MEDIA RECEPTION AND INTERCULTURAL READING: IVO ANDRIĆ IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Dragana Litričin Dunić[1], Faculty of Teacher Education, University Educons, Serbia

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Abstract: *This paper examines the ways in which contemporary media and digital technologies shape the reception of the literary work and public persona of Ivo Andrić among students. Proceeding from the assumption that literature in the digital age is no longer perceived exclusively through the written text, but also through diverse media representations, the study encompasses three complementary levels: literature, media, and digital adaptation. The first part of the paper analyzes the attitudes of students of the Faculty of Teacher Education toward the possibility of completing Andrić's unfinished novel, as well as their reception of a digital monodrama as a contemporary interpretation of a literary text. The second part examines the perception of Andrić as a media figure through an analysis of nonverbal communication in a television interview, based on a sample of students from the Department of Journalism and Mass Communications and the Bulgarian Studies and Media programme at Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen, as well as students from the Faculty of Teacher Education at Educons University.*

A particular emphasis is placed on the comparative dimension of the research, which offers insight into the differences and similarities in reception between Serbian and Bulgarian students. The paper contributes to a broader understanding of the relationship between technology and the humanities by highlighting the transformation of reading practices in the contemporary media environment. All sections of this paper are united by a common research objective: to examine how contemporary audiences perceive Ivo Andrić beyond the boundaries of the printed text, through digital media, public performance, and intercultural reception.

Key words: *digital age, literature, Andrić, media, imagology*

Introduction

The contemporary digital environment has significantly transformed the ways in which literature is read, interpreted, and transmitted. The text is no longer the sole or dominant bearer of meaning; rather, it has become part of a broader media system in

1 Dragana Litričin Dunić, PhD, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Teacher Education, University Educons. She holds a PhD from the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad. Her academic interests include media discourse analysis, literary criticism, and comparative literature. She is a collaborator on the international research project Andrić-Initiative *: Ivo Andrić in the European Context*. She has delivered guest lectures at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen and the guest lecturer at the Sorbonne University in Paris. E-mail: ddunic@gmail.com

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which literary works are reshaped through various forms, ranging from audiovisual content to digital representation. In this context, the boundaries between author, work, and audience have become increasingly fluid, while the process of reception more frequently involves the active participation of readers and viewers.

This paper is divided into two parts. Through a literary-critical interpretation of Andrić's unfinished novel *Na sunčanoj strani* (*On the Sunny Side*), this paper explores how complex literary texts can be understood in contemporary digital contexts. It examines how computational approaches may highlight different ways of reading Andrić's work and open up alternative interpretations of the text. Finally, it presents the results of a reception study conducted with students of the Faculty of Education at Educons University in Serbia.

The second part of the paper focuses on reception and imagological interpretation among students in Bulgaria. The literary work of Ivo Andrić occupies a distinctive place within the broader European cultural sphere. As the recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1961, Andrić became an author whose work transcended national literary frameworks and entered the international literary canon. His prose is frequently interpreted in relation to the historical, cultural, and identity-related questions that characterize the Balkans.

The aim of this section is to examine how students in Bulgaria and Serbia perceive Andrić's literary work, as well as his public presence in the media sphere. Special attention is given to the analysis of communication in a television interview from 1967 and to the interpretation of literary intervews through an imagological approach.

I. Contemporary Reception of Andrić's Work Among Students

The contemporary reception of Andrić's work among students represents an important aspect of studying the literary canon within the academic environment. The ways in which young readers interpret classical literary works may reveal how cultural values and literary models are transmitted and transformed in the context of contemporary education. Andrić's unfinished novelistic fragment *On the Sunny Side* occupies a distinctive place within his so-called prison cycle. Although formally fragmentary, the text possesses remarkable internal cohesion and symbolic density. This paper proceeds from the thesis that the unfinished nature of the novel opens the text to new forms of reading, interpretation, and media transformation.

The aim of this section is to demonstrate how the intersection of literary hermeneutic and pedagogical practice can offer a new reading of Ivo Andrić. Particular attention is devoted to the female figure as the central semantic node of the novel. As Andrić reflected, his works were not originally conceived as complete books, but emerged gradually through the accumulation of separate and initially disconnected texts that were later organized, with varying degrees of coherence, into novels or collections of short stories (Andrić, 2017, p. 9).

The reconstructed novel *Na sun*čanoj *strani, On the Sunny Side*, edited by Žaneta Đukić Perišić, belongs to the broader prison cycle of Andrić's prose. These texts are united by the experience of imprisonment and by the figure of Toma Galus (Perišić,2007), thereby forming a novelistic structure, an open sequence that may be read as a fragmented novel.

Within *On the Sunny Side*, the motif of the woman stands out as the central semantic node. A fleeting female presence at the window, repeatedly appearing and disappearing, introduces an image of fragile visibility that interrupts the monotony of imprisonment (Andrić, 2017). When she later appears carrying a birdcage, the scene acquires symbolic force: the female figure becomes associated with light, hope, and the possibility of spiritual transcendence within a confined and oppressive space (Andrić, 2017). Such motifs demonstrate that Andrić's work already contains an inherent potential for intermedial and transmedial interpretation.

Within a semiotic framework, the structure of meaning may be understood as organized around several interconnected symbols that form a unified semantic field. Within this network, the female figure emerges as the central narrative node and bearer of the text's fundamental meaning.

Her appearance in direct relation to the motifs of the sun and the window indicates a specific position within the symbolic structure of the work and in this context, the window functions as a liminal space, a mediating point between the closed and the open world. As such, it becomes a symbolic stage upon which the key moment of narrative development is articulated and it is precisely at this point that the central motifs intersect and the deeper semantic structure of the text is revealed. This paper proposes the stage form of a digital monodrama that combines live performance with digital layers. It is not a conventional theatrical production, but rather an experimental form that transforms the text into a performative event.

The structure of the performance is conceived as follows: Prologue – the algorithm reads Andrić's unfinished sentences; Dialogue – the performer engages in conversation with a "virtual Andrić"; Climax – the woman with the birdcage appears alongside the projection of the window as a stage; Epilogue – the algorithm concludes the story by positioning the woman as the symbolic outcome.

The issue of completing unfinished literary works raises several ethical and philosophical questions. Is it justified to "supplement" the intention of a writer who deliberately left no ending? Or is unfinishedness itself part of the poetics of the work? Do new media undermine the authenticity of Andrić's style, or do they provide a new layer of interpretation?

Certain aspects of the research developed in this paper were presented at the 17th "Andrić Virtual" Symposium, held at the Complutense University of Madrid within the framework of the international research project *Andrić-Initiative : Ivo Andrić in the European Context*.

In the educational process, this form enables students to experience the text through multiple media and stage performance. Such an approach develops media literacy grounded in creative reading as a precondition for creative writing.

In this context, a comparative reading of *Na sunčanoj strani (On the Sunny Side*) and *Prokletaj avlija (The Damned Yard)* eveals a deeper structural affinity that transcends the shared theme of imprisonment. In both texts, confinement does not produce passivity; rather, it activates compensatory mechanisms of meaning. In *Prokleta avlija, (The Damned Yard*), that mechanism is language storytelling, mythomanic speech, and the endless multiplication of narratives that replace the freedom of movement with the freedom of speech.

Just as speech in *The Damned Yard* is continuously renewed, varied, and expanded, so too in this fragment the visual scene is repeated, though without narrative evolution. In this sense, the female figure in *On the Sunny Side* represents the visual equivalent of the mythomanic story. Each new appearance of the woman at the window is not new information, but a new illumination of the same meaning.

The paradise dreamed of by all mythomaniacs is filled with women. Similarly, the woman at the window does not refer solely to the external world as a stable reality, but to an inner space in which that reality is transformed into meaning.

In *The Damned Yard*, one encounters many of the obsessive motifs of Andrić's prose: guilt, unreflective speech, imprisonment, fatal women, and the all-knowing story. According to Petar Džadžić, a leading authority on Andrić, *The Damned Yard* is indeed the "matrix cell" of his entire oeuvre. (Džadžić, 1996). Albert Thibaudet argues that, within the complete oeuvre of every great writer, there is one work that functions as a profound message and behaves like a stem cell (Thibaudet, 1961, p.305). *The Damned Yard* appears to be precisely such a work. In *The Damned Yard*, a symbolic vision of all prisons is condensed, including that of life lived in constant fear as an imaginary prison. (Litričin, 2020, p. 388).

> "If, in his anxiety to be free at least for a moment from Karagöz's pressure, the cornered, tormented man began to beg and assure him of his innocence, with either genuine or feigned tears, Karagöz could all at once change his behavior, smacking his palm against his brow.
>
> What are you saying, you're completely innocent? Ah, why are you telling me now, for god's sake, man. Pshee... If you'd told me you were guilty, I could have let you go, because there are a lot of guilty people here. They're all guilty. But it's precisely an innocent man that we need. So I can't let you go. If you hadn't said so yourself, something could have been done. But as it is, now you'll have to say here until I find another innocent man somewhere, someone like you, to take your place. Now, sit still and keep quiet!" (Andric, 1992, p. 26).

Therefore, there are no innocent ones. Andrić's literary characters escape through storytelling into imaginary spaces of freedom. Many of Andrić's characters search for an ideal woman that constantly eludes them. In *The Damned*

Yard, the sun is associated only with the story about women. The sun has barely appeared, and the conversation is already flowing...

In *On the Sunny Side*, this role is assumed by the image: the gaze, the scene, the visual epiphany that substitutes movement through the repetition of the same motif.

This poetic boundary between traditional interpretation and innovative intervention becomes particularly clear in the reception among students in teacher education, with whom a study was conducted focusing on attitudes toward the digital representation of Andrić and the possibility of scenic and algorithmic "continuation" of the unfinished novel.

The survey was conducted among 100 students at the Faculty of Teacher Education of Educons University. More than half of the surveyed students (54%) expressed interest in the possibility that artificial intelligence might offer a model continuation of the unfinished novel. However, this position was not motivated by a desire for textual closure, but by curiosity and pedagogical interest. For this group, algorithmic continuation did not represent a substitute for Andrić, but rather experimental material that could enable comparisons of style, deepen understanding of the poetics of unfinishedness, and encourage critical reflection on authorship.

At the same time, a significant proportion of respondents (20%) explicitly rejected the idea of AI "finishing" Andrić, emphasizing that such intervention would violate the authorial integrity and artistic authenticity of the text. The remaining 26% remained undecided, indicating the presence of an ethical and poetic dilemma that cannot be easily resolved and requires further theoretical and pedagogical consideration.

This distribution of attitudes demonstrates that the question of completing the novel is not merely technical, but fundamentally poetic. The closer the digital intervention approaches the body of the text itself, the stronger the resistance becomes. Even when students display openness toward experimentation, they intuitively recognize that the unfinishedness of the novel is not an empty space to be filled, but a structural condition of its meaning.

Interestingly, as many as 83% of respondents expressed a desire to see a "virtual Andrić" on stage. Only 17% rejected this possibility.

Particularly significant is the fact that students draw a clear distinction between visual reconstruction and textual intervention. While the digital "presence" of Andrić on stage was perceived as an acceptable and inspiring form of media mediation, rewriting his text remained problematic. This distinction reveals a high degree of poetic awareness: Andrić's text is perceived as inviolable, whereas the authorial figure remains open to interpretation.

For students, this form does not represent dramatization in the classical sense, but rather a media expansion that enables the visual, auditory, and

symbolic revitalization of the central motif. Such reception confirms that stage interpretation does not undermine the poetic structure of the unfinished text, but is instead perceived as a legitimate and pedagogically stimulating mode of reading.

II. Reading Andrić: Andrić in the Media Sphere – The Interview as Genre

While the first part of the paper explores the possibilities of digital interpretation and stage transformation of Andrić's work, the second part shifts attention to the reception of the author himself as a media figure and cultural symbol in different academic environments.

Andric rarely gave interviews, did not like public exposure and was cautious when it came to public speaking. The interview, as a journalistic genre, represents a specific form of communication in which the writer, the journalist, and the media audience encounter one another. In such a context, what is transmitted is not only information about the author and his work, but also particular cultural and symbolic models of representation.

Although the interview is fundamentally a journalistic genre, within literary studies it occupies a special place as a distinctive literary-cultural form, since it does not merely convey information, but also constructs discourse about the writer, the work, and the broader cultural context. It is precisely this dual nature that makes the interview a relevant object of study within literary history and theory.

The very concept of the interview belongs to the broader European tradition of dialogue, whose roots may be traced to Ancient Greece, where dialogue was not merely a form of communication, but also a method of thinking and searching for truth. Knowledge was not transmitted as a finished fact, but formed through the exchange of viewpoints.

The essence of the interview, therefore, lies not only in the sequence of question and answer, but in the act of encounter itself. The interview is a space in which two consciousnesses, two perspectives, and two cultural positions meet.

Here, it is particularly important to introduce the imagological dimension. Imagology examines representations of the "Other" in literature and culture and that is, the ways in which one culture portrays another, while simultaneously constructing its own identity through that representation. In the interview, this process becomes especially visible: discourse about the Other simultaneously becomes discourse about the self.

The Other in an interview is never neutral. It is always culturally shaped, selected, and interpreted through the speaker's system of values. When discussing the interview as a literary form, it is necessary to understand its dual nature: it is simultaneously a journalistic instrument and a literary-cultural text. It is precisely this duality that enables its study within literary scholarship.

For this reason, the interview becomes a space of autopoetic expression. In an interview, the author does not merely communicate facts, but constructs his own literary persona. He chooses what to emphasize, what to omit, how to interpret his work, and how to position himself within culture. The interview thus becomes a form of self-representation and self-interpretation.

In this study, a television interview with Ivo Andrić, broadcast in 1967 on Radio Television of Serbia, was analyzed. Students observed the manner in which the author spoke, his gestures, facial expressions, and his overall mode of communication before the camera.

The nonverbal communication displayed in this interview was frequently interpreted as an expression of calmness, concentration, and intellectual reserve. Students noted that Andrić spoke in a slow and thoughtful tone, with minimal gestures, which contributed to the impression of seriousness and authority. Such an interpretation demonstrates how the media appearance of a literary author may shape the perception of both his work and his personality within the contemporary academic environment.

In Gérard Genette's theory, an interview with a writer may therefore be interpreted as a form of "public authorial epitext." (Genette, 1997, p.323). It also points to the significance of the autopoetic dimension. In an interview, the author often explains the genesis of the work, poetics, the relationship to tradition or cultural context, and their own position within the literary field. In this way, the interview becomes an additional interpretative framework. The reader no longer approaches the work solely through the text, but also through the author's subsequent self-reflection.

In the prose of Ivo Andrić, complex relations among different cultural communities in the Balkans frequently appear. For this reason, his work provides a particularly suitable framework for imagological analysis. Imagology, as a methodological approach in literary studies, examines the ways in which literature represents both one's own identity and the identity of the Other. In this sense, the literary text becomes a space in which cultural images and stereotypes concerning different peoples and cultures are formed. "Indeed, the opposition between an abstract East and West has been as old as written history" (Todorova, 1997, p.12).

During the course, students read Andrić's texts in Bulgarian translation, which enabled a different perspective on the interpretation of his literary world. The discussion following the reading was focused on questions of identity, cultural difference, and the ways in which literature may contribute to a deeper understanding of other cultures.

The empirical part of the study is based on a survey conducted among students at the University of Shumen, as well as among students of the Faculty of Teacher Education in Serbia. It should be noted that the students in Shumen were previously prepared within coursework. They were also familiar with Andrić's

works in Bulgarian translation, as well as with imagological studies such as Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans*. Data for this study were collected in January 2026 during the guest lectures delivered by the author, held at the invitation of Shumen University *Bishop Konstantin Preslavski*. The seminar brought together students from the Department of Journalism and Mass Communications at *Konstantin Preslavsky* University of Shumen: bachelor's students in Journalism and Advertising, Public Relations, and Bulgarian Studies and Media, as well as master's students in PR in Public Administration.

Before completing the survey, students had:

1. read Andrić's texts in Bulgarian translation; while the students in Serbia were already familiar with Andrić's work;
2. become familiar with the basics of media genres, particularly the interview as a genre;
3. watched the 1967 television interview with Andrić;
4. analyzed excerpts from a television series about Andrić.

Afterward, a survey was conducted in which students responded to questions concerning:

- their perception of Andrić's personality in media appearances;
- the significance of his nonverbal communication;
- interpretations of his literary texts;
- the possibilities of imagological readings of literature.

The analysis of student responses reveals several noteworthy tendencies. First, students in both academic environments perceive Andrić as an author who represents the cultural and intellectual tradition of the region. His public appearance in the interview was frequently described as calm, thoughtful, and dignified.

Students particularly emphasized the importance of nonverbal communication in shaping the image of the author. Restrained gestures, a slow speaking tempo, and a serious facial expression were interpreted as signs of intellectual authority. In their interpretation of the literary texts, students often highlighted the universal themes of Andrić's prose, such as historical destiny, cultural encounters, and the complexity of identity in the Balkans.

The research focused on nonverbal communication, that is, the way respondents perceive Andrić's speech and overall appearance. The survey included five questions, and the respondents answered each question by choosing "Yes" or "No." The questions referred to whether Andrić appears reserved, whether he speaks calmly, whether he speaks slowly, whether he pauses while speaking, and whether the respondents like his manner of speaking. In this way, the research

covered several important elements of nonverbal communication, such as calmness, speech tempo, pauses, and the general impression the speaker leaves on the audience. Words are not the sole bearers of meaning. Gesture, facial expression, tone, sound, gaze, pause, and silence also participate in communication. In *Poetika knji*ževnog razgovora (*The Poetics of Literary Conversation)*, Jovan Pejčić, drawing on Jakubinsky, demonstrates that dialogue cannot be reduced merely to its verbal content, since meaning is formed through the totality of the interlocutors' verbal and bodily behaviour (Pejčić, 1982, p.78).

The survey was conducted among a total of 100 students. Serbia: 43 out of 50 affirmative responses. Bulgaria: 46 out of 50 affirmative responses. These findings indicate that students perceive Andrić as a writer who speaks calmly and thoughtfully. Such a perception confirms that the author's media appearance plays an important role in the contemporary interpretation of his work and in shaping the image of the writer within an academic context.

The results of the study confirm that contemporary students perceive Andrić's work as relevant within today's cultural context. The combination of literary analysis and media materials proved to be an effective method in literature teaching. The analysis of the interview enabled students to connect the literary work with the author's personality and his public presence. At the same time, the imagological approach encouraged students to reflect on questions of identity and cultural perception.

Conclusion

Literature teaching in the contemporary period must develop new modes of reading and interpreting literary texts, in which traditional approaches are complemented by contemporary media and digital forms of reception. The results of the research show that students are generally receptive to such innovative approaches, particularly when the literary text is examined through different media forms and contemporary interpretative frameworks. At the same time, a certain degree of reservation is observed regarding the idea of completing a literary text, whereby its unfinished nature is understood as an important aspect of its poetics and meaning.

On the basis of the above, it can be concluded that the combination of literary interpretation, media approaches, and digital forms represents a meaningful and productive model of contemporary literature teaching, which encourages more active and in-depth reading of literary works.

In the second part of the paper, the study of the reception of Andrić's work among students in Bulgaria and Serbia demonstrated that literary classics continue to hold an important place in contemporary education. The combination of literary analysis, media materials, and empirical research enables a deeper understanding of the ways in which young readers interpret literature.

The results indicate that Andrić's work may serve as a productive framework for an interdisciplinary approach connecting literary studies, media studies, and imagology. Such an approach contributes to the understanding of literature as a space of dialogue among different cultures and identities. In this way, Andrić's work confirms its enduring openness to new readings, while at the same time underscoring the need to preserve the integrity of the authorial text in contemporary forms of interpretation.

Viewed together, the results of both research directions demonstrate that Andrić's work and authorial figure retain strong cultural relevance, yet in the contemporary era they are increasingly interpreted through multimedia, interdisciplinary, and intercultural frameworks.

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