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On Andrić's Bosnia

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These are the reasons why it is not possible to define Ivo Andrić's group identity exclusively by ethno-national standards. For the same reasons, it is, strictly speaking, impossible to define the ethno-national cultures in Bosnia in exclusive terms. The manner in which the ethno-national cultures are recognized as separate and the manner in which they at the same time overlap, enter into each other, and "borrow" from one another—I have elsewhere described these manners as the pattern of a rainbow. We can identify each color in the spectrum, but we cannot determine the exact border between the colors. Is the border a place of simultaneous separation and coalescence, a hyper-identity? Yes. Andrić was, in fact, giving a literary reformulation to this amazing and complex historical and cultural reality. Yes, he reformulated it in an artistically unique and masterful manner. Thus, Ivo Andrić, his literature - along with everything else that it is and that it "belongs" to - is, in fact, today the one solid and secure place for the complex Bosnian-Herzegovinian identity, a place in which this identity is deposited and from which it is clearly legible. And therein arises a dismal paradox: the political process of creating and distinguishing three separate and distinct national cultures in Bosnia-Herzegovina - which could soon prove to be irreversible - yields a cultural situation in which this very kind of identity is, in fact, undesirable.

Translated by Wayles Browne and Keith Doubt

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