

Forthcoming in *Slavonic and East European Review*, July 2008

Zoran Milutinović
School of Slavonic and East European Studies
University College London

Misunderstanding is a rule, understanding is a miracle: Ivo Andrić's *Bosnian Chronicle*

Sometime towards the end of Mehmed Pasha's stay in Travnik, in Andrić's *Bosnian Chronicle*, the French consul Daville decides to read the Vizier a couple of scenes from Racine's *Bajazet* in order to satisfy his curiosity for all things French. Mehmed Pasha listens carefully, but when they come to the Grand Vizier's conversation with the sultana in the Harem, he loses his patience and interrupts Daville. Grand viziers, he explains, do not enter harems to talk with sultanas, and the Frenchman had not known what he had been writing about. Daville tries to explain the meaning of tragedy and the purpose of poetry to him, but the Vizier will not listen. For him, the Frenchman's play presents as truthful something that has never been, and could not possibly happen: what meaning and significance could such an undertaking possibly have? He expresses his discontent 'openly, almost rudely, and with the inconsiderateness of someone from a different civilization. [...] "Ah yes, we too have all sorts of dervishes and pious folk who recite sonorous verses. We give them alms, but we never dream of treating them like people with a position and reputation. No, no, I don't understand".'¹ And so Daville's attempt to explain theatre to the Vizier comes to nothing. Mehmed Pasha misses the opportunity to learn something about the country which attracts and interests him so much, and Daville misses the pleasure of sharing his love for Racine's verses with the Vizier. Instead of deepening their friendship and understanding, the two men, both foreigners in Travnik, part in misunderstanding.

Who is to blame? Mehmed Pasha, for being impatient and unwilling to try to understand something new and unfamiliar, such as the idea that a work of art does not need to be factually true in order to have meaning and value? Or Racine, for translating French court customs into another culture, without trying to learn something about that culture beforehand? Or Daville, for trying to share something which he considered to be important with Mehmed Pasha, in order to deepen their mutual understanding? None of them. The question 'who is to blame' assumes that understanding is a rule, and misunderstanding a result of a mistake, or impatience, or a lack of good will, for which someone must be blamed. In this episode Daville and Mehmed Pasha only live up to an old claim of hermeneutics, which states that misunderstanding in human communication is a rule, and understanding is an exception and a miracle, something to struggle for, and to celebrate as a blessing if and when it occurs. Several months after this failed attempt at reading Racine to Mehmed Pasha, and after having forgotten the disappointment it had brought him, Daville realises this himself: 'Misunderstandings are natural and failures inevitable.' (155; 141) One only needs to remember how many obstacles every genuine

understanding must overcome, in order to realize that there is nothing more natural than the situation Daville and Mehmed Pasha found themselves in: the former wanted to say something, but the latter failed to understand. It would have been unusual if it had turned out any differently.

In spite of his many virtues as a soldier and administrator, Mehmed Pasha is not an experienced reader of literature, and it does not strike one as strange that he failed to understand why 'people with a position and reputation' in France would write verses which describe such obvious nonsense as a Grand Vizier's discussion with a sultana in a harem. Daville, however, in spite of being a man of letters, fails to understand the Turkish fondness for peppering serious conversations with verses:

Daville was always irritated by this Turkish habit of quoting lines of verse in the middle of a conversation, as though they were something especially important and significant. He could never see the real point of the lines quoted or what their connection was with the subject under discussion, but he always felt that the Turks attributed to them an importance and significance which eluded him. (388; 364)

The meaning of verses, while obvious to the Turks, escapes Daville, and he would have preferred for them to speak clearly and directly, as 'people with a position and reputation' should, instead of using verses which, much as Racine's, might have meaning and significance, but nevertheless demanded an additional effort of interpretation. The misunderstanding between Daville and the Turkish administrators in Bosnia does not seem to be caused by cultural differences, because it is obvious that verses have an important function in both cultures. And if cultural difference is no obstacle, but understanding still does not occur, then there must be something deeper that causes misunderstanding.

Mehmed Pasha's discontent with Racine's representation of the Ottoman court has one more meaning in *Bosnian Chronicle*. While writing this novel, Andrić used as a source the authentic correspondence and diplomatic reports of Pierre David, the French consul in Travnik from 1807 to 1814. Midhat Šamić, who studied the documentary sources of the novel, found that the Racine episode is in fact authentic.² In David's report the Vizier, protesting against the inaccuracies of Racine's play, says: 'You don't know much about us in France, if you judge us by images like this one.' How could Turkey have been viewed in France at the beginning of the nineteenth century, if not through novels and plays with 'oriental' themes, and by travelogues, many of which were written by diplomats such as David? Having no opportunities to go to Turkey themselves and find out who, when and under which conditions could talk to sultanas, the French had to rely solely on representations produced by their compatriots. A travelogue from Turkey written for the French by a Turkish author, if it ever existed, might have offered more accurate images, but would also almost certainly have failed to mention that grand viziers did not converse with emperors' wives, for it would not have occurred to the Turkish author that something like this would be possible in France. The ideal source would have been a book which combined the French and Turkish perspectives, but did such a book ever exist?

Andrić's *Bosnian chronicle* is not a novel which harmoniously reconciles the European and the Bosnian image of Bosnia, but a novel which puts forward the possibility of such reconciliation as its theme. Its time frame, its structure, many episodes

and individual sentences were borrowed from David's writings, and combined with the correspondence of two Austrian consuls, and with the book *Travelling in Bosnia in the Years 1807-1808* by Chaumette des Fossés. Through their writings, these foreigners produced images of Bosnia which contemporary French and Austrian readers then used to build up their knowledge of Bosnia and make judgments about this isolated and little known part of Europe. These same images were intertwined into Andrić's novel, where their producers appear, either as characters with their real names, such as Des Fossés and von Paulich, or with slightly modified names, such as Daville and von Mitterer. They represent what we might name the European view of Bosnia of the time. By framing this view with a narration, produced by an author born and raised in Bosnia, this European image acquires a fully-fledged context. A reader can simultaneously see the image of Bosnia produced by the foreigners, through the episodes and utterances which the author has taken from the pre-literary material, and these very foreigners again, during the actual process of image production. We see them communicating with Bosnians, or avoiding any contact with them; we see them exchanging images of Bosnia between themselves; we also see how the different positions they occupy in Travnik condition what can be seen and understood. And it was in this manner that the French and Austrian images of Bosnia were returned to where they came into being. Andrić's purpose for doing so was not for them to be compared with a true image of Bosnia, because no 'true' image exists. There are only different images, based on the perspectives of different observers. In *Bosnian Chronicle* the European image of Bosnia is contrasted with the images produced by Bosnians about themselves and about Europe. Their images are put into perspective too: who produces them, when and with what purpose in mind? It would be misleading to claim that the combination of the 'foreign' and 'domestic' images in *Bosnian Chronicle* has as its result a total image of Bosnia, as it 'really' was, or that the purpose of contrasting these two sets of images is to privilege one over the other. More than in the 'true image of Bosnia', Andrić was interested in the phenomenology of image production and in the mechanism of their exchange. For page after page, *Bosnian Chronicle* describes people's attempts to understand one another, and their failure to do so. If we contrast the few occasions in the novel where characters make themselves understood with the countless number of occasions in which these attempts fail – *Bosnian Chronicle* is a novel about misunderstanding, not only between East and West, but between people in general.

Of course, *Bosnian Chronicle* is not a study in imagology, but a novel. Although Andrić had at his disposal the documents which helped him recreate the 'foreign' image of Bosnia, he had to create the 'domestic' one himself, relying on his own experiences and knowledge of Bosnians' self-representation. In writing the novel Andrić followed two complementary principles, which do not ease the task of interpretation. The first one was to give an absolute right of expression to each producer of each image and each voice, and to understand producers in the way that they would wish to be understood. The second principle was to relativise all images by putting a voice into a context made up of the other voices and the plot. While the first principle sharpens the contrast between them, the second one smoothes the edges, but without any final reconciliation and harmonization into a single, total image which would represent Bosnia 'as it really is'. There is no privileged image of Bosnia in *Bosnian Chronicle*, there are only different voices which try to impose and justify their images. The very dynamics of creating and

exchanging images, the dynamics of people's attempts to understand each other and of their inability to step out of their own perspectives is the true theme of *Bosnian Chronicle*.

It is thus not surprising then – even though it is ironical to a certain extent – that *Bosnian Chronicle* provoked so many serious misunderstandings. As no other novel written in Serbian/Croatian, *Bosnian Chronicle* has given rise to so many different interpretations, that one can hardly believe that they all refer to the same text. There are very few aspects of this novel which have not been interpreted from entirely opposing perspectives and with entirely different results. Is *Bosnian Chronicle* 'the analysis of the psychological roots of our national being' and 'the novel of collective',³ 'the drama of one man, Daville',⁴ or 'the study of the meeting between the East and the West'?⁵ As regards the meaning of the novel, is it a book written with the intention of inciting hatred towards Bosnian Muslims,⁶ or a 'plaidoyer for a world of justice and tolerance'?⁷ As regards the characters, is Des Fossés 'the representative of the author',⁸ or 'the representative of the readers'?⁹ These multitudinous opposing interpretations result from three aspects of *Bosnian Chronicle*, which characterise the novel in a decisive way: it is not a moralistic work, it is irreducible to good-evil and true-false oppositions, and it is not narrated by a central narrative consciousness, but by a number of voices struggling for space. These three aspects demand a detailed explanation.

Due to the nature of Andrić's main pre-literary material – Pierre David's reports and diary – the novel is dominated by Daville's perspective. However, this is only the case quantitatively, in terms of the organization of narration – not qualitatively, in terms of values represented. One of Andrić's methods of distancing himself from Daville is the representation of Daville as a writer. The French consul has been writing an epos about Alexander the Great for years, but it is obvious that his talent is only modest, and his work poor. Daville is not a real writer primarily because his understanding of literature is rationalistic and confessional. The narrator does not advocate any specific idea about the nature and origin of literature, but clearly states what literature is not and how it should not be written. Daville's epos comes into being as:

[...] A kind of disguised intellectual diary for Daville. He took all his experience of the world, his ideas about Napoleon, about war and politics, all his desires and dissatisfactions and placed them in the distant times and hazy circumstances of his central hero's life [...]. Bosnia had a place in his "Alexandriad" as well: a barren land with a harsh climate and savage inhabitants, under the name of Tauris. [...] And here too was all the revulsion Daville felt for the Asiatic spirit and the East as a whole, expressed in his hero's struggle against distant Asia. (81; 69)

Although seemingly about Alexander, Daville's epos is about himself, his experiences, opinions and views. It is somewhat akin to an allegorical autobiography and confession of a diplomatic official projected into a world-historical individual, as Hegel would put it. Daville's 'Alexandriad' differs from his official correspondence – which also recorded his experiences, opinions and views – only through its versified form and allegorical meaning. Daville is not a real writer because genuine literature cannot be reduced to literary form and meaning dressed in allegory, even when the author himself is a world-historical individual, not to mention when he is not. As much as it is false to believe 'that poetry is made out of certain conscious intellectual acts' (82; 70), it is equally false to believe that the elimination of literary form – plot and characters, being

understood as something superfluous, as an unnecessary roundabout way towards the author's opinions and views – can allow for the author's bare confession. This remark about Daville's understanding of literature clearly positions *Bosnian Chronicle* vis-à-vis the understanding of literature as a form of allegorical confession: literature can, and good literature must be something else, less focused on the author's personality, opinions and views. That something can be, for example, a meeting with other personalities, opinions and views.

Literary confession is essentially a moralistic genre founded on a clear division between good and evil, and thus related to confession as a speech genre – a linguistic ritual in the presence of authorities. *Bosnian Chronicle* also clearly positions itself vis-à-vis moralistic literature: 'Daville's experience of evil in the world left him bitterly dejected while his experience of good aroused his enthusiasm and a kind of moral elation. It was from these moral reactions, which were really strong, if not constant or always reliable, that he created verses lacking in everything that would have made them poetry.' (82-3; 70-1) 'Cheap moral euphoria' (83; 71) does not help create good literature, claims the narrator of *Bosnian Chronicle*, hence the reader should not expect the defence of good and the indictment of evil in this novel.

The antidote to moralistic simplification is a constant awareness of the complexity of human affairs. *Bosnian Chronicle* opens with an image in which the idea of a book is discretely interwoven into the description of the geographical position of Travnik, the site of the novel's action. Travnik lays in 'a deep, narrow ravine', such that 'the whole place looked like a half-open book' (13; 5) in which 'there is virtually no straight road or any flat place where a man might step freely. Everything is steep and uneven, tortuous and intricate, connected or interrupted by private roads, fences, blind alleys, gardens and back-gates, graveyards and places of worship'. (14; 6) As the town whose chronicle the reader begins to read is all tortuous and intricate, connected or interrupted, so shall the chronicle be lacking a single place in which meaning can be unambiguous and privileged, in which a reader might step freely and find a stable point which can be relied upon. What is more, everything is interwoven in such a way that themes, points of view and values acquire their relative meaning only if the reader is ready to hear them recalling and contrasting each other throughout the book.

The meaning becomes all the more elusive if we attempt to interpret the novel in both time perspectives: in the narrated time and the time of narration. *Bosnian Chronicle* tells a story which took place between 1807 and 1814. Despite its being an interval of peace for the Bosnian capital, the echoes of cannons from a Europe ravaged by the Napoleonic wars could still be heard, as well as the news that the Christians in neighbouring Serbia had risen up against the Ottomans, can be heard in Travnik. These very wars brought the consuls to Travnik in the first place; had it not been for them, Daville's report and *Bosnian Chronicle* itself would probably not have come into being, or at least not in the form in which we know Andrić's novel. The narrated time of *Bosnian Chronicle* is a period in which this Ottoman province began, in its own modest way, to take part in the 'great game' of European politics, and the consuls are intermediaries in the game whose task it is to make sure that the European powers are heard and seen in Bosnia, and that Bosnia is heard in European capitals. Between 1807 and 1814 Europe came to Bosnia for the first time after the Ottoman conquest, but its coming was motivated by something outside Bosnia itself, something that concerned

Europe more than it concerned Bosnia: the wars between European states. The other dimension, the time of narration, was stressed by the author himself at the end of the manuscript: it was finished 'in Belgrade, in April 1942' (459; omitted in the English translation). Framing a text by dating it was not characteristic of Andrić, and *Bosnian Chronicle* is the only work in which he used this device. The novel was written in Belgrade under German occupation, during the famine-stricken and coldest winter of the Second World War. And once again the thunder of cannons from Europe, and the news of Ustasha massacres in neighbouring Bosnia, at that time part of the Nazi puppet-state in Croatia, could have been heard in Belgrade.¹⁰ From the moment one encounters this dating frame, one necessarily has to double up all meanings in these two time perspectives.

History saw to it that this doubling up becomes even more complex. Today we read the novel by adding a third perspective constructed by the Bosnian war of 1992 to 1995. Almost everything written about *Bosnian Chronicle* during the last decade has been marked in a decisive manner by this perspective, and the question is not 'should it be so', but 'how could it be otherwise?'¹¹ As the time of writing the novel in 1942 colours the represented world in a specific manner, so the time perspective of reading it in, say 2006, releases the meaning potential which was not so obvious a decade and a half previously. This is neither illegitimate nor characteristic of only *Bosnian Chronicle*; rather, it is a consequence of literature's existence in time. Illegitimate, however, would be to translate this meaning potential into authorial intention. The very possibility of *Bosnian Chronicle* to generate new meanings in changed historical circumstances is proof of its value, and, as in other similar cases, different interpretations achieve different degrees of persuasiveness, and can be compared and evaluated.

This complexity of *Bosnian Chronicle* is further strengthened by its polyphonic composition. The perspective dominant in the plot of the novel – Daville's – does not dominate its meaning. It is rather one of many in the orchestra of voices which could have been heard in Travnik at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Accompanying the voice of the French diplomat are the voices of Austrian consuls, the voices of the Ottoman administrators, those of the representatives of all four Bosnian confessions, and through this complex orchestration one can hear the solos of those who, like Cologne, do not belong to any group and represent no one but themselves. None of these voices is the ultimate semantic instantiation. This polyphony of voices, however, already produces a meaning: it already *is* the dominant meaning of *Bosnian Chronicle*. 'The tranquil chronicler of the consuls' times in Travnik knows how to discretely take over the arguments and advocate the points of view of every participant in the events', wrote Ivo Tartalja.¹² Zdenko Lešić claims that such a multiplying of voices is the main characteristic of Andrić's narrative as a whole, and shows how ever since his early collection of poetry Andrić developed an approach of withdrawing and giving way to the voices of his characters:

Andrić as a storyteller enters the world he tells of, and tells us of it from the inside. It is true that we often fail to notice him, but it is not because he is 'completely in the background', as Barac believed, but because he does not speak as a 'distinct I', rather he disappears among the characters, eavesdropping on their voices from a close distance. Andrić himself considered it a characteristic of a genuine (modern) writer: 'One should speak from the core of the things described; not from the surface, even less so from the perspective of the writer, but from the very

essence of what was chosen for the object and what the reader needs to see, understand and feel.’ In the same ‘Note for the writer’ Andrić added: ‘A writer, *if he is where he should be*, is the inner voice of things and the translator of their relationships.’¹³

In the same article Lešić refers to *Bosnian Chronicle* as a polyphonic novel, and although he indicates that Bakhtin’s theory of the novel may offer the right conceptual tools for its interpretation, he nevertheless chooses a narratological perspective as being more suitable for the polemical purpose of his article. But that which is most important has been already said by recalling Bakhtin’s theory: the author exhibits as specific speech-things the different voices, which put forward their own points of view on the world.¹⁴ The speaking person in the novel is always an ideologue, and his words are always ideologemes. The particular language used in a novel is always a specific point of view on the world because an alien ideological world can only be adequately represented if it is permitted to sound, if the special discourse particular to it is revealed. An entirely adequate discourse for portraying a world’s unique ideology can only be that particular world’s unique discourse. These voices in *Bosnian Chronicle* are set against each other dialogically: one point of view opposed to another, one evaluation opposed to another, one accent opposed to another. The author utilizes them in order to avoid fully giving himself up to any of them; he uses their dialogue so that he may remain as it were neutral, a third party in a quarrel between two people. He might remain in the background to such an extent that large portions of the novel became what Bakhtin calls character zones – the fields of action for characters’ voices, encroaching in one way or another upon the author’s voice. An author, *if he is where he should be*, concedes a character’s point as much as possible: his success can be measured by the extent to which he succeeds in letting characters express themselves. Consequently, the author can be recognized only in the dramaturgy of voices and in their counterpoint, in the actions which are ascribed to the characters, and in the overall composition which is thus created.

2.

Is *Bosnian Chronicle* really a novel about the conflict between East and West, as many of its interpreters have claimed?¹⁵ This is true to a certain extent, but the opposition between East and West is certainly not the only source of misunderstandings in the novel. There are many memorable and quotable sentences in *Bosnian Chronicle* which apparently suggest that there is an unbridgeable gap between East and West, but these are, as a rule, either ascribed to the Western characters, or included in their character zones. At the same time, these claims are framed by the narration in such a way that their meaning is either relativized or subverted. One such sentence describes Des Fossés’ arrival in Bosnia:

It had begun at once, in Split. Like the tightening of an invisible hoop: everything required a greater effort and at the same time one was less capable of making it. Every step was more difficult, every decision more laborious, and its outcome more uncertain, while behind everything, like an ever-present threat, lurked distrust, poverty and trouble. This was how the East made itself known. (86; 74)

Although it was not introduced as reported speech, this paragraph is a part of Des Fossés’ ‘night thoughts’, part of his inner monologue during a sleepless night, and hence

the emotionally expressive inversion in the first sentence. There is no doubt that the narrator is within the zone of the character Des Fossés, and that this description of the East expresses the latter's experience. Further down, we learn how 'it' had begun. The first of Des Fossés' impressions of Bosnia was his encounter with a French officer in Split, whose duty was to provide a carriage for the young diplomat. In response to Des Fossés' inquiry as to whether the carriage had strong springs and soft seats, the French officer answered maliciously that 'anyone going to work in Turkey must have a rump of steal'. (87,74) This is how the East made itself known to Des Fossés – through a malicious French officer. That same evening, Des Fossés meets Julian, a young Bosnian monk, who cannot resist the temptation to express his disapproval of the position of the Catholic Church in France. Although he has an 'angry, almost wild expression on his face' (89, 77), his words are carefully measured, and the whole conversation takes place in an atmosphere which is far from aggressive: by a fireplace, over dinner and drinks. Des Fossés, however, already knows what one should expect in Bosnia and how one should interpret it: 'So my job has already begun', he thought, 'and these are the kind of difficulties and tussles you read about in the memoirs of old consuls in the East'. (89; 77) Since books tell of the difficulties and tussles awaiting diplomats in the East, and everyone knows that books – especially the memoirs of diplomats – always speak the truth and nothing but the truth, then the maliciousness of that French officer and the carefully measured words of that Catholic monk must be that cultural gap between East and West that one hears so much about. This is how Andrić treats the stereotype of the impenetrable and difficult East throughout the novel: he always leaves it in the reported speech of his Western characters or in their zones without commenting on it explicitly, but he frames it with events that subvert its meaning or discretely indicate its questionable origin. Reality is, however, always more complex than the representation imposed by books, and upon his arrival in Travnik, Des Fossés quickly learns to shake off the stereotypes from diplomatic memoirs.

The frontline of misunderstanding in *Bosnian Chronicle* does not follow a clear division between the Eastern and Western characters, a division into Europeans on the one hand and Ottomans and Bosnians on the other. There is little understanding among the Westerners, to start with, and no common language between Bosnians and Ottomans, who should stand for the Orient. The line of misunderstanding in the novel is constructed and deconstructed – so that no stable and essential opposition is ever established – according to altogether different criteria. Due to these dynamics of construction and deconstruction of the division into *us* and *them*, which can never be reduced to the stable Eastern and Western identities, *Bosnian Chronicle* subverts the opposition between East and West. Although this opposition is repeatedly recalled in the characters' speech, it is dissolved and discarded by the novel itself.

The dynamics of misunderstanding can best be exemplified by the complex relationships between Daville and the other characters. Daville is an exemplary Westerner, one would almost say he is the Europe which came to Bosnia. If the opposition between East and West were what *Bosnian Chronicle* is about, Daville's relations with the Bosnians and the Ottomans would be one of conflict, and one of harmony with the other Westerners. But it is not so. Daville lives in constant misunderstanding with the Westerner who should be closest to him: with Des Fossés, with whom he shares a common homeland, language and culture. 'This young man, the

only Frenchman in this wilderness and the only man he really had to work with, was so different from him in so many ways (or at least that is how it seemed), that Daville felt at times that he was living alongside a foreigner and an enemy.’ (68; 56-7) Different political experiences and growing up under different political circumstances, along with their belonging to different generations, prove to be stronger than the ties of shared language and culture. But this is not all. The characters of *Bosnian Chronicle*, in addition to standing for larger cultural, religious and political identities, also have their own personal individualities. Des Fossés, ‘the foreigner and the enemy’, is quite different psychologically from Daville, which conditions their different reactions to the country they were sent to. Des Fossés is curious, confident, extrovert and cheerful, while Daville is introvert, lacking in confidence, and not too curious. This is why Des Fossés was able to free himself quickly from the stereotypes about the East emanating from diplomatic memoirs, and Daville had no other choice but to join the group of those who create and disseminate them – quite literally so, for most of the stereotypes encountered in *Bosnian Chronicle* do come from Pierre David’s reports, diaries and letters. Last but not least, the two Frenchmen are differently equipped for encountering the East: while Des Fossés can communicate with the people from Travnik in Turkish, Daville ‘did not know the language, or understand the country and its circumstances’. (28; 29)

The misunderstanding between Daville and Des Fossés is exemplified in their different views of Bosnia. To start with, they demonstrate different degrees of willingness and readiness to learn something about the country:

And the ‘Young Consul’ continued to visit places round Travnik, through the rain and mud. He would approach people and talk to them without the slightest hesitation. He succeeded in learning things Daville, so serious, upright and rigid, could never have seen or learned. Daville who, in his resentment, responded to everything Turkish or Bosnian with revulsion and distrust, could not see much sense or professional benefit in those outings or the things Des Fossés learned. He was irritated by the young man’s optimism, his desire to penetrate deeper into the past, the customs and beliefs of those people; to find explanations for their shortcomings; and, finally, to discover the good in them, stifled and distorted by the unusual circumstances in which they were obliged to live. This activity seemed a thorough waste of time to Daville, and a harmful distraction from his real tasks. (76; 64-5)

Different approaches bring different results: while Daville claims that ‘the backwardness of this people comes in the first place from their ill-will, their “innate ill-will”’ (78; 67), Des Fossés believes that ‘both the ill-will and the goodness of a people are the product of circumstances in which they live and develop’. (78-9; 67) Where Daville sees only the Bosnians’ ‘incomprehensible, perverse hatred of roads’, Des Fossés sees a comprehensible and rational explanation for the bad state of roads in Bosnia: neither the Christians nor the Turks would benefit from good roads, because for the Christians it would mean that the Turks could reach their villages much more easily and quickly, and for the Turks that Christian Austria and France, threats just across the border, could invade the country with less difficulty. The narrator, however, never privileges any of these two opinions, and allows the characters to state their arguments without judging them. It could be said that the narrator implicitly gives his support to Des Fossés’ view after all, if only by having described him as a man ready to observe, listen and investigate, and thus better equipped to reach the truth than Daville, who only sits in

his room complaining about his fate which had brought him to a place such as Travnik. However, Des Fossés' inquisitive character would still not guarantee that Daville is wrong: the benevolence of the former and his search for a rational explanation do not *ipso facto* preclude the possibility that the latter's key argument about ill-will and barbarity of the Bosnians is flawed. The narrator privileges Des Fossés' argument much later in the novel, when making a connection between their judgements and the points of view from which they are expressed:

As had always been the case up to then, Daville watched what was going on around him with bitter disdain, attributing everything to the innate iniquity and barbaric way of life of these people, concerned only about safeguarding French interests. Des Fossés, on the other hand, with an objectivity that astonished Daville, analysed all the phenomena around him, endeavouring to find reasons for them both in themselves and in the conditions which had given rise to them, regardless of the damage or benefit, comfort or discomfort which they might momentarily afford the Consulate. (304; 285-6)

What one sees and understands is conditioned not only by the personality of the observer, but by his position in the field as well. If one wants to understand Bosnia from the position of French interests only, which is quite legitimate, the result will not be the same as the one achieved from a disinterested position. What something is for me and what it is as such - do not need to be the same. Here, as in other instances of interpretation, one cannot say who has an *absolute* right. *Bosnian Chronicle* does not claim that Des Fossés is right absolutely; it only portrays a foreigner who tries to understand something that is alien to him with a degree of principled openness, and without bitterness, hypocrisy and being concerned solely with the protection of his own interests:

Unshakeable, Des Fossés argued that this region, although numbed and far removed from the world, was not a desert, but, on the contrary, varied, interesting from every point of view and eloquent in its way. Certainly, the people were divided by faith, highly superstitious and subject to the worst administration in the world and consequently in many ways backward. But at the same time they were full of interesting features of character, strange customs and spiritual wealth. In any case, it was worth making an effort to investigate the causes of their misfortune and backwardness. And the fact that M. Daville, Herr von Mitterer and M. Des Fossés, as foreigners, found life in Bosnia difficult and unpleasant was neither here nor there. The value and importance of a country could not be measured by the way the Consuls of a foreign state felt there. (126; 113)

What has already been said about Daville, must be said about Des Fossés as well: he too embodies the Europe which came to Bosnia. Nevertheless, as much as *Bosnian Chronicle* refuses to essentialise Bosnia, it declines any possible essentialisation of Europe too. Instead of simplifying it, reducing it to a single dimension and one meaning, or even to a simple opposition of good and evil, *Bosnian Chronicle* represents Europe in a manner similar to its representation of Travnik: steep and uneven, tortuous and intricate, connected or interrupted. Europe comes to Bosnia with bitter disdain, not speaking its language and not knowing much about it, but wanting to protect its interests in it. Europe also comes to Bosnia speaking its language, benevolent and willing to learn more about it, and without the intention to understand everything only from the standpoint of its interests. These two Europes, Daville's and Des Fossés', do not

understand one another. Where the former sees only bad roads which slow down trade and diminish profits, the latter sees something else, which has nothing to do with interests and profits:

To a depth of some dozen feet you could see, like geological layers, one on top of the other, the traces of former roads that had passed through this same valley. At the bottom were heavy paving stones, the remains of a Roman road, six feet above them the remnants of a medieval cobbled way and, finally, the gravel surface of the Turkish road where we walk today. So, in a chance cross-section, I was shown 2,000 years of human history, and in them three epochs, each of which buried the other. You see! (126-27; 113-14)

This is not to say that Des Fossés is an eloquent advocate of Bosnia, whose task it is to tell Daville what Bosnia could tell about itself only if it knew how to stand for itself. Bosnia does not speak in one voice only, but through a cacophony of voices which compete with each other. Des Fossés' benevolent Europe, ready to understand something irrespective of its own interests, cannot reach an understanding with Bosnian voices for much the same reason which obstructs its coming to terms with Daville's Europe – interests. Father Julian and Des Fossés agree only upon one thing: that in Bosnia life is hard, and that people of all faiths are wretched and backward from any point of view. However, when they try to touch upon the causes of hardship, wretchedness and backwardness, they slip into a misunderstanding as deep as the one between Daville and Des Fossés. The interest, in this particular case Father Julian's confessional interest, precludes any understanding, and the friar refuses to realize that this very cacophony of voices is the cause of wretchedness and backwardness:

'How is it possible', asked Des Fossés, 'for this country to become stable and orderly and adopt at least as great a degree of civilization as its closest neighbours, if its people are divided as nowhere else in Europe? Four faiths live in this narrow, mountainous and meagre strip of land. Each of them is exclusive and strictly separate from the others. You all live under one sky and from the same soil, but the centre of the spiritual life of each of these four groups is far away, in a foreign land, in Rome, Moscow, Istanbul, Mecca, Jerusalem, and God alone knows where, but at any rate not here where the people are born and die. And each group considers that its well-being is conditioned by the disadvantage of each the other three faiths, and that they can make progress only at their cost. Each of them has made intolerance the greatest value. And each of them is expecting salvation from somewhere outside, each from the opposite direction.' (252; 236-37)

It is tempting to believe that this much quoted and commented paragraph from *Bosnian Chronicle* contains the novel's privileged meaning, its 'last word', which cannot be further relativised. It seems that here, this benevolent Europe, free from any particular interests and ready to see the conditions in an objective manner, discovers the causes of hardship and backwardness in Bosnia. Father Julian's immediate reply also seems to confirm the impression that Des Fossés has found a soft spot: '[...] if we had been less rigid and opened our doors to all sorts of "healthy influences", my parishioners Petar and Anton would today be called Muhammed and Hussein'. (252-3; 237) When this benevolent, enlightened Europe, represented by Des Fossés, tries to point to the causes of Bosnia's backwardness, it encounters a wall of resistance to listening and understanding. Bosnia needs 'schools, roads, doctors, contacts with the world, work and activity' (311; 293), 'more up-to-date education and more liberal ideas' (312; 293), instead of building

links with the feudal, conservative politics of the reactionary European powers doomed to destruction, claims Des Fossés. More than anything else, Bosnians must find 'a common basis for their existence, a broader, better, more rational and humane formula' (313; 294) than the confessional one. Des Fossés does not doubt that Bosnia will one day 'join the European community, but it could happen that it joins it divided and burdened with inherited ideas, habits and instincts which you won't find anywhere else any more. [...] You see that not a single nation, not one country in Europe bases its progress on a religious foundation.' (312; 294) To that Father Julian answers as if he had either not heard him or understood him: 'We Catholics have had that formula for a long time. That formula is the Credo of the Roman Catholic Church.' (313; 294) On another occasion, the same answer is given to Daville by the Orthodox bishop Joanikije: 'We are for Russia, Monsieur, and for the liberation of all the Orthodox Christians from the infidel.' (360; 338) And, in order not to lag behind, the Muslims hurry to remind the foreigners: 'Divine Will had ordained that the Turks should rule as far as the Sava river, and the Austrians from the Sava on.' (20; 11) As Des Fossés' Europe cannot reach any understanding with the Europe of the consuls, so it cannot achieve an understanding with the Bosnian voices, and for the same reason: they are all firmly entrenched in their narrow interests, and refuse to see anything else.

Nevertheless, there is no 'last word' in *Bosnian Chronicle*, and the voice which seemed privileged for a brief moment will be relativised, by one further turn of a screw. Des Fossés is privileged no more than any other voice in the novel's cacophony. He is the voice of selfless and benevolent Europe, but the other Europe, that of Daville, acts in a manner which makes the steadfast expectations of Bosnia's religious communities to be saved from somewhere outside look less unfounded. When the new Vizier Ali Pasha imprisons the leaders of Catholic, Orthodox and Jewish communities, upon his arrival in Travnik, the Europe of consuls acts exactly as the religious communities expected them to act:

The Austrian consul immediately intervened on behalf of the imprisoned friars. Daville did not wish to lag behind. Only, he mentioned the Jews as well as the friars. The friars were the first to be released. Then, one by one, the Jews were let out and they immediately organized a levy and placed such a ransom in the Residence that all the Jewish coffers were emptied down to the last coin, the last coin of the sum set aside for bribes, that is. The longest to remain in the fortress was Abbot Pahomije, as no one took his part. Finally, he too was redeemed by his few, impoverished parishioners [...]. (409; 384)

Bosnia is divided into confessions, Europe into Daville's and Des Fossés' halves, and no one listens to, let alone understands the other. Even Daville's Europe, the Europe of consuls, interests and profits, is not one, but is in fact divided and in conflict with itself. Von Mitterer, the first Austrian consul, had barely set foot in Bosnia, when Daville welcomed him by bribing Nail Bay, the captain of the border post in Derventa, to hide the decree which granted him free entry to Bosnia. Von Mitterer, for his part, seemed to be ready for this kind of communication: while waiting in Derventa for the decree to be found, he began to read letters addressed to Daville. The consuls struggle for influence with the Vizier and his officials, they bribe the ayans in the border towns, and incite them to plunder and raid their opponent's territory. Daville directs his hirelings to the north across the Austrian border, and the Austrian consuls send theirs south, towards French-

occupied Dalmatia. 'Each used his agents to spread false information among the people and refute that spread by his opponent. They ended up slandering and maligning each other like two quarrelling women. They intercepted each other's couriers, opened their letters, lured away and bribed the servants.' (100; 88) While von Mitterer brings together all of Daville's opponents, Daville does everything he can to weaken Austrian military strength and maintain a state of constant tension on the borders with Bosnia. It comes as no surprise that from time to time a Bosnian would suffer the consequences of their conflict. The young, courageous and proud captain of Novi, Ahmet Bay Cerić, whom Daville uses to destabilize the Austrian border, ends up being a victim of an intrigue between the European consulates, the Vizier and the court in Istanbul. Daville is not able to protect his protégé, which is not to be unexpected either; what is unexpected, however, is the conclusion which Daville draws from his failure: '[...] It was a black day when you came to this country and now there is no going back, but you must always keep in mind that you should not judge the actions of these people by your own standards nor react to them with your own sensitivity; otherwise you will come down very rapidly to a wretched end.' (209; 195) His conclusion was not that he should not use Bosnians as instruments in his game with the Austrian consul if he was not able to protect them if something were to go wrong, but that he should protect himself against the consequences of failure by becoming less morally sensitive, and by measuring the events with standards different to those which he would use in his own country. And in order not to 'come down to a wretched end', he blamed 'this country' and 'the black day when he came' to it – and the game could go on. In any event, neither Daville nor von Mitterer were sent to Travnik to safeguard the lives of Novi's captains, nor to mediate between the four Bosnian confessions, nor to enable the meeting and understanding of East and West. Daville was sent to Travnik 'with the task of opening the Consulate, establishing and developing commercial links with this part of Turkey, assisting the French occupying forces in Dalmatia and following the actions of the rayah in Serbia and Bosnia' (26; 17), and not to worry about the enlightenment and progress in this Ottoman province. The moment of truth for both consuls comes with the beginning of the war between France and Austria, when Napoleon responded to the Austrian attack 'with the lightning blow against Vienna. Now even the uninitiated could see just why the Consulates had been opened in Bosnia.' (270; 254) The consuls start to work day and night, caring even less than before about the morality of the methods they use:

With d'Avanat's help, [Daville] succeeded in finding and bringing together everyone opposed to Austria by temperament or interests and willing to undertake anything at all. He contacted the town commanders from the Military Frontier, particularly the commander of Novi, the brother of that unfortunate Ahmed Bey Cerić whom he had not succeeded in saving, urged them to stir things up in the Austrian territories and offered them resources for raids.

Through the Livno friars, von Mitterer sent newspapers and proclamations to Dalmatia, which was under French occupation, maintained links with the Catholic clergy in Northern Dalmatia and assisted the organization of resistance to the French. (271; 255)

And all that is happening between two men who are divided neither by religion nor culture, who both must live in the same little oriental town, 'without company or pleasure, without any comforts, often without the most essential things, among these wild mountains and uncouth people, struggling with distrust, inaccuracy, dirt, sickness and

misfortunes of all kind'. (101; 89) Much as the four Bosnian confessions, which although living under the same sky and of the same soil are in a permanent state of conflict and distrust – thus imitating the global conflict and distrust of the larger communities to which they belong – fate had directed these two Europeans to one another, but each of them still saw his own benefit in the misfortune of the other:

And they imitated in their little actions the large-scale actions of their distant, unseen and often incomprehensible superiors. But their hard life and wretched fate drove them towards one another. And if there were in the world two men who could have understood, sympathized with and even helped one another, it was these two consuls who spent their energy, their days and often their nights putting obstacles in each other's way and making their lives difficult in every way they could. (101; 88)

Although he had to spend his days in Travnik in mutual misunderstanding and conflict with Des Fossés and the Austrian consuls, Daville had better luck with the Ottoman viziers, with whom he was not in disagreement all the time. But the circumstances under which they did not disagree put their understanding into question. Daville had come to Travnik with 'a revulsion for the Asiatic spirit and the East as a whole' (81; 69), which is one of the more important elements of his intellectual life and at the same time the main topic of his life work – the epos about Alexander's struggle against distant Asia. Nevertheless, though the Asians in Travnik pleasantly surprised him, they failed to change his opinions about the Orient. The first vizier, Mehmed Pasha, was the opposite of Daville's stereotype of Ottoman dignitaries, as he was lively, pleasant and kind. He left the impression of 'a mild, reasonable man who would not only make well-meaning promises, but [would] actually carry them out' (36; 26). Most of all, Mehmed Pasha won Daville's sympathy not only through his smile, civility and kindness, but by suggesting a new division into *us* and *them*, which rearranged Daville's orientalist mental map: 'In the course of the conversation, the Vizier made a point of stressing the savagery of this country, the crudity and backwardness of the people. The land is wild, [...] the men are violent and uncouth.' (34; 25) The Vizier and Daville agreed that Bosnia is *other*, 'uncultured and barbaric' (151; 138), and the two of them are the same – enlightened and civilized. The second vizier, Ibrahim Pasha, resembled Daville's stereotype about the appearance of Ottoman dignitaries with his slow motions, expressionless face and operatic dignity. However, after overcoming first impressions Daville struck up a sincere and cordial friendship with him too, and once again this friendship was based on the agreement about the division between us and them:

As soon as he started to talk about Bosnia and the Bosnians Ibrahim Pasha could never find enough harsh words and black images, and Daville would listen to him now with sincere compassion and genuine understanding. [...] 'You can see for yourself, my noble friend, the place we live in and the people I have to contend with. It would be easier to manage a herd of wild buffalo than those Bosnian beys and ayans. They are all savage, savage, savage and mindless, coarse and vulgar but easily offended and arrogant, pig-headed and stupid. Believe me when I tell you: these Bosnians have neither honour in their hearts nor sense in their heads.' (199-200; 185)

Here too the plot of *Bosnian Chronicle* subverts and relativizes the claims of the characters. The supposedly enlightened and civilized vizier Mehmed Pasha murders his old friend through deceit, who incidentally had come to Travnik in order to murder

Mehmed Pasha through deceitful means. Honest and noble Ibrahim Pasha piles severed human ears and noses before the consuls, claiming that they are trophies from a battle with rebels in Serbia, although it later turns out that these 'trophies' were gained in an ordinary massacre carried out against Bosnian Christians during a religious festival. Daville's immediate reaction, almost a reflex of a diplomat, is to overcome his disgust and fear, compose himself and congratulate the Vizier with several sentences in honour of this victory, peppered with his hopes for peace and future victories of the sultan's army. What else is a diplomat to do, but to celebrate whatever his host considers a victory? Privately, however, the consul is entitled to his own opinion about the nature of that victory. Daville experiences the whole event as a nightmare from which there was no waking: 'This is what these people were like', thinks the consul. 'This was their life. This was how the best of them behaved.' (203; 189) After this cruel episode, Daville wonders whether there ever was any understanding between Ibrahim Pasha and himself:

Why these lies? Where did this futile, almost childish cruelty come from? What did their laughter and their tears mean? What did their silence conceal? And how could these people, the Vizier, with his exalted views, and apparently honest Suleiman Pasha and the wise Tahir Bay even conceive such things and participate in scenes from some other, lower, terrible world? What was their true face? What was life and what calculated acting? When were they lying and when telling the truth? (204; 189-90)

Daville would never find a satisfactory answer to this question, but on it he would build a far-reaching conclusion about 'the man of the East'. Soon after this episode he sent the Vizier a crate of lemons using a messenger who also brought news of the sultan's death. The Vizier responded with a kind, composed letter, which did not reveal how he had really felt upon hearing that his beloved master and protector was dead. Despite the fact that the serene tone of the letter was as true a reflection of the Vizier's state of mind, as was the honesty in Daville's earlier congratulatory sentences, the consul is nevertheless taken aback: 'It was one of those strange surprises one experiences in the East. There was no connection between a man's true inner life and the words he wrote.' (212; 197) 'The East' obviously served as a universal explanation for Daville, even when he was confronted with something which should not have been so puzzling to him.

If this were all, we could conclude that *Bosnian Chronicle* familiarizes a Frenchman who initially harbours strong orientalist stereotypes with true representatives of the Orient, which subsequently helps him to redraw his mental map: for him, *us* and *them* cease to refer to the East and the West, Asia and Europe. The Easterners he meets in Travnik deserve to be included among *us*, and only the uncouth and barbaric Bosnians remain as *them*. At a later stage, after the murder in the Residence and the episode with the ears and noses, Daville realises that the adjustment of his mental map was premature, and both viziers, and with them the whole East from which they came, are returned to where they belong – to among those wild, dishonourable and mindless *them*. But that is not all. Although Daville begins to consider the possibility that the viziers hide their true nature behind a mask of kindness and civility, their mutual friendship, cordiality and alliance remain unquestioned. Although he knows with what means Mehmed Pasha managed to briefly prolong his stay in Travnik, Daville bids farewell to the Vizier in the most friendly and cordial of manners and returns to the Consulate with a feeling of loss, as if he were in mourning. Daville is deeply touched by the Vizier's last words: 'And to

you, dear friend, I wish good health, fortune and success, regretting that I shall not be able to be at your side in the difficulties which you will always have with the uncultured and barbaric people of Bosnia.’ (151; 138) The murderer-vizier and the consul – who knows that the Vizier is a murderer – part cordially and with sadness, but the uncultured barbarians are the Bosnians. Daville parts with Ibrahim Pasha in a similar manner. The Vizier tells him: ‘We found one another as two exiles, imprisoned and shut in among these terrible people’ (399; 375), and Daville is deeply moved again; the severed ears and noses are forgotten and forgiven, and the terrible people are once again – the Bosnians. This is how the division between us, civilised consuls and Ottoman dignitaries, and them, Bosnian barbarians, which for a brief moment seemed blurred, is restored again.

Only superficial interpretations of *Bosnian Chronicle* can accuse Andrić of Orientalism. Orientalist claims in the novel mostly appear in Daville’s utterances, or in his zones, but they are relativised and subverted to such an extent by his actions, his other utterances and relationship with other characters, that it seems justified to claim that Orientalism in *Bosnian Chronicle* appears as one of the novel’s themes, not as the conscious or even subconscious attitude of its author. Of all the foreigners in Travnik, Daville has the least in common with Des Fossés, with whom he shares a common language, culture and religion, but whose political views and general behaviour towards everything which is other are alien to him. Daville is constantly in conflict with the Austrian consuls, with whom he shares a common culture and religion, but who represent the political interests of a competing empire. Those closest to Daville are Mehmed Pasha and Ibrahim Pasha, who come from another cultural and religious background, and with whom Daville can communicate only with the aid of an interpreter, but who do have something important in common with Daville: they represent an empire which at that moment happens to have political interests similar to those of Daville’s. In addition to personal and political interests – which are difficult to distinguish between in Daville the diplomat – the consul also shares other traits with the viziers: their social interests, the subconscious sympathy between members of ruling classes, founded on a similar understanding of social etiquette and lifestyle. Daville failed to strike a friendship with the third vizier, Ali Pasha, not only because before him went the reputation of being a cold-blooded murderer – the two previous viziers were not exactly innocent either – but because he, uneducated and crude, came to Travnik ‘without many officials, without attendants or a harem, “naked and alone like a bandit in the woods”’ (403; 378), and left ‘the rooms and the corridors of the Residence [...] empty, without any furnishings and decorations’. (406-07; 382) This is how Daville’s revulsion for the Asiatic spirit and the East as a whole bounces back from the two gentlemen viziers, whom he recognizes as cultural variants of a socially desirable form of life, and is refocussed on Travnik and the Bosnians. In this channelling of Daville’s orientalist stereotypes, the viziers actively help by repeating the same stereotypes, but applied to Bosnia.

In this novel Bosnia is hated and misunderstood by those who want to rule it and those who need to protect the interests of their empires in it – by the Ottoman viziers and the consuls. When their political and social interests overlap, and when their countries are not at war, they understand and accept each other only to a certain extent. They call this overlap of interests ‘civilisation’, as opposed to the barbarity of those whose interests might be altogether different. Despite this, that which the consuls label as ‘barbaric’ in Bosnia are those things that they can encounter in similar forms in their own countries, or

even in their own homes. As ‘a Christian and a European’, Daville is ‘disgusted and indignant’ by the sight of ‘daily savagery’ (292; 274) such as when an execution site, with heads of Serbs stuck on stakes, appears in the front of the Austrian Consulate. Fifteen years previously, in Paris, upon opening the window of his room he suddenly ‘found himself face to face with a severed head, swaying, pale and bloody, on a pike of a sansculottes’ (64; 52), Daville was simply disgusted, but without recalling Christianity, Europe and savagery.¹⁶ Von Mitterer calls the singing of the people from Travnik ‘*Urjammer*’, and Daville explains it as their way of expressing ‘their hidden passions and base desires’, and as ‘the fury of savages’ (135; 122). However, von Mitterer finds equally unbearable his wife’s singing accompanied by the harp, ‘that language of passion and daring feelings’, coming ‘as from some mysterious depths’ and ‘from a world which was the reverse of all that the Colonel considered important, sacred and serious’ (261; 245; the English translation has been slightly modified in the interests of precision). Von Mitterer used to cover his ears in order not to have to listen to her, but he did not call that expression of hidden passion ‘barbaric’.¹⁷ This European urge to run away from the barbarian in oneself, if by nothing else than by putting one’s hands over one’s ears and eyes, is commented on in *Bosnian Chronicle* by one learned Easterner, Tahir Bay:

[...] The difference is that the Islamic states make war without pretence or contradiction. They have always regarded war as an important part of their mission in the world. It was as a warring faction that Islam came to Europe and it has maintained itself there either by warfare or through the mutual warfare of the Christian nations. But as I understand it, Christian nations condemn war to such an extent that they always accuse the other side of being responsible for every war. Yet while condemning it, they never cease to wage it. (352-53; 331)

3.

It is much easier, and takes less time, to list the examples of human understanding in *Bosnian Chronicle*. People give presents to one another: the women of Travnik send presents to Mme Daville; both consuls give food away during the famine; Salomon Atijas offers money to Daville, even though the consul did not ask for any help. People fall in love with one another. The whole tenth chapter of the novel describes love which crosses confessional and social borders: Salko falls in love with von Mitterer’s daughter, Des Fossés with Jelka, and Ana-Maria with Friar Mijat. A man heals other people irrespective of their faith: Brother Luka is ‘a friend of the sick part of the humankind’, despite the fact that this friendship sometimes has unpleasant consequences for himself and his monastery. When they do not fight for power, when they are not trying to subdue others, when they are grateful, or wish others all the best, when they succeed in seeing others only as suffering human beings, or when in love, wish to protect the other being such as it is – it is then that they are capable of understanding. However, all these examples of sympathy, or *meetings* of human beings in gratitude, compassion or love, exclude speaking. Those who are in love do not talk much, or not at all, and certainly do not talk about their feelings. Presents are exchanged without words, or through a go-between. Brother Luka heals, but converses only with the other monks, and only occasionally with the chemist Mordo. When they are not ideologists, when there is not a world view to be advocated or imposed, people do understand each other.

Even when human sympathy, support, understanding and gratefulness want to be expressed in language, it proves to be impossible. Salomon Atijas tries his best to explain to Daville why he had brought him the money, but fails to do so: he is too excited and does not say a word. As far as Daville and Atijas are concerned, theirs was also a meeting of two human beings which did not bring about their mutual understanding in language, as was the case in the previous examples of healing, love, or presenting gifts. But this was not a missed opportunity as far as we, the readers, are concerned. This is the only place in the novel where the narrator does not report a character's words, while at the same time clearly staying in the zone of the character Salomon Atijas by narrating what he might, if only he could have said himself.¹⁸ Moreover, the narrator uses this opportunity to introduce one additional meaning, which surpasses the meaning of Atijas' unuttered monologue, by framing it with the following two sentences:

It will never be possible to say what it was that was stifling Salomon Atijas at that moment, what was driving tears to his eyes and an agitated trembling through his whole body. Had he known how, had he been able to speak at all, this is roughly what he would have said. (449; 423)

But all of that was far from being completely clear and precise in his consciousness, and still less ripe for expression. It lay in him, vivid and heavy, but unspoken and inexpressible. And who does ever succeed in expressing his finest feelings and best impulses? No one, virtually no one. So how could it be done by a Travnik hide merchant, a Spanish Jew, who did not know a single one of this world's languages properly, and if he had known them all it would not have done him any good, because he was not permitted to cry out loud even in his cradle, let alone speak freely and clearly in his lifetime. (452; 425)

The narrator does not speak up in his own name, but he states that what follows is a record of what Atijas might have said if only he could and knew how. All the other characters in *Bosnian Chronicle* speak, and the narrator transmits their words. Why is it that Atijas, in a novel in which all characters talk and write incessantly, with the narrator transmitting it all while remaining in the background, cannot say what he has to say? On one level, it is motivated by Atijas' excitement, and lack of rhetorical skills, but on another level this has a secondary, more important meaning: the narrator will speak up on behalf of those who are all over Europe at the time, in 1942, denied the right not only to speak, but to live – something which Andrić, the former Yugoslav ambassador to Berlin, must have either known, or at least have been able to presume even before the true dimensions of the Holocaust became known to all. The novel, through the instance of its narrator, will be their advocate and their representative, and return to them their right to speak, denied to them in the historical world. What is it that this Jewish merchant wants to say?

[...] Neither will our desire for a better world ever fade, a world of order and compassion in which one can walk upright, look calmly and speak openly. [...] There, that is what we should like known, *over there*. That our name should not perish in that brighter, higher world which is constantly darkened and disrupted, constantly shifting and changing, but is never destroyed and always exists somewhere for someone. That this world should know that we carry it in our hearts, that we serve it even here, in our way, and that we feel at one with it, although we are forever hopelessly separated from it. (451; 425)

Understanding is an exception, not a rule: even where there is good will, people do not understand each other not only because they do not listen, but also because sometimes they cannot say what needs to be said. Daville received the money, but not Atijas' other departure gift: his wish for it to be known *over there*, where people are allowed 'to walk upright, look calmly and speak openly', that he also cherishes the ideals of humanity, tolerance and understanding – that the image they might have of him is wrong. Such an explication of the most essential in a human being is not possible in the historical world, in which one is not allowed even to cry out loud. The historical world, in which wars are being waged and Europe is being conquered, both in Daville's and Atijas' time and in the time of Andrić's writing of *Bosnian Chronicle*, has neither the time to listen, nor the good will to even try to understand. Such an explication of the most essential in a human being is possible only in literature: this is the meaning of the narrator's speaking up on Salomon Atijas' behalf, and of his elucidation of what lay in Atijas' vivid, heavy, unspoken and inexpressible words.

It does not thus matter much that Daville did not hear and understand what Atijas had wanted to say. Daville is not, after all, going *over there*, where Atijas wants his message to be heard: he himself despairs over the fact that this *over there*, which he calls the 'right path' (457; 430), is so difficult to find. For him the 'right path' is somewhere where there are neither heads on sansculottes pikes, nor the *ancien régime*, nor the restoration in France, where he must return. Atijas' *over there* is *ou topos*, a place which does not exist, a place which is not a fact of geography, but a state of mind: the idea of humanity, tolerance, respect and understanding, which has only ever been realised for brief moments of time. It is thus not strange that Andrić wanted to stress it by italicising it.

Two more words are italicised in *Bosnian Chronicle*: the *third world*, which Travnik's physician Cologna speaks of in his monologue before Des Fossés. The *third world* are the Christians from the Levant, the 'eternal interpreters and go-betweens, [...] people who know well East and West, their customs and beliefs, but are equally despised and mistrusted by either side'. (279; 263) They know both worlds well, but belong to neither and remain in between them. In them, ideas of tolerance and understanding have already been realised, which means that they are the embodiment of the *over there* that Salomon Atijas talks about. How are we to understand this *over there* and *third world* in between?

Our idea of a genuine interpretation and understanding is somehow always connected with the notions of *third* and *in between*. Egyptologist Jan Assmann, who studied the forms of intercultural translations of names of gods in the Middle East, claims that in the Hellenistic period a form of syncretic translation into a third language was devised. In the Greek language, which served as a linguistic medium, different Middle Eastern cultures were syncretically mixed, but none of them dominated others. Greek served as a vehicle which brought together different traditions in order to create a new culture. 'The different divinities are not just "translated" into each other but into a third and overarching one which forms something like a common background', writes Assman.¹⁹ Syncretic translation thus provided a double membership in a third language. Such a language is not actually given, 'but virtually envisaged and kept up in order to

provide a framework in which individual cultures can become transparent without losing their identities'.²⁰

Our knowledge is not destined to ethnocentricity, says Charles Taylor, who also advocates the idea of a third language: '[T]he adequate language in which we can understand another society is not our language of understanding, nor theirs, but rather what one could call a language of perspicuous contrast. This would be a language in which we could formulate both their way of life and ours as alternative possibilities in relation to some human constants at work in both. [...] Such a language of contrast might show their language of understanding to be distorted or inadequate in some respects, or it might show ours to be so (in which case, we might find that understanding them leads to an alteration of our self understanding, and hence our form of life, a far from unknown process in history); or it might show both to be so.'²¹

Gadamer's hermeneutics also offers an insight into what has been referred to here as syncretism or the language of perspicuous contrast. Richard Bernstein shows how fruitful Gadamer's concepts can be, such as the fusion of horizons and an authentic dialogue, in the context of the debate of a possibility of cross-cultural communication.²² Although we are conditioned by our respective traditions, which belong to us as much as we belong to them, and although an attempt to understand others the way they understand themselves must always end in failure, there is still much space left for breaking out of our limited horizons, which are in no way hermetically closed and isolated. To the extent that they are linguistic – meaning that they consist of language-based elements or of phenomena which can be described and explicated in language – our horizons can be penetrated by elements from the horizons of others, and thus be re-shaped and extended, for how else could we account for all known instances of cultural translation? Bernstein sums up Gadamer's point: 'Potentially we can always understand if we are willing to make an effort to understand and have developed the necessary talents and virtues required for hermeneutical understanding [...] – a willingness and ability to move beyond our limited finite horizons.'²³ Hermeneutic sensibility is a prerequisite for the fusion of horizons, which need not be an uncritical acceptance of all the elements from other cultures and traditions, but a dialogue in which both the claims of our tradition, and those of the tradition we are seeking to understand, become intelligible. The fusion of horizons thus enables both an understanding of what is familiar and what is alien within a larger whole: an understanding of the other always has within itself a dimension of self-understanding. This is, after all, the core of Gadamer's definition of understanding: '[...] Understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves'.²⁴ Understanding does not mean submission, claims Gadamer, it is an attempt to meet the other, that one wants to understand, in a third place, somewhere between our particular positions: '*The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between.*'²⁵ This is Cologne's *third world*, in which Islam, Judaism and Christianity meet, and without assimilating one another, become syncretically united in a new, larger whole. And the precondition for such an understanding is to recognize everyone's right to say one's own word about oneself, and to try to understand one's arguments in their strongest possible light.

Ivo Tartalja has already pointed out the 'striking similarities between the Illyrian physician's character and Andrić himself'.²⁶ In the twelfth chapter of the novel, where Cologne appears for the first time, a number of his characteristics correspond with those

which in Andrić's other works refer to poets or writers in general: wearing a mask, the ability to identify with others or with their beliefs and thought systems, having an undetermined identity, and being focused on language. What is more, the introduction of Rumi's verses in the fifteenth chapter opens up a new field of associations and clearly indicates that Andrić expected readers to understand Cologne as a metaphor for a writer – though not necessarily as a metaphor for Andrić himself. Tartalja also cautiously refutes the possibility of understanding Cologne as Andrić's self-portrait: 'It would be unreasonable to equate Cologne with Andrić. A writer, who would simply project himself onto a character from his novel, would certainly break the rules of Andrić's poetics. He would resemble the failed poet Daville, rather than the always somehow elusive writer-thinker Cologne.'²⁷ The most we can say, claims Tartalja, is that Cologne is 'the author's caricature'. There is certainly something caricature-like about Cologne, but what function would it have served to include a caricature of the author in a novel which so thoroughly erases all authorial traces?

More than the personality of the author, Cologne's portrait resembles the novel *Bosnian Chronicle*. Much in the same way as Cologne, the novel takes all views which appear within the horizon of its topic, and tries to articulate them as strongly as possible. Cologne leaves an impression of elusiveness and indeterminacy, because he does not advocate any of them exclusively, but identifies himself for a certain time with the subject of his studies, can be excited by this, can adopt it at least momentarily as his only, exclusive faith, and can reject all that he had previously believed and that had thrilled him up to then (243; 228), as does *Bosnian Chronicle*. Much in the same way that Cologne can during the course of a single conversation change his appearance several times by putting on different masks, so too can the narrator of *Bosnian Chronicle* eradicate all his recognisable and constant features by putting on a mask of the character that happens to be in his focus at the moment, thus transforming huge parts of the novel into the zones of his characters. This power of transformation leads Cologne to believe that he knows everything best: Christianity better than the monks from Guča Gora, and Islam better than the Ulema. And as all belief systems to Cologne are 'equally close [...] and equally remote and with each of them he [is] able to agree and completely identify for a certain time' (245; 230), so too to the narrator are all characters' points of view. This makes both Cologne and the novel consistently inconsistent, which paves the way for the possibility of different and even opposing interpretations. And as such, *Bosnian Chronicle* belongs to those 'eternal interpreters and go-betweens, [...] who carry in themselves much that is hidden and inexpressible' (279; 263). As with Atijas, *Bosnian Chronicle* strives to allow each character and each point of view to express an opinion, to get a word in, to say something about themselves, so that in the fiction of the novel the great dialogue, though impossible in reality, can be staged – in the hope that the voices which refuse to listen to one another in reality would agree to do so in fiction. This is why Cologne's monologue before the puzzled and speechless Des Fossés can be understood as the very centre of the novel. This scene very much resembles what Bakhtin called the 'dialogue on the threshold' in which, in the situation of impending death, a character reveals 'the deepest layers of his personality and thought'.²⁸ Cologne, among other things, stands in front of Des Fossés, as if saying his last sentence before departing. Its style and intonation very much resemble the monologues of Dostoevskii's most exalted characters:

At the end, at the real, final end all will nevertheless be well and everything will be resolved harmoniously. Despite the fact that here it all looks utterly discordant and hopelessly embroiled. 'Un jour tout sera bien, voilà notre espérance', as your philosopher put it. And one could not even imagine it any other way. For why should my thought, if it is good and true, be worth less than the same thought conceived in Rome or Paris? Because it was born in this pit called Travnik? And is it possible that this thought should not be noted in any way, not recorded anywhere? No, it is not. Despite the apparent fragmentation and chaos, everything is connected and harmonious. No single human thought or effort of the spirit is lost. We are all on the right road and we shall be surprised when we meet. But we shall meet and understand each other, all of us, wherever we are going now and however we go astray. That will be a joyous meeting, a glorious, redeeming surprise. (281; 264)

The third world, a meeting in mutual understanding which awaits us at the end of the wandering, where nothing is wasted, nothing is lost, everything is connected with everything else, and everything contributes to the wholeness and unity of human culture. Even his thoughts, though conceived in Bosnia, and not in Paris or Rome. This image fully corresponds to Cologne's description of the Jeni mosque:

The people know that once, before the arrival of the Turks, this mosque was the Church of St Catherine. And they believe that even now there is a sacristy in one corner which no one can open, however much force they use. And if you look a little more closely at the stone of that ancient wall, you will see that it comes from Roman ruins and tombstones. [...] And deep beneath that, in the invisible foundations, lie large blocks of red granite, the remains of a far older cult, a former temple of the god Mithras. [...] And who knows what else is hidden in those depths, under those foundations. (281-82; 265)

Cologne's point is not that cultures destroy and devour one another, but that the Jeni mosque is a metaphor for culture as such, of culture's syncretism and unity. Nothing wasted, nothing lost, everything preserved. His capricious interest in different thought systems is not a sign of his inconsistency, but a sign of consistent devotion to the unity of culture, in which everything has its place, everything counts, and although it may speak in different tongues, it serves the same aim: 'You understand, it is all connected, one thing with another, and it is only apparently lost and forgotten, scattered, haphazard. It is all moving, everything without realizing it, towards the same goal, like converging rays towards a distant, unknown focus. [...] So there is hope, and where there is hope... You understand?' (282; 265-66) His repeated exclamation 'You understand' is the last that Des Fossés hears from him. A man from the Levant, who lives in a gap between Europe and Asia, between Islam, Judaism and Christianity – much as Bosnia itself, in which this conversation takes place – addresses a Frenchman, not a representative of Europe of the consuls, but the representative of the Europe of Enlightenment and good will: *Bosnian Chronicle* is Andrić's address to that Europe with the same message of hope in an eventual meeting and understanding. He does not talk about an understanding of the four Bosnian confessions only, but about the understanding of all of us, everywhere, including the understanding of two Europes, that of the consuls and that of Des Fossés. Last but not least, the meeting and understanding of Bosnia and Europe. As much as Cologne is an interpreter and a go-between, so *Bosnian Chronicle* wants to be an interpreter between Bosnia and Europe.

This is the core of the novel's meaning, expressed with a passion and a pathos which were not characteristic of Andrić's style. It must have taken a lot of hope to be able to send this message of unity and understanding in 1942. But the message of hope in *Bosnian Chronicle* is shaped by the character who can be understood as a caricature, whom everybody views as 'confused and ridiculous, suspect and superfluous' (246; 230), and the character who is certainly not easy to understand: 'What was best in him remained unseen and inaccessible, and what could be seen repelled everyone.' (245-46; 230) Although it is clear that Cologna is not an allegory but a metaphor for *Bosnian Chronicle*, and that the correspondence between the description of his character and the author's understanding of his own novel need not be perfect in every moment, there remains a question which cannot be avoided: the one posed by Cologna's death. Trying to protect a Christian, Cologna utters the words which are understood by Muslims as his conversion to Islam, and on the following day Cologna is found dead. The author decided not to motivate or explain this death. Was Cologna murdered? This seems unlikely, for why should anyone want to murder a 'confused and ridiculous' physician? Did he commit suicide, which could be interpreted as a continuation of his disturbed mental state, of which his conversion to Islam was the first act? There are no indications in *Bosnian Chronicle* to support such an interpretation. The fact that Andrić left Cologna's death unexplained and unmotivated may be less of a problem for an interpretation which does not focus on Cologna as the metaphor for the novel itself, but here the question cannot be avoided: what does it mean for a novel about misunderstanding that the author 'murdered' the character who had the task of building a noble vision of the unity of human culture, and the hope of eventual universal understanding, the character who at the same time stands for the novel itself?

Since Cologna's death remained unmotivated on the level of the plot, the answer must be looked for on a symbolic level, where Cologna is the bearer of the vision of the unity of culture and the hope for understanding. One possibility would be that by means of Cologna's death the author shows how taking one exclusive point of view – here, his conversion to Islam – must be detrimental and lead to the death of this noble vision. Compared with the meaning already reached in the novel, this seems to be an anticlimax: Cologna's character in *Bosnian Chronicle* is built upon the possibility of overcoming particular points of view, and it is not clear what would be gained by degrading him to the level already occupied by all the other characters in the novel. The other possibility is that Cologna as the novel *Bosnian Chronicle*, and thus as a metaphor for literature as a whole, dies in order to show that literature is too powerless to change the world. Confused, ridiculous, and superfluous, literature cannot do anything against fatal hatreds, divisions and misunderstandings. If this is so, then Cologna's death would introduce to *Bosnian Chronicle* a meaning which is directly opposed to the meaning of the novel as a whole – namely, that it is in literature that we can construct a dialogue for which there is no place in historical reality.

The third possibility seems most plausible: Andrić needed Cologna, such as he is, in order to convey the core meaning of the novel with passion and pathos. Expressed in a more rational and calm manner, this meaning would lose all of its utopian potential. He also needed Cologna's death in order to soften the passion and pathos. It was in this manner that it was possible for Andrić to express this meaning with the utmost passion and pathos, for it is expressed by a character prone to such a style, and to keep his

distance from a style he always avoided. For that same reason, Cologne is represented as a caricature. In addition to this, Cologne's monologue 'at the threshold' is in no way placed at a privileged place in *Bosnian Chronicle*, but somewhere in the middle of the novel, and, eventually, the 'confused and ridiculous' character, who had the task of expressing what is most important in the novel, is sent to an unexplained death. The pathos of the most powerful meaning in *Bosnian Chronicle* is thus softened to a significant extent – but the meaning is still there.

The same device was used by Thomas Mann, the modern writer whom Andrić revered, in *Magic Mountain*: the most important meaning was expressed in the middle of the book, also underlined with italics, and in a dream which Hans Kastorp quickly forgets.²⁹ But a reader would remember it. *Bosnian Chronicle* thus avoided the moralistic overtones of poor literature: Cologne's hope that we shall all meet there, in the realm of understanding and unity of human culture, Muslims and Christians, Levantines and French, Bosnians and Europeans, is placed side by side with the long list of our misunderstandings. That meeting is real in *Bosnian Chronicle* only as a hope; Cologne himself falls victim to one of our many misunderstandings, which are the rule. Understanding, when and if it comes, will be an exception and a miracle, and will certainly not come effortlessly. This is why Cologne's last words to Des Fossés are an exclamation and a question at the same time: "You understand!"

¹ Ivo Andrić, *Travnička hronika*, Belgrade, 1967, p. 154. The quotes are taken from Celia Hawkesworth's and Bogdan Rakić's translation (Ivo Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, London, 1996, p.141). Henceforth the first number in brackets refers to the relevant page number in the original text, and the second to Hawkesworth's and Rakić's translation.

² Midhat Šamić, *Istorijski izvori Travničke hronike Ive Andrića i njihova umetnička transpozicija*, Sarajevo, 1962, p. 105.

³ Radovan Vučković, *Velika sinteza. O Ivi Andriću*, Sarajevo, 1974, p. 318 and 321.

⁴ Henry R. Cooper Jr., 'The Image of Bosnia in the Fiction of Ivo Andrić', *Serbian Studies*, Vol.3, 1984-85, No.1-2, p. 98.

⁵ Celia Hawkesworth, *Ivo Andrić: Bridge Between East and West*, London and Dover N.M., 1984, p. 142.

⁶ Šukrija Kurtović, 'Na Drini ćuprija i *Travnička hronika* od Ive Andrića u svjetlu bratstva i jedinstva', in *Andrić i Bošnjaci*, Tuzla, 2000, pp. 133-177; Muhsin Rizvić, *Bosanski muslimani u Andrićevom svijetu*, Sarajevo, 1995.

⁷ Manfred Jähnichen, 'O zakonu protivnosti, oder Ivo Andrić's Appell zur Toleranz im Roman *Travnička hronika*', in Thiergen, *Ivo Andrić 1892-1992*, München, 1995, p. 41.

⁸ Ibid, p.50.

⁹ Zdenko Škreb, 'Što je Ivo Andrić unio novo u svjetsku književnost?', *Sveske Zadužbine Ive Andrića*, No. 3, 1985, p.277.

¹⁰ Andrić's indication of the time of writing is also highlighted by Šamić, p. 14; Jähnichen, p.44; Vučković, p. 322; Miroslav Egerić, 'Nasilje i tolerancija u *Travničkoj hronici*', in Nedeljković, *Delo Ive Andrića u kontekstu evropske književnosti i kulture*, Belgrade, 1981, p. 309; Andrew Wachtel, 'Imagining Yugoslavia: The Historical Archeology of Ivo Andrić', in Vucinich, *Ivo Andrić Revisited: The Bridge Still Stands*, Berkeley, CA, 1995, p. 96.

¹¹ Some aspects of these interpretations are discussed by Ivo Žanjić, 'Pisac na osami', *Erasmus*, No.18, 1996; Bogdan Rakić: 'The Proof Is in the Pudding: Ivo Andrić and His Bosniak Critics', *Serbian Studies*, No.1, 2000; Celia Hawkesworth, 'Ivo Andrić as Red Rag and Political Football', *SEER*, Vol.75, 2002, No.2, pp. 201-216; Enver Kazaz: 'Egzistencijalnost / povijesnost Bosne – interpretacija u zamci ideologije', http://www.openbook.ba/izraz/no10/10_enver_kazaz2.htm, [accessed 22 February 2006].

-
- ¹² Ivo Tartalja: Put pored znakova, Novi Sad, 1991, p. 18.
- ¹³ Zdenko Lešić, 'Ivo Andrić- pripovjedač. Između naratologije i hermeneutike', Novi izraz, No.30, 2005, p. 29.
- ¹⁴ M.M.Bakhtin: 'Discourse in the Novel', in The Dialogic Imagination, Austin and London, 1981, pp.259-422.
- ¹⁵ Hawkesworth, Ivo Andrić: Bridge Between East and West; Radmila Gorup, 'Reader as Critic: Ivo Andrić's Bosnian Chronicle', Serbian Studies, No.2, 2001; Boguslav Zjelinjski, 'Bosna između Istoka i Zapada', Sveske Zadružbine Ive Andrića, No. 4, 1986.
- ¹⁶ This point was also made by David Norris, In the Wake of the Balkan Myth. Questions of Identity and Modernity, London, 1999, p. 68.
- ¹⁷ Svetozar Koljević also points to the similarities in Andrić's description of the singing of Ana-Maria and the people of Travnik in "Andrićev Vavilon. Dijalog civilizacija u Andrićevom umetničkom svetu", in Isaković, Zbornik radova o Ivi Andriću, Belgrade, 1979, p. 21.
- ¹⁸ Jähnichen claims that it is also the only place in the novel where the narrator's views and attitudes become clear (p. 45).
- ¹⁹ Jan Assmann, 'Translating Gods: Religion as a Factor of Cultural (Un)Translatability', in Budick and Iser, The Translatability of Cultures. Figuration of Space Between, Stanford CA, 1996, p. 34.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- ²¹ Charles Taylor, 'Understanding and Ethnocentricity', in Philosophy and Human Sciences. Philosophical Papers 2, Cambridge, 1985, p. 125-26.
- ²² Richard J. Bernstein, 'The Hermeneutics of Cross-Cultural Understanding', in Balslev, Cross-Cultural Conversation (Initiation), Atlanta GA, 1996, pp. 29-41.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- ²⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, London and New York, 2004, p. 305.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 295.
- ²⁶ Ivo Tartalja, Pripovedačeva estetika. Prilog poznavanju Andrićeve poetike, Belgrade, 1979, p. 233. On the similarities between Andrić's biography and Cologne's uncertain identity see also Tomislav Z. Longinović, 'Bosnian Cultural Identity in the Works of Ivo Andrić', in Vucinich: Ivo Andrić Revisited, p. 136.
- ²⁷ Tartalja, Pripovedačeva estetika, p.233.
- ²⁸ M. Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Manchester, 1984, p.111.
- ²⁹ Of all modern writers Andrić was most drawn to Thomas Mann. More on his reading of Magic Mountain in Tartalja, Put pored znakova, p. 74-90.