina*, as confirmed by the following quote:

»They knew all the bosses and concavities of the masons, as well as all the tales and legends associated with the existence and building of the bridge, in which reality and imagination, waking and dream, were wonderfully and inextricably mingled. They had always known these things as if they had come into the world with them, even as they knew their prayers, but could not remember from whom they had learnt them nor when they had first heard them.«³

This quote describes the children's perspective and attitudes towards tales because it was the children who valued and acknowledged these stories more than anyone else did. They never questioned their authenticity, and Andrić used these oral tales as a fabric to weave his novel *The Bridge on the Drina*.

¹ Cf. Tvrtko ČUBELIĆ, *Narodne pripovijetke [Folk stories]*, Zagreb, Školska knjiga, 1963, 237; Maja BOŠKOVIĆ-STULLI, *Usmena književnost kao umjetnost riječi [Oral literature as the art of words]*, Zagreb, Mladost, 1975, 11, 12, 128; Josip KEKEZ, *Usmena književnost [Oral literature]*, in: Z. Škreb, A. Stamać (ed.), *Uvod u književnost [Introduction to literature]*, Zagreb, Globus, 1986, 184-186; Stipe BOTICA, *Biblija i hrvatska kulturna tradicija [The Bible and Croatian cultural tradition]*, Zagreb, Vlastita naklada, 1995, 7-9; Stipe BOTICA, *Povijest hrvatske usmene književnosti [The history of Croatian oral literature]*, Zagreb, Školska knjiga, 2013, 435; Marko DRAGIĆ, *Tradicijske priče iz Zagore [Traditional stories from Zagora]*, Split, Književni krug – Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Splitu, 2017, 33.

² A legend is an oral story of religious character which usually involves characters such as Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary, saints, martyrs and other exceptional individuals. Legend is similar to a hagiography which narrates about the life of the saints. It differs from other literary forms by the element of miracle which rewards the good and punishes the bad behaviour. Miracle is an act of God materialised through saints. Legends usually serve a moral and didactic function [Maja BOŠKOVIĆ-STULLI, *Narodne pripovijetke [Folk stories]*, Zagreb, Zora, Matica hrvatska, 1963, 12; Marko DRAGIĆ, *Hrvatska usmena književnost Bosne i Hercegovine, proza, drama i mikrostrukture [Croatian oral literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina, prose, drama and microstructures]*, Sarajevo, Matica hrvatska u Sarajevu, HKD Napredak Sarajevo, 2005, 34; Marko DRAGIĆ, *Etnografsko-filološki prinosi tradicijskoj kulturi drniškoga kraja [Ethnographic-philological contributions to the traditional culture of the Drniš region]*, *Titius*, 1 (2008) 1, 167-205, 180; Botica, *Povijest...*, 446-447; Dragić, *Tradicijske priče...*, 165].

³ Ivo ANDRIĆ, *The Bridge on the Drina*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1959, 15.

The paper focusses on analysing these oral tale motifs and classifying them according to the genre.

1. *Oral tales about the bridge*

Historical traditions narrate about fateful historical events and persons. One of them is the Grand Vizier Mehmed Pasha Sokolović, who had been born in the nearby village of Sokolovići, under whose patronage the bridge was built. The construction was executed by Rade the Mason, »that legendary and in fact nameless master whom all people desire and dream of.«⁴ The children of Višegrad knew that the construction had been obstructed by the water fairy (*vila*), who would destroy by night what had been built by day, until a voice whispered from the waters and advised Rade the Mason to wall two infant children, Stoja and Ostoja, into the central pier of the bridge⁵. A reward was promised to whomever found them. The guards found the children and walled them into the bridge, but the Mason took pity on them and left windows on the pillars so that the mother could breastfeed them. It is a popular belief that mothers who do not have milk scrape the powder off the bridge and say it is effective.⁶

The favourite gathering spot of the Višegrad townsmen was the terrace at the middle of the bridge which they referred to as *kapia*. There was a larger opening in the pier of the bridge, just below the *kapia*, which resembled a gigantic loophole. All children knew that there was a large room in the pier where a black Arab lived. »If he should appear to anyone, that man must die.«⁷

⁴ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 16.

⁵ The motif of walling human sacrifices into the masonry foundations is found in the oral poem *Zidanje Skadra (The Building of Skadar)*. In the poem, the fairy prevents the King Vukašin Mrnjavčević from building Skadar on the Bojana River. She urged him to find a twin brother and sister, Stoja and Stojan, and wall them into the tower foundations. The King sent his servant Desimir into the world to seize or buy a twin brother and sister by that name, but it was to no avail. Since they failed to find Stoja or Stojan, she requested that one of the wives of Mrnjavčević brothers, whoever came first to bring lunch for the workers of Rade the Mason, be walled into the foundations. The first to arrive was the wife of Gojko Mrnjavčević, so Rade walled her into the tower foundations. She implored them to leave a window in the wall at her breast, so that she might continue to feed her infant son, and at her eye level, so that she can see him. The poem ends in the following verses: Still for the child the milk did flow for a whole year, / And so it has remained for ever, / And still today the milk doth flow: / A sign of wonder, a sign of healing, / For every woman that cannot suckle. Andrić also referred to this when he described men who scraped the milky traces off the piers and sold them as medicinal powder to women who had no milk after giving birth [Zidanje Skadra, <https://www.prelepapoezija.com/zidanje-skadra/> (13.10.2020)]. For more information on the walling motif, see Marko DRAGIĆ, Povijesne i etiološke predaje u ljubuškom kraju [Historical and etiological tales about Ljubuški province], *Motrišta*, 92 (2016) 25-61.

⁶ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 16.

⁷ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 16.

None of the children died, but they believed that Hamid, who fell asleep drunk on a bridge one cold night, had in fact seen him and died as a result of that. That opening was the source of horror for those boys, but also a place of continuous play. The oral tale about the black Arab, which contains eschatological motifs, probably originated from a story about a young man who was one of the workers on the construction of the bridge. He was an assistant to Maestro Antonio from Ulcinj, a stonemason who was hired by the Turks to help with the construction of the bridge. He was killed by a large stone block when the workers tried to place it into position. Maestro Antonio arrived quickly and did everything he could to help his assistant, but the young man could not be saved.⁸

2. *Mythical oral tales about Serbian and Muslim heroes*

Mythical tales usually tell the stories of fairies and exceptional historical figures who were believed to have supernatural powers.⁹ Upstream from the Višegrad bridge, on both steep banks of the river made of grey limestone, people could see rounded hollows, always in pairs at regular intervals, which resembled the hoof prints of a gigantic horse. The children, who used to play in the summer along these banks, knew that these were the hoof prints of ancient warriors. However, they could not agree on whose hoof prints they were.

Both sides were convinced of the authenticity of their respective stories. Kraljević Marko (Prince Marko)¹⁰ and Alija Đerzelez¹¹ are represented in oral poems and oral tales as epic heroes with supernatural abilities. Due to these traits, this oral tale may be classified as mythical.¹²

⁸ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 63.

⁹ Marko DRAGIĆ, *Poetika i povijest hrvatske usmene književnosti [The poetics and the history of Croatian oral literature]*, Split, Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Splitu, 2008, 429.

¹⁰ According to Orbini, Marko was the son of the King Vukašin Mrnjavčević. His other three sons were Ivaniš, Andrijaš and Mitraš. Vukašin died on 26 September 1371 after being assassinated by his shield-bearer Nikola Hrisojević who wanted to seize his necklace, so his sons were forced to succumb to the Ottoman rule to protect the rest of their estate from the Ottomans and their neighbours who had already seized a large portion of their estate. Marko, accompanied by Sultan Bayezid's army, led the invasion against the Wallachian Duke Mircea, where he died in the woods from the arrow-inflicted wound after he had been mistaken for a feral beast by a Wallachian man (Mavro ORBINI, *Kraljevstvo Slavena [The kingdom of the Slavs]*, Zagreb, Golden marketing, Narodne novine, 1999, 341-342).

¹¹ According to Hadžijahić, Alija Đerzelez was the most legendary hero of the Muslim folk tradition in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the oral tale, Alija was either killed while he was saying his daily prayers, or he vanished after he realised that he had unjustly killed his own sister (Muhamed HADŽIJAHIĆ (prir.), *Narodne pjesme o Đerzelez Aliji [The folk songs about Đerzelez Alija]*, Sarajevo, Štamparija Omer Šehić, 1934, 3-11).

¹² Dragić, *Poetika i povijest...*, 429.

Orthodox people and Muslims could not even agree on an earthen barrow near the pathway on the left riverbank. Nothing grew there except for tufts of short grass. They called it »Radisav`s tomb«; according to the tale, he was a Serbian hero of great power who revolted against the construction of the bridge and warned Mehmed Pasha not to continue with the works on the bridge over Drina.

»And the Vezir had many troubles before he succeeded in overcoming Radisav for he was a man greater than other men; there was no rifle or sword that could harm him, nor was there rope or chain that could bind him. He broke all of them like thread, so great was the power of the talisman that he had with him«.¹³

They managed to overpower Radisav when they bribed and interrogated his servant. »Then they took Radisav by surprise and drowned him while he was asleep, binding him with silken ropes for against silk his talisman could not help him«.¹⁴ According to a folk belief about his tomb:

»(...) there is one night of the year when a strong white light can be seen falling on that tumulus direct from heaven; and that takes place sometime in autumn between the greater and lesser feasts of the Virgin«.¹⁵

The Muslims believed that a dervish by the name of Sheik Turhanija died as a martyr on that tumulus. He was a great hero who defended the crossing from an army of infidels. As per his wish, he was buried in an unmarked grave. According to the oral tale:

»For, if ever again some infidel army should invade by this route, then he would arise from under his tumulus and hold them in check, as he had once done, so that they should be able to advance no farther than the bridge at Višegrad«.¹⁶

In both versions of the oral tale, the protagonist is a mythical hero with supernatural powers.

Andrić referred to Radisav several times throughout the novel, and he tied his fate to the construction of the bridge on the Drina River. He was one of the workers who were coerced into building the bridge. His surname was Herak, originally from Unište, a small village just above Višegrad. He tried to convince other workers to join him in his efforts to stop the construction of the bridge. Their plan was to spread the rumour »(...) that it is a vila, a fairy, who is destroying the works at the bridge and who does not want any bridge over the Drina.«¹⁷ Soon the rumour began to spread among the workers and the townsmen that the water fairy had been obstructing the construction of the bridge,

¹³ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 18.

¹⁴ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 18.

¹⁵ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 18.

¹⁶ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 18-19.

¹⁷ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 35.

»(...) that she destroyed and pulled down overnight what had been built by day and that the whole scheme will come to nothing. At the same time, inexplicable damage began to appear overnight in the revetments and even in the masonry itself. The tools which the masons had up till then left on the piers began to get lost and disappear, the revetments to break down and be carried away by the waters.«¹⁸

The Christians helped spread this rumour, and even the Turks. This is where the story about Stoja and Ostoja originated from.¹⁹ Around that time, a mentally challenged mute girl gave birth to stillborn twin babies who were later buried in a plum orchard by the women from the village. On the third day after the delivery, the mother started looking for her children. After her incessant questioning, they told her that the children had been taken to Višegrad. She was convinced that the children had been walled into the bridge, so she searched for them across the town and on the construction site. At first, they tried to chase her away, but they gradually got used to her presence. They would refer to her as crazy Ilinka, and soon after, the entire town started calling her that as well.²⁰

The construction site was managed by a man called Abidaga, who summoned the guards and their chief, a man from Plevlje, and ordered them to find the person responsible for the sabotage that took place on the construction site during night-time. Since he was convinced that the sabotage was not the fairy's doing, he told them that they had from Thursday until Sunday to find the person responsible for the sabotage, and that he would gravely punish the chief unless he found the culprits. Driven by fear, the man from Plevlje threatened the guards. They would search the riverbanks during night-time:

»At one time during the night, it seemed to them that something was knocking at that part of the staging which was farthest out in the river and they rushed thither. They heard a plank crack and a stone fell into the river, but when they got to the spot, they indeed found some broken scaffolding and a part of the masonry torn away but no trace of the miscreants. Faced with that ghostly emptiness the guards shivered from superstitious fright and from the darkness and moisture of the night.«²¹

The damage had been done, but they failed to find the culprit. The following night, they devised a better ambush and waited for the perfect moment to act, but to no avail. In the silence of the third night, they heard the sounds coming from the construction site, and that was their signal to act. They all rushed onto the bridge and captured a peasant on the scaffolding, while the other one managed to escape. The fact that one escaped greatly infuriated the chief of

¹⁸ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 35.

¹⁹ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 36.

²⁰ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 37.

²¹ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 39.

guards, but he knew that even one captured saboteur meant that he would stay alive. There was quite a commotion throughout the entire construction site, after which they took the perpetrator to a stable. When the perpetrator was brought to light, they recognised Radisav from Unište. Abidaga noticed the commotion and the light on the construction site, so he came down to see what was happening. He started interrogating the prisoner who claimed that he and another young man had decided to escape on a raft down the river. They responded to his blatant lie by torturing him with scorching chains.²²

Since he refused to reveal the name of his accomplice, they continued to torture him into admitting that the two of them were the only ones involved in the sabotage. He also described the way they sabotaged the bridge. The Turks were not satisfied with his explanations, so they continued with the torture. »Merđjan then came nearer with a pair of pincers. He knelt in front of the bound man and began to tear the nails off his naked feet.«²³ Abidaga ordered them to pursue with the torture and to prepare everything so that the culprit could be impaled on a stake²⁴ at noon. The place they chose for the execution of the punishment was the most elevated part of the scaffold visible to all. Merđjan oversaw the preparations for the impalement, and the messengers informed the people that they were all obligated to attend the impalement. When the people gathered, the guards, executioners and the prisoner headed off towards the bridge. Radisav had a difficult time walking because of the torture he had endured the night before. No one could hear anything from the distance, but they all saw the blood-curdling images that ensued.

From the banks, all this could scarcely be heard and still less seen, but the people were instantly struck by a gut-wrenching fear which manifested itself as trembling and cold shivers. However, even more nauseating scenes ensued. They left the poor man's tortured corpse hanging in plain sight, and many people in the crowd deeply regretted witnessing the atrocious act. The chief burst into a hysterical laughter and started gloating over Radisav's fate which could have been his own in a different turn of events.²⁵ Andrić's description of this event coincides with the Đurđević's testimony.

²² Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 44.

²³ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 44.

²⁴ The atrocious images of impaling were described by Đurđević in his book *Memoari s Balkana (Memoirs from the Balkans)*: »Dying from impalement was even more hideous than dying from crucifixion. The stake was well-polished, greased with fat, 15 cm thick and 2.5 m long, with a well-sharpened tip. The person sentenced to a horrifying and tortuous death by impalement would have a stake forcibly pushed through their bottom crevice, right through the intestines and ribcage, and the stake would rip open the flesh on their neck so as not to (damage) harm the abdomen and the liver. Then they would push the stake into the ground, leaving the person in a hanging position to suffer unspeakable pain, provided that the person could endure it for so long« (Martin ĐURĐEVIĆ, *Memoari s Balkana [Memoirs from the Balkans]*, Sarajevo, Zid, 1997, 20-21).

²⁵ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 51.

3. *Starina Novak on the people of Višegrad*

The people of Višegrad were generally considered »(...) easy-going men, prone to pleasure and free with their money.«²⁶ This is confirmed by a tale about a hajduk brigand Starina Novak, who was compelled to leave his highwayman days behind him as he felt his strength failing due to old age, so he decided to teach his tricks to a young man named Grujić who was to succeed him:

»When you are sitting in ambush look well at the traveller who comes. If you see that he rides proudly and that he wears a red corselet and silver bosses and white gaiters, then he is from Foča. Strike at once, for he has wealth both on him and in his saddlebags. If you see a poorly dressed traveller, with bowed head, hunched on his horse as if he were going out to beg, then strike freely, for he is a man from Rogatica. They are all alike, misers and tight-fisted but as full of money as a pomegranate. But if you see some mad fellow, with legs crossed over the saddlebow, beating on a drum and singing at the top of his voice, don't strike and do not soil your hands for nothing. Let the rascal go his way. He is from Višegrad and he has nothing, for money does not stick to such men.«²⁷

This oral tale, even though its protagonist is a historical figure – the hajduk brigand Starina Novak – is not a historical tale, but a tale from everyday life²⁸ because it is primarily focussed on the characterisation of the local people.

4. *Tribute in blood*

Andrić described the cruelty of collecting tribute in blood. The tribute was first mentioned by Kuripešić in 1530, when he said that »every third, fourth or fifth male child or boy is taken from every town or region.«²⁹ The Turks chose the most beautiful and skilful children regardless of whether they were the only children their parents had. These children became Janissaries or servants, clerks, and captains.

»The Turks considered them the best, most pious and loyal men who liked to be deemed the real Turks and took great pride in it; which is why they were trusted more than the real Turks.«³⁰

²⁶ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 20.

²⁷ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 21.

²⁸ »Tales from everyday life are usually short and sarcastic oral traditions ridiculing the local people or members of certain social classes (peasants, provincials) or occupations (clerks, police officers)« (Dragić, *Poetika i povijest...*, 444.)

²⁹ Benedikt KURİPEŠIĆ, *Putopis kroz Bosnu, Srbiju, Bugarsku i Rumeliju 1530*. [Travelogue through Bosnia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Rumelia 1530], Sarajevo, Oslobođenje, 1950, reprint: Beograd, Čigoja štampa, 2001, 27.

³⁰ Kuripešić, *Putopis...*, 36.

In his doctoral thesis, Andrić (1924) described the procedure of collecting the tribute in blood that was enforced every five years by special commissioners referred to as *telosnici*. They arrived in Bosnia for the first time in 1467, after the collapse of the Bosnian Kingdom, and kept returning until the 17th century. They travelled from village to village, and every head of the family was obligated to report the exact number of children in the household. Every attempt to conceal the exact number was severely punished. There was no law prescribing that a given number of children was to be taken from a single household, but only the total number of children they were obligated to bring. The final decision was on the commissioners. The Christian parents resorted to every available means to protect their children from this forcible seizure. The most common strategy was to bribe the commissioner into leaving the child in their custody. The parents who were too poor to bribe the officials would attempt to hide the child or even go so far as to maim their child because the commissioners selected only the healthiest children. Since the Turks refused to take young married men, the parents would even arrange for the child to marry as early as eleven or twelve years old. Some Christian parents even offered money to their Muslim neighbours to substitute their own children, which some of them gladly accepted. The abducted children soon forgot their family home and faith.³¹ According to Vlašić, the tribute in blood (Tur. *devshirme*)³² was first recorded during the rule of Bayezid I (1389-1402), and this practice was regulated by law during the reign of Murad II (1421-1444 and 1446-1451). The law enabled the state to seize the physically and mentally capable boys between seven and eighteen years of age from its non-Muslim subjects. The appointed committee recorded the children in a registry and then sent them to Constantinople in groups of one hundred to one hundred and fifty boys. In the 16th century, the tribute in blood was executed at regular intervals of three, five or seven years, depending on the state demands. According to Vlašić's estimate, at least two hundred thousand boys went through that system during two centuries on the Balkans. Their main goal was to train loyal bureaucrats for the Sultan's palace, state administration and Janissary troops. The tribute in blood included only the non-Muslims, and they were forbidden to marry during their service. If they decided to marry after the end of their service, their children were considered Muslims and they could not succeed their fathers. The tribute in blood practice was terminated in the 17th century, i.e. the last recorded instance was in 1648.³³ According to Dragić, the girls and the boys would both wear dresses made from a single piece until their adolescence with the aim of preventing the boys from being recruited for the Janissary troops. For the same reasons, they

³¹ Ivo ANDRIĆ, *Razvoj duhovnog života u Bosni pod utjecajem turske vladavine* [The development of spiritual life in Bosnia under the influence of Turkish rule], Zagreb, AGM, 2017, 64-67.

³² Tur. *devşirme*: collection, harvesting.

³³ Anđelko VLAŠIĆ, Danak u krvi sultanu Osmanskog Carstva [The tribute in blood to the sultan of the Ottoman Empire], *History.info – povijesni časopis*, 2017.

would walk barefoot and bareheaded.³⁴ Without giving exact figures, Kadrić believes that the tribute in blood recruited numerous boys from the provinces of the Ottoman Empire.³⁵

Andrić described a similar seizure of children that took place in the Višegrad area in November 1516, when a young boy, who would later become known as Mehmed Pasha Sokolović, was taken from his village home. Six years have passed since the last tribute:

»(...) and so this time the choice had been easy and rich; the necessary number of healthy, bright and good-looking lads between ten and fifteen years old had been found without difficulty, even though many parents had hidden their children in the forests, taught them how to appear half-witted, clothed them in rags and let them get filthy, to avoid the aga's choice. Some went so far as to maim their own children, cutting off one of their fingers with an axe«.³⁶

The boys were transported in large baskets carried on the back of small Bosnian horses, one on each side.

»On each horse were two plaited panniers, like those for fruit, one on each side, and in every pannier was put a child, each with a small bundle and a round cake, the last thing they were to take from their parents' homes«.³⁷

The convoy of seized children and their captivators was observed and followed from a distance by aggrieved parents and the relatives of the children.

»When they came too close, the aga's horsemen would drive them away with whips, urging their horses at them with loud cries to Allah. (...) The mothers were especially persistent and hard to restrain«.³⁸

The exhausted mothers would soon abandon their vain efforts, one after the other. When they reached the Višegrad ferry and the crossing over Drina, even the most persistent of them were forced to give up because there was no way over. In one of those many baskets, there was a boy who would become a powerful Grand Vizier one day.

»On that November day in one of those countless panniers a dark-skinned boy of about ten years old from the mountain village of Sokolovići sat silent and looked about him with dry eyes. In a chilled and reddened hand, he held a small curved knife with which he absent-mindedly whittled at the edges of his pannier, but at the same time looked about him. He was to remember that

³⁴ Marko DRAGIĆ, Danak u krvi u romanu *Na Drini ćuprija* i u suvremenom pripovijedanju [Tribute in blood in the Novel *The Bridge on the Drina* and in the modern narrative], *HUM – časopis Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Mostaru*, 8 (2012) 123-140, 126.

³⁵ Sanja KADRIĆ, The Islamization of Ottoman Bosnia: Myths and Matters, in: A. C. S. PEACOCK (ed.), *Islamisation. Comparative Perspectives from History*, Edinburgh, University Press, 2017, 280-286.

³⁶ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 23-24.

³⁷ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 24.

³⁸ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 24.

stony bank overgrown with sparse, bare, and dull grey willows, the surly ferryman and the dry watermill full of draughts and spiders' webs where they had to spend the night before it was possible to transport all of them across the troubled waters of the Drina over which the ravens were croaking«. ³⁹

The fate prevented Mehmed Pasha Sokolović from enjoying the endowment he had gifted to Višegrad because, after the bridge and all its pertaining facilities had been completed, he met his ill-fortune and fell victim to a fanatic dervish and his blade. Andrić's recount of events differs from the description provided by Bašagić and Kukuljević.

»One Friday, when he went with his suite to the mosque, a ragged and half-demented dervish approached him with his left hand stretched out for alms. The Vezir turned and ordered a member of his suite to give them. But the dervish then drew a heavy butcher's knife from his right sleeve and violently stabbed the Vezir between the ribs. His suite cut the dervish down, but the Vezir and his murderer breathed their last at the same moment«. ⁴⁰

5. *Playing cards with the devil*

Andrić introduced the oral tradition about the fate of Milan, the son of the inn owner Nikola Glasićanin from Okolište, to the novel. Their family moved to Višegrad from Serbia during the insurrection against the Ottomans. The young Milan was a gambler. He would enjoy in his vice with only few other Višegrad gamblers in a smoke-laden room at the Ustamujić inn. Their routine changed when a stranger arrived in the inn, who emptied their pockets in a very short time. After losing money several nights in a row, Milan managed to control himself and decided to stay at home, but the stranger appeared at his doorstep and invited him to play on the bridge. Milan tried to resist it, but to no avail. They sat down on the *kapia* and the stranger took out the deck. The game began despite Milan's objections that he was unable to see the cards properly or distinguish the money due to the lack of lighting. They played in silence.

»In not quite an hour Milan had no longer had any ready money. The stranger proposed that he should go home and get some more and said that he would accompany him. They went there and returned and went on with the game«. ⁴¹

As they continued, Milan mostly lost money, but he would also win a hand or two. However, he soon lost all cash, so the stranger proposed that they play for his cattle, land, and estate.

³⁹ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 25.

⁴⁰ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 70.

⁴¹ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 147.

The stranger was on a winning streak, so Milan lost all his estate. His opponent then surprised him with the following proposal:

»Do you know what, friend? Let us have one more turn at the cards, but all for all. I will wager all that I have gained tonight and you your life. If you win, everything will be yours again just as it was, money, cattle, lands. If you lose, you will leap from the *kapia* into the Drina.«⁴²

Milan made every effort to move and to resist it, but the stranger's glance left him motionless. He then faced his final defeat which opened his eyes and allowed him to gain a clear perspective on his life. Milan started panicking, but he was unable to call anyone, while the stranger just stood there, waiting.

That night left a severe mark in Milan's life. He could barely summon the strength to stagger from the bridge to his house, where he fell like a wounded man and remained bed-ridden with fever for two months. The experience he had endured irreversibly changed his character. He was not sure whether he had actually experienced it or if it was merely a dream. He confided in Pop Nikola and two of his best friends about what had happened to him that night, but they all thought that it was just a figment of his imagination or even a hallucination.⁴³ The only thing that was sure is that he had lost a large sum of money, his health, youth, and a long-time vice overnight. This oral tale has the traits of a demonological oral tale because it describes a personal encounter with a demonic being, in this case in human form.⁴⁴ The power of evil had vanished upon the crowing of the cocks and the rising of the dawn.

There is another similar tale added to this story, the tale about Bukus, the son of the pious Jew Avram Gaon. He was a young man of restless spirit who found a golden ducat on the *kapia* one day. Since he was in a company of others, he decided to wait until everyone had left home and then try to reach the ducat. He extracted the ducat even though it was Saturday, the day of rest for the Jews, and decided that the ducat would be his entry card into the enticing world of gambling at the Ustamujić inn. He had always dreamed of it, but he never had enough money to realise that dream. On the first night, he won, so he started fantasising about a life of luxury away from the family poverty. He left his family and became a gambler, so the folk tradition maintains that it was all due to the *devil's ducat* he had found on the *kapia*.⁴⁵

⁴² Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 149.

⁴³ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 151.

⁴⁴ Dragić, *Poetika i povijest...*, 436-437.

⁴⁵ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 153-

6. *The escape of the hajduk brigand Jakov Čekrlija*

In the fourth year of Austrian administration in Bosnia, there was an insurrection in Eastern Herzegovina which spilled over to the surrounding area of Višegrad. The detachment guarding the bridge received a warning to take extra precautions because they suspected that the extremely dangerous *hajduk*⁴⁶ brigand Jakov Čekrlija, who was described as extremely dangerous due to his incredible strength and cunningness, could try to flee from Bosnia across the bridge. A young Russian Gregor Fedun and the older Stevan of Prača were the designated guards. The young man was very diligent about his service, while Stevan mostly slept on duty. For several days in a row, a Turkish girl passed the bridge and exchanged timid gazes with Fedun. On the fourth day, she asked him when he would next be on guard. She told him that she would bring her old grandmother with her to spend the night in the town and that she would return later. Six hours later, she appeared with an old woman entirely covered in a black veil. She gazed into Fedun's eyes so boldly that it sent him into a reverie. He tried to think about all the different ways the situation could unfold, but the girl never returned. Instead, he was approached by two guards, who were supposed to take his and Stevan's place, accompanied by Sergeant Draženović who ordered Fedun and Stevan to remain in their dormitories once they reached the barracks. In the barracks, they were separated and subjected to interrogation. The Russian was confronted with a woman disguised as a young Muslim girl but now she was dressed as Serbian girls from the adjacent villages, save for the bright coloured Turkish trousers.⁴⁷ She explained how he allowed her to cross the bridge. He discovered that her name was Jelenka Tasić and that she had helped the Jakov Čekrlija to cross the bridge disguised as an old Muslim woman.

⁴⁶ According to Lovrić, *hajduk* brigands were no ordinary outlaws since they robbed people in plain sight. They appeared in Bosnia after the collapse of the Bosnian Kingdom, and they were first mentioned by the travel writer Zeno. The local people perceived them as heroes and fighters against the Ottomans, while the authorities viewed them as bandits. [Ivan, MIMICA, Prikaz hajduka u djelima Alberta Fortisa, Ivana Lovrića i Vladimira Arđalića [Representations of hayduks in the works of Alberto Fortis, Ivan Lovrić and Vladimir Arđalić], *Titius*, 4 (2011) 4, 111-113; Ivan LOVRIĆ, *Bilješke o Putu po Dalmaciji opata Alberta Fortisa i Život Stanislava Sočivice* [Observations on the Travels into Dalmatia by abbot Alberto Fortis and The life of Stanislav Sočivica], Zagreb, Izdavački zavod Jugoslavenske akademije, 1948, 65; Miroslav DŽAJA, Krunoslav DRAGANOVIĆ, *Sa kupreške visoravni* [From the Kupres plateau], Baška polje – Zagreb, rkt. župni ured Otinovci – Kupres, 2019, 89; Marko DRAGIĆ, *Od Kozigrada do Zvonigrada. Hrvatske povijesne predaje i legende iz Bosne i Hercegovine* [From Kozigrad to Zvonigrad. Croatian historical tales and legends from Bosnia and Herzegovina], Baška Voda – Mostar – Zagreb, Mala nakladna kuća sv. Jure – Zajednica izdanja ranjeni labud ZIRAL, 2001, 143-144; Marko DRAGIĆ, *Hrvatska usmena književnost Bosne i Hercegovine, lirika, epika, retorika* [Croatian oral literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina, lyrics, epics, rhetoric], Hrvatska književnost Bosne i Hercegovine u sto knjiga, 4. knj., Sarajevo, Matica hrvatska – HKD Napredak, 2006, 353].

⁴⁷ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 164.

»He threw off his feridjah and pushed Jelenka at the gendarme so violently that they both lost their footing (...). She, as she calmly and clearly confessed, tangled herself with the legs of the gendarme. By the time that the gendarme had freed himself of her, Jakov had already rushed across the Rzav as if it had been a stream, though the water was above his knees, and was lost in the willow clumps on the farther side«.⁴⁸

Fedun confessed to everything, and after he had returned to his dormitory, he took his own life with his rifle. He left the following note: »All that I have please send to my father at Kolomea. I send greetings to all my comrades and beg my superiors to pardon me. G. Fedun«.⁴⁹ This oral tale with integrated historical elements testifies to the cunningness of the *hajduk* brigand Jakov Čekrlija; it is based on the wittiness demonstrated by the actual *hajduk* brigands when they were faced with a more powerful enemy.

7. *Bridge keeper Alihodža Mutevelić*

The oral tale about the origin of the bridge is recounted by Alihodža Mutevelić, the descendant of the family whose oldest male members were the administrators of Mehmed Pasha's religious endowment called *vakuf*. His life was greatly influenced by his confrontation with Osman Effendi Karamanli. Alihodža disapproved of the military resistance against the Austrians because he believed that it would result in a bloodshed, while Karamanli adamantly advocated the armed uprising. The confrontation escalated when Karamanli, before he fled Višegrad, brought Alihodža to the kapia and nailed him by the ear to the wooden beam on the bridge. This event changed him forever.

When the Austrians decided to restore the bridge, Alihodža, as a man whose family had managed the bridge for years, strongly opposed it. He based his arguments on the oral tradition recounted by his late father. This oral tale contains aetiological and mythical elements about angels who taught people how to build bridges, and who care for them and maintain them. Alihodža teaches and warns that after the construction of the fountain

»the greatest blessing is to build a bridge and the greatest sin to interfere with it, for every bridge, from a tree trunk crossing a mountain stream to this great erection of Mehmed Pasha, has its guardian angel who cares for it and maintains in as long as God has ordained that it should stand«.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 165-166.

⁴⁹ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 168

⁵⁰ Andrić, *The Bridge...*, 209.

Conclusion

Oral tales are the main structural elements of Andrić's novel *The Bridge on the Drina*. The writer uses them to describe the origin and causes of events and to account for the inexplicable phenomena. Andrić initially approaches them from the position of a child that uncritically accepts everything it hears, but then shifts his point of view in the following chapters to demystify the previously incorporated oral tales by offering possible explanations for the related phenomena. Most oral tales are related to the bridge itself, its construction, restoration, life on the bridge and the people who were born, lived and died with the bridge. The oral tales used by Andrić tell the story of turbulent and difficult times under various aggressors, but also about the joyous moments of life. These oral tales have a didactic character and are a result of the life experiences of various generations.

Nikola Sunara*

Motivski svijet usmenih predaja u romanu Na Drini Ćuprija

Sažetak

Roman *Na Drini Ćuprija* Ive Andrića kronika je o Višegradu i mostu preko Drine koji se u njemu nalazi. Pisac je u tekst inkorporirao brojne predaje koje čine okosnicu romana, a motivski su vezane uz most, njegovu okolicu i ljude koji su tu živjeli. Žanrovski ih se može odrediti kao povijesne, mitske, demonološke, etiološke predaje, eshatološke i pričanja iz života. Žanrovi predaja često se prepleću. U romanu *Na Drini Ćuprija* nalaze se sve vrste predaja. Predaje se u radu interpretiraju u povijesnom, etnološkom i antropološkom kontekstu. Svjedočanstvo su traumatičnog životnog iskustva na konfliktnom prostoru, a karakterom su didaktične, što je u skladu s dominantnom funkcijom usmene književnosti. Iznimna je estetska i socijalna funkcija predaja.

Gljučne riječi: junaci, predaje, pučka vjerovanja, sudbina, vila brodarica.

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