

Ivo Andrić's *Put Alije Đerzeleza* -  
The Dethronement of Heroism?

by

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Without a doubt, Ivo Andrić's story *Put Alije Đerzeleza*, which is the objective of the present study, marks a turning point in the author's literary career, not only because it was enthusiastically welcomed by contemporary critique, and because it laid the foundation for his literary fame. In a technical regard, too, the story is particularly important since - as opposed to the overall lyrical tone of his early writings (be it his early poems or the lyrical prose of *Ex Ponto* and *Nemiri [Unrest]*) - this is the first short story told in realistic prose. Additionally, it was Andrić's first work which was set in Bosnia, the land where the author was born and educated.

In terms of structure, *Put Alije Đerzeleza* represents a trilogy: the first part, *Đerzelez-u hanu [Đerzelez at the Inn]*, was published in 1918, the second part, *Đerzelez na putu [Đerzelez on the Road]*, one year later, and the third, *Đerzelez u Sarajevu [Đerzelez in Sarajevo]*, was published in 1920, at the time of publication of the entire narrative.<sup>1</sup>

Before analyzing the story in detail, it seems reasonable to say a few words about the figure of Alija Đerzelez who is by no means Ivo Andrić's personal invention. On the contrary, Alija Đerzelez is the most popular hero of Moslem Bosnian epic folklore. A whole cycle of songs and stories is centered around his figure, in which his fights and adventures are described. Most of these texts were collected and recorded in the nineteenth century. Although the events take place in some kind of achronical situation and are not set in a concrete temporal framework, the episodes are supposed to take place in past

centuries, as far back as the sixteenth century, at least. In many ways, Alija Đerzelez can be compared to his Christian equivalent Kraljević Marko, the most familiar hero of Serbian folklore. However, Alija's strength and appearance make even Kraljević Marko fear: once asked by his mother, if he was ever afraid, Kraljević Marko answers that he was afraid only once in his life, when he met Alija Đerzelez for the first time. Then he describes this first meeting (Parry/Lord 1954: I/198):

He had a fine fez on his head, with a many-coloured sash around it, and a peacock's wing in the turban. His slender mustaches hung over both his shoulders. His shoulders were broad and heroic. In his belt there were two golden pistols, and at his thigh a curved sword. Its hilt was covered with yellow ducats. On his shoulder rested a flintlock with rings on it. It had twenty-four rings, and each contained a litre of gold. When I saw him, I wanted to flee, but the stranger spied me and cried out loudly to me: 'Come here, Kraljević Marko!' There was nothing else to do, so I went in, I went in and gave him greeting, and we shook hands. Then I swore: 'Where are you from?' and 'By what name do they call you?' He said to me: 'Đerzelez Alija.'

According to the legend, Alija was born near Sarajevo. From his family, only his widowed mother and his sister Ajkuna are still alive, two women for whom Alija cares very much. Đerzelez's strength and his skill in the use of weapons is unsurpassed by either his Moslem or Christian contemporaries. It is no problem for him to lift a whole castle with one hand, to throw the mace twice as far as Kraljević Marko, and to win over an army of a thousand men. Otherwise good-natured, he may in an instant become a cold-hearted killer who, in one incident, even kills his own sister (Hörmann 1888: 82):

To Aliji vrlo žao bilo,  
Pa poteže svoju oštru čordu:  
Zakla sestru kako janje malo.  
(And Alija was very sorry:  
And he draws his sharp sword:  
and he slaughters his sister like a little lamb.)

Immediately afterwards, however, when he sees what he has done, he repents his deed and tells his mother:

'Avaj, meni, moja mila majko,  
U ijedu posjekoh djevojku!  
(Woe is me, my dear mother,  
In my rage I have cut down the girl!)

The episode of this murder is unique, however, and it is an exception to the rule; generally speaking, Alija is an extremely positive hero. Over the past centuries, Alija Đerzelez has become *the* symbol of cultural heroism within the collective memory of Moslem Bosnia at best.

The importance of Alija Đerzelez's figure in Bosnian culture has a tradition which can be traced to our days, and it seems worthwhile to at least briefly mention some examples. Thus, in 1992, during the Yugoslavien war, an audio cassette was distributed which contained, among others, a record named 'Đerzelezu Ale' [To Đerzelez Alija]. The text (which was accompanied by a sound track written by Phil Collins) was originally written by Bosnian poet Enver Čolaković (1913-76), in 1950. Since this text has never been published before,<sup>2</sup> it will be quoted here in full.

ĐERZELEZU ALE  
[TO ĐERZELEZ ALIJA]

Enver Čolaković \* ca. 1950

Osedlaj najbržeg ata,  
Najoštriju sablju opaši,

S majkom halali se brzo  
I kreni, Đerzelezu Ale!  
Prašinu otresi sa ruha  
I čupavu podigni kosu  
S očiju umrlih davno.

Pa hitro izjaši iz groba  
U borbu za opstanak Bosne!  
U dženetu ne miruj više  
Ako si mumín i junak,  
Majčine ne gledaj suze,  
Ako si ponosni Bošnjak.

S nebeskih kad modrih visina  
Snesu te meleći amo  
Do tvoga zapuštenog groba,  
Nek' at te već osedlan čeka.

Potegni buzdovan i sablju  
Pa jurni kroz prašnjavu Bosnu  
I gledaj, i bori se, Ale!  
Nek' te ne začude gladni,  
Poniženi, jadni i bosí  
Bošnjaci u izlizan jaram  
Zapregnuti, kada ih spaziš.  
Nek te ne začudi, Ale,  
Što nećeš čaršije naći  
Ni kule begovske hane,  
Ni tople hamane, ni žene  
U zaru, il feredži crnoj.

Saddle the fastest horse,  
Put the sharpest sword around your  
waist

Say quickly good-bye to your mother  
And set off, Đerzelez Alija!  
Remove the dust from your clothes  
And raise the unkempt hair  
From your eyes which died a long time  
ago.

Ride quickly out of your grave  
Into the fight for Bosnia's survival.  
Don't rest any longer in paradise,  
If you're a believer and hero,  
Don't look at your mother's tears,  
If you are a proud Bosnian.

When from the blue heights in the sky  
The angels will carry you hither  
To your neglected grave,  
May your saddled horse already wait  
for you.

Lift your club and sword,  
And race through the dusty Bosnia,  
And look, and fight, Alija!  
Don't be astonished by the hungry,  
Humiliated, wretched and barefoot  
Bosnians in the shabby  
harnessed yoke, when you meet them.  
Don't be astonished, Alija,  
That you won't find the streets,  
Nor the pubs at the Beg's castle,  
Nor the hot baths, nor the women  
in their veils, in their clothes.

Nek' te ne začudi, kada  
U džamiji mjesto đemata

Pronadeš konje i ovce;  
To narodu oteti mal je

Kog šejtanu daju u danak.

Ti samo razmahuj sa sabljom  
I jaši kroz zamrlu Bosnu,  
Neka te očaj bar vidi  
I u tebi nasluti spas.

Kad dušmanin zaišče sablju,  
buzdovan i s prsa ti toke,  
I zlatni sahat, i saruk,  
Pa čak i kosu sa glave -

Ne daj mu, ne daj mu, Ale.

Već nastavi kružiti Bosnom...  
Kad, kao veliki junak,  
U dženet se materi vratiš,  
Reci joj: Ne strahuj, majko,  
Za svoga sina junaka.

Veći su, veći i jači  
Đerzelezi danas Bošnjaci,  
I hrabrije danas se bore,  
Jer žive i prkose vragu  
Dok smrt mu opaku slute...

Don't be astonished, when  
In the mosque, instead of praying  
people,

You will find horses and sheep;  
This is property which has been taken  
from the people,  
and which they give as a tax to the  
Devil.

You need only wave with your sword,  
And ride through the stunned Bosnia,  
May the despair only see your  
And feel salvation in you.

When the enemy asks for the sword,  
mace, and from your breast flow  
Both the golden clock and the turban,  
Yes, and also the hair from your head

Don't give it to him, don't give it,  
Alija.

Go on to cross over Bosnia...  
When, as a great hero,  
You return to your mother in paradise,  
Tell her: Don't worry, mother,  
About your heroic son.

They are greater, greater, and stronger,  
Today's Bosnian Đerzelezes  
And they fight more bravely today,  
Because they live and defy the devil  
Until death overcomes the evil...

Without further delving into details, we can see the cultural importance of Alija Đerzelez as an epic folk hero. It is no wonder, then, that there have been many attempts to trace back his figure to some historical reality and to prove his authenticity. At the end of the nineteenth century, scholars such as Novaković (1886) and Vukićević (1899) maintained that the historical person behind Alija Đerzelez was none other than Ali-beg, who, after the fall of the Serbian capital Smederevo in 1439, was the first Osman provincial governor (sandžakbeg) of Smederevo and Serbia. More recently, there have been arguments in favour of the idea that Alija Đerzelez should be traced back to the fifteenth century Bosnian warrior Gerz-Eljas (cf. Buturović 1975). Whatever the solution to this question may be, one can say that, in none of these cases, it is doubted 'that the epic hero Đerzelez Alija is a historical personality, a warrior and hero from the Bosnian region, who lived at the end of the fifteenth century', and 'that the epic hero Đerzelez is a real and complete historical personality' (Buturović 1975: 172ff.).<sup>3</sup>

Other scholars have focused less on the historical roots of Alija Đerzelez, than on the picture which emerges from the epic songs and stories about him. Interestingly enough, the hero's name has played an important role in the relevant discussion. Olesnicki (1933a,b), for example, argues in favour of a contamination of two names; speaking of the 'epic type' of Alija Đerzelez, he considers his name to be 'a fruit of a later compilative creation of folk phantasy'. According to him, there are several explanations for the name, but in any case, the name Đerzelez is composed of two parts: thus, the name may be explained as 'young fighter with a club', or as 'young hero Elez'. The second explanation refers to the personal name of 'Elez', which, in popular language, is assumed to have been pronounced as 'Eljas' or 'Ilija (Ilija)'. In any of these explanations, it remains unclear, however, why the name Alija was then added. Referring to the Bosnian proverb *In the morning Alija, in the afternoon Ilija*,<sup>4</sup> Olesnicki (1933b: 41) postulates a contamination of two different epic heroes: 'In any case this is a combined name, in which, in a bizarre manner, two different male personal names of two different well-known heroes of the epoqe of the rise of the Turkish fame on the Balkan are fused into one name; it is a fruit of the folk phantasy of the most recent times.'

This interpretation leads to another explanation of Alija Đerzelez's name, which has been put forward by Marjanović (1936), who also speaks of a contamination with far-reaching mythological implications. Marjanović is able to demonstrate quite a number of parallels between the legends about Alija

Derzelez and about two saints who are highly esteemed in Islamic tradition, as well. According to him, the name Derzelez is a fusion of two names: 'Хизр' and 'Илија' - whereas the first name is supposed to refer to St George [св. Ђурђе], the second name is assumed to refer to St Ilias [св. Илија].<sup>5</sup>

Given the controversies as to the origin of the folk hero, it might seem reasonable to side with Marjanović's argument that 'there is a poetic Alija Derzelez and a historical Alija Derzelez, both of whom are different from one another, so that one can say that they represent two completely separate personalities'.<sup>6</sup> This recognition of a distinct poetic figure seems wise, since it is valid, even if the existence of a historically authentic person by the name of Alija Derzelez should not be correct.

With this perspective in mind, we will not further dwell upon the historical or mythological roots of Alija Derzelez' person. Instead, we will accept him as he was presented above, and as he been accepted over the past centuries: as the most important epic hero of Moslem Bosnian folklore and culture.

As that hero, he was well familiar to Ivo Andrić, as well. As he would later, in his novel *The Bridge over the Drina* (*Na Drini ćuprija*), write:

The children who fished for tiddlers all day in the summer along these stony banks knew that these were hoofprints of ancient days and long dead warriors. Great heroes lived on earth in those days, when the stone had not yet hardened and was soft as the earth, and the horses, like the warriors, were of colossal growth. Only for the Serbian children these were the prints of the hooves of Šarac, the horse of Kraljević Marko, which had remained there from the time when Kraljević Marko himself was in prison up there in the Old Fortress and escaped, flying down the slope and leaping the Drina, for at that time there was no bridge. But the Turkish children knew that it had not been, not could it have been (for whence could a bastard Christian dog have had such strength or such a horse!) any but Derzelez Alija on his winged charger which, as everyone knew, despised ferries and ferrymen and leapt over rivers as if they were watercourses. They did not even squabble about this, so convinced were both sides in their own belief. And there was never an instance of any one of them being able to convince another, or that any one had changed his belief.

Many years later, in the early 1970s, Andrić reported that he had always been very much involved with legends and myths in his literary work; but at the same time, he pointed out that an author's first and foremost fault would be to make literary use of myths in their raw form (Andrić 1973; cf. Jandrić 1977: 259).<sup>7</sup> Taking this statement at face value, one is tempted to assume that Andrić was well familiar with Alija Derzelez as a folk hero, but that, in his own literary texts, he would submit him to significant transformations. In fact, Andrić explicitly distinguished between the 'popular hero Alija Derzelez', on the one hand, and 'his own hero Alija Derzelez', on the other hand (Andrić 1974; cf. Jandrić 1977: 331).<sup>8</sup>

On the basis of this distinction, it seems reasonable to assume that the figure of Alija Derzelez as he is represented in Andrić's narrative, and, consequently, the narrative as a whole, can meaningfully be read only in a close intertextual relationship with the folkloristic tradition.<sup>9</sup> With this perspective in mind, let us now come back to Andrić's narrative.

As to the time of the events, we are not told, when exactly they took place; the place(s) of action, by contrast, are named concretely. The three parts of the whole story are located in three different Bosnian places: near Višegrad, near Priboj and in Sarajevo. This spatial macrostructure alone implies that Alija Derzelez - 'who had spent his youth on a horse's back between Travnik and Istanbul' - is characterized as a hero of the road: his sphere of action is the external, not the internal, and the open space rather than the closed space.

The first part of the story has its beginning at an inn near the Višegrad custom-house. It is thus placed exactly on the cultural borderline between two spheres of influence, between East and West; everyone who is travelling from Sarajevo to Istanbul, or vice versa, has to pass this borderline. The place of action thus represents the more general cultural situation; it is a point of culmination in both a spatial and a temporal aspect. What happens at the inn can be understood as a model of the Bosnian cultural situation in general.

Very different people have to stay at the inn because the bridge over the river Drina, which both connects and separates these two different cultural spheres, is torn down by the flood. Therefore, a very heterogeneous, though not untypical society is gathering at the inn: among them are two friars, a Greek monk, three Venetians accompanied by a young and beautiful woman, a Serbian merchant with his son, a student, three Albanians, an Arab selling

drugs and talismans, and many others, mainly horse factors and dealers, hucksters and gypsies.

Alija Derzelez, the story's hero, is the last to be introduced: he is the last to arrive at the inn, and to join the company described above. As opposed to all other persons, more or less ordinary people, his name is well-known to all other guests at the inn. He is well-known by repute, by rumours about him, that is, by word, by oral tradition - no-one has ever seen him before, he is a legend, part of cultural tradition, and thus, in a way, one representative of the picture the culture has developed about itself in the course of history:

Gjerzelez was one of the last to come. His progress was preceded by song ... He was met by a silence full of wonder and respect, for did he not bear the fame of many conflicts and the strength which inspired fear? Everyone had heard of him, but few had seen him ...

In this passage, a sequence of elementary oppositions is set in motion, which develops along the semantic line of **hearing - seeing - speaking - acting** and the negations of these concepts. Alija Derzelez is represented as a typical epic hero of oral tradition, that is, as a hero who is famous for his actions reported by way of narration. Usually, heroes are different from ordinary people; they not only perform extraordinary actions, they also share extraordinary company. Thus, by being placed in the midst of this almost ordinary, though multi-coloured company, Alija is immediately removed from the sphere of ideal heroism to the ground of reality and everyday life. It is not by chance that he is right from the beginning 'brought to earth', both in a literal and figurative meaning, when he dismounts from his horse:

Now that he had dismounted from his pedestal as it were, the fear and respect waned a little ....

It does not take long until his uniqueness and extraordinariness become relative and vanish. In fact, the word 'equate' (izjednačiti) is used twice in the story's beginning in order to describe his similarity to the ordinary people around him:

... now that he had *put himself on a level with other people* it was possible to approach him and enter a conversation. ... Within a few days the magic halo round Gjerzelez had entirely disappeared; he was approached of one after another of these humdrum townfolk, for they

could not resist trying to *put him on their own level* or even to *make him their inferior*.

As long as Alija was only a hero of oral tradition, as long as one could **not see** him, but only **hear about** him, one could only **speak about him**; but as soon as one can **see** the de-mythologized person, one can not only **speak of him**, but also **speak with him**.

Alija thus turns from an object to be talked about into a subject to talk with. In fact, as is said in the story, Alija himself 'liked talking' (on je rado razgovarao). All the more important to note, therefore, that Alija's own verbal abilities are diametrically opposed to the dimensions of his fame. His verbal incompetence is emphasized repeatedly throughout the story:

He was slow and unskillful in his speech, words failing him at every moment, as is common enough with men of action; whenever the words would not come, he would spread out his long hands and roll up his eyes [...].

It is no wonder, then, that by the unskillful use of language (language originally having made him a hero) Alija makes himself a ridiculous figure of fun, and thus turns from an assimilated subject into an object again. The obvious reason for this development is his immediate infatuation with the above-mentioned young girl accompanying the three Venetians:

On the following day he saw the Venetian lady as she was going with her suite into her room. He cleared his throat, and, striking his knee with his hand, called twice after her: 'Hallo, hallo.'

In one way, Alija's de-mystification is thus symbolically expressed by his inability to find the right words both when **talking to** the Venetian lady and when **talking about her**:

For two days he caroused with the company, calling the Venetian girl to him, and he sighed and spoke to every one of his love, making himself a laughing stock with his halting, stammering ways ...

But language is not the only means, nor the most important means, by which Alija is dethroned, ultimately, his linguistic awkwardness mirrors and

emphasizes the hero's decline in an ironic manner. More importantly, and more obviously, Alija fails to prove a hero in the sphere of **action**. In fact, it is much more important that he is ridiculed by his companions in the sphere of **action**; it is here, where he is indeed made their inferior, their object of fun, their toy. And by making fun of him, by playing with him, they ultimately heighten their own subjective value, their self-consciousness.

A leading figure in this process is a knife-selling man from Foča, a 'wastrel (lola)', who enters into a squabble with Alija ('Trećeg dana ... porjekaše se Fočak i Đerzelez'). He starts a verbal contest, which focuses upon Alija's Achilles' heel, the Venetian lady, and in which Alija, 'speaking more with his hands than his tongue' (kazujući više rukama nego riječima), simply had to be the inferior.

Alija is therefore incredibly happy, when the other guests suggest a real contest to him, a contest between the man from Foča and himself, a contest to decide who is going to get the Venetian lady. It almost goes without saying that in this patriarchal society, the Venetian lady herself is not considered to have her own word about this question. The woman's fate is a matter between Foča and Alija, and Alija takes it as a matter of male contest:

Gjerzelez at once leapt to his feet and waved his arms about, to show he was ready to fight or to run a race or to put the weight. He no longer knew what he was doing nor why he was doing it, but was filled with happiness that the hour had come when *strength was to have its say*.

But in his blind hope that now, in the sphere of **action**, he might prove to be a hero, Alija does not notice that he is running into a trap, that he is being made the victim of the well-organized practical joke which the other guests are playing upon him. They talk Alija into a race with Foča, hang an apple in a tree, and decide that the person who gets the apple first, shall have the girl. When the race starts, Alija dashes off immediately, as if having wings, and does not notice that the man from Foča stops after two or three strides. Instead of competing with Alija, he claps his hands as all other spectators do, laughing, dancing, screaming for fun. When Alija reaches the beam, he stretches out for the apple, which has purposely been hung too high for him; not being able to reach it the first time, he has to take a running leap at it, and only then is he able to pluck it off along with the thread.

Holding the apple in his hand, Alija turns around and begins to understand the situation, looking from a distance at the crowd which is rolling about with laughter. At this moment, the situation changes abruptly: now, his facial expression signals danger ('taj pogled bio je opasan'), the crowd is filled by fear ('i najbezbržinije među njima ispuni strah'):

Distance and aloofness restored to him all that he had lost by putting himself on a level with them

Frightened by the situation, and realizing that they have gone too far, everyone sneaks away to their rooms. Alija, in turn, begins to understand that a mean practical joke has been played on him. His reaction is anger, hatred, fury, aggression. But, interestingly enough, these feelings are not only, and not predominantly, directed towards those who have played the joke on him; instead, they are predominantly directed at the innocent Venetian lady, or projected upon her:

At the thought a flame ran hotly through his whole body. A mad and irresistible longing came over him to see the unbeliever, to make her his own, to know how he stood with her. Failing that, he would kill and shatter everything around him.

It goes without saying that Alija does not win the Venetian lady's heart, a failure which simply reinforces his aggressions, his lust for violence:

Not knowing what to do in his fury, he began to saddle the horses and fill the bags ... And suddenly the anger within him began to fade ... When he had gone a little farther on he could not help looking back, and there, in the furthest corner of the inn, he saw the bulging window of the unbeliever's room. As he looked at it, closed, cold and enigmatic as the look of a woman and the human breast, there again rose up in all their strength the wrath and venom he had already forgotten. And in his mad lust to kill and damage somebody, anybody, he raised and brandished his hairy hand and wrist in the direction of the window ...

Summarizing and generalizing, a close interrelation can be observed between Alija's lust for violence, his failure to obtain a woman he desires, and his masculinity and overall fame.

But where is the cause, where the effect in the mutual interrelation of these three aspects of his life? Is it that his fame is based on his brutal aggression which, in turn, is a result of the frustrations he experiences with women? Or is it, the other way round: his overall frustration which makes him want to flee into the arms of women? Or is it simply impossible to distinguish cause and effect, reason and consequence? Is he caught in a vicious circle, from which there is no escape?

Interestingly enough, modern psychology and sociology have contributed important evidence on the close interrelation of the concepts of violence, sexuality, and masculinity.

Thus, based on the assumption that 'both violence and sexuality are culturally embedded concepts' (Harvey/Gow 1994: 12), violence is seen as one specific strategy not only to achieve dominance, but to construct a particular image of masculinity (Morgan 1987: 180). In this context, violence against women, i.e., the victimization of women by men, appears to be directly related to a society, in which male supremacy must be upheld at whatever cost (cf. Becker/Abel 1978: 49). Sexual relationships in this sense, then, would reflect more general tendencies on an individual level. Violence between man and woman would be comparable to war, in which violence becomes apparent as a social phenomenon. In fact, it is assumed that sexual relations between man and woman are a micro-sociological, minimal model of violence, in which social and cultural attitudes are reflected (Goletzka 1985: 121).

If one wants to transfer these insights to our story, one must not forget, however, that Alija's aggressive attitude towards women is nothing specific, since his lust for violence is not directed at women, exclusively, but against his surroundings in general. Therefore, we will have to look for additional explanations in trying to understand his behaviour.

With these questions in mind, let us turn to the other two parts of the trilogy in which Alija's relation to women plays a crucial role, too.

In *Derzelez na putu*, there are two relevant women figures; one of them is Darinka from Plevlje, who sends Alija her greetings via the Morić brothers, two 'loose-living wastrels' (*lole i rasipnici*). Darinka plays only a minor role; when Alija meets the two brothers, they communicate Darinka's message to him, saying that she has slept alone ever since he went away. But this brief

information plays only a subordinate role, and it is not by chance that we are concerned with a verbal report, in this case.

Alija's meeting with Zemka, a young gypsy girl, turns out to be much more important. Alija sees her, when he joins the two Morić brothers going to the gypsy fair, where they never stopped 'drinking and feasting and frolicking and laughing and romping' (*Pije se, jelo, trčalo, smijalo, valjalo i bez prestanka pjevalo*). Zemka had been divorced for the third time, and it was said that there was no man who was a match for her. Alija sees her at the moment, when she hoists herself on to a swing fastened to a pear tree; he immediately loses his mind and wants to get hold of her:

Gjerzelez sat where he was and gazed at her, delighted and with his arms wide apart - his reason all gone - carried away by the gaiety and by her beauty ... His depression yearned of a sudden to be transformed into high spirits and merriment. For an instant only he felt a kind of grief and shame at having so quickly renounced his sadness and angry resolve on the high road real never again to have anything to do with a woman - 'no, not even a pussy cat.'

But as rapidly as his sadness seems to transform into hope and desire, his wish to get hold of Zemka turns out to be another illusion and failure; in fact, aggression rises again, and as before, it is directed at the woman, at Zemka, in this case:

Then he got up and said he was off to snatch Zemka ... With the hubbub and guffaw, Gjerzelez began to stammer: 'She... she ... is my enemy'.

Again, Alija fails: instead of establishing contact with Zemka, he ends up at the bank of the river, full of dirt, drunk and sick. Having phantasies about Zemka, he is unable to win control of himself. The only thing he remembers is

... that he wanted to fight someone; he wanted to ask someone what ailed him, but the sky had grown overcast and the night was late, and there was no-one to ask and no-one to fight.

It is with this loneliness and isolation, disillusion and frustration, that this second story of Alija's adventures concludes. The third story, *Derzelez u*

*Sarajevu*, also begins with reports about Alija's experiences with women. But the only information we obtain is that, during that summer, he did many foolish things because of some merchant's widow, and that a Jewish woman travelling through the land with musicians from Saloniki, totally got the better of him.

Again, one episode is described in a more detailed way. This time, it involves Katinka, a young Christian beauty. Seeing her, 'as always, when he caught sight of a female beauty, he immediately lost any feeling about time and reality'. Not for a second, has he any doubt as to his right to get hold of her, to own her - he only needed to stretch out his hand... But again, as the action develops, Alija comes to learn that Katinka has simply disappeared, this time, because she has been brought away by her relatives. Realizing this, Alija's aggressions and his wish to kill, to damage, get hold of him:

He blew up with anger. He could not get to the Christian girl; he never could. And he could not kill anyone or destroy anything.

The only woman Alija finally succeeds in establishing some kind of relation with, is the prostitute Jekaterina. He has repeatedly seen her before at night, but this is the first time he has seen her by day. In her arms, he dreams of all the other women he has met before: the Venetian lady, the gypsy girl Zemka, the stately widow, the Jewish girl, and Katinka. And holding the prostitute's hand, and at the same time dreaming of all the other women, an offending and miserable thought comes across his mind:

Why is the way to a woman so full of windings and so difficult to find, and why could he not travel this way, he, with all his fame and all his strength [...].

Among others, this passage has been taken as a starting-point for various generalizing interpretations of the story as a whole. Thus, it has been repeatedly pointed out that, not only in *Put Alije Đerzeleza*, but in many other stories by Andrić, as well, 'women are in the forefront, either as the main protagonists or as the *spiritus movens* of the action' (Juričić 1986: 79).

Indeed, the 'female question' has been taken as an essential key to the story, regardless of the fact that different generalizations have been made on the basis of this overall assumption. Juričić (1986: 86), for example, argues:

From the outset of the story it is evident that Đerzelez is hardly an incarnation of the heroic and spiritual harmony with which legend has endowed him. In Bosnia, a land of cunning and deceit, his strength is a detriment to him, and women are his Achilles heel. Andrić's hero subjugates everything to the insatiable sexual drive which only underscores the frustration of his strong personality.

According to Juričić (1986: 84),

Andrić's visions of women as representing either an imagined reality which men turn to out of despondency and desperation, as flashes of sporadic happiness amidst the evil of life or as the perpetual tormentors of passionate personalities, have found their realization in *Put Alije Đerzeleza*.

More generally speaking, Juričić (1986: 89) therefore arrives at the conclusion that 'Đerzelez is not merely a Bosnian braggart, but a symbol of man in general confronted by the eternal problem presented by woman'. More concretely, Juričić (1986: 89) seems to have in mind the basic suffering and fear as motives which represent this eternal problem:

Although in his more mature works Andrić concentrated more directly on pain, suffering, hatred, isolation, and fear, and on all that is vicious in the world, the subject of women, and their effects on men [...] continued to occupy his mind throughout his writing career as one of the more important facets of his study of men and their fates.

In trying to provide support for this line of interpretation, Juričić (1986: 89) refers to Andrić's *Ex Ponto*, from which he quotes the following passage:

Fear is the only mover of all human actions, indistinct panic, often completely groundless, but authentic and deep fear. Perhaps, earlier, there were also other motives, but today it is fear. From fear people are evil, rude, and contemptible; from fear they are generous, even good.

We will soon come back to this passage and to Juričić's interpretation, which is convincing in itself, but which is, as we will see, deceiving, since it represents an incomplete quotation. Let us first look at two other interpretations, however, which, in one way or another, also take the female



question as a starting-point for further, more general explanations.

One of them is by Hawkesworth (1984: 70ff.). According to her, a striking feature of Andrić's early stories is the theme of violence and brutality in general. The social conditions which produced Alija Đerzelez were those prevailing in an aggressive, masculine culture. In this culture, the options open to an individual whose experience falls outside the established social norms are strictly limited. Following Hawkesworth (1984: 72), this seems to be the key to Alija's fabled position:

Failing to understand why he should be denied possession of any beautiful woman who catches his eye simply because of a discrepancy in their social position, Đerzelez is prepared to ignore all social convention and ride roughshod over taboos and boundaries respected by others as sacred and unchallengeable. Such an awareness may well result in apparently heroic actions ... Đerzelez is, then, the first of Andrić's outsiders, the social misfit who pursues an unattainable illusion.

Disillusion is also at the centre of Vučković's (1974: 139) interpretation, although he arrives at this conclusion in a different way. For him, the relation between folk legend and its literary transposition is the basic problem.<sup>10</sup> According to Vučković (1974: 140), the erotic problem in *Put Alije Đerzeleza* is only seemingly at the centre of the story, and it complicates the real intention which he sees as the 'humiliation of the idealized hero'<sup>11</sup> and in the ironization of the romantic idealism to which Andrić's generation was attached.<sup>12</sup> Seen from this point of view, one can, in fact, read the story as a 'narrative allegory of lost ideals in general' which was written immediately after World War I, when, according to Vučković (1974: 140), allegory was a very common literary device.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to these interpretations by Juričić and Hawkesworth, we thus arrive at an explanation which takes into consideration the contemporary cultural and political situation of the story's composition. With this in mind, let us re-read the above-mentioned passage from Andrić's *Ex Ponto* (1918: 58) in its correct context:

Видио сам да је, у ова времена, главни и често једини покретач људског дјеловања страх, панички, неразумни, често посве

безразложни, али истински и дубоки страх.

Ево друга година да у свих људи гледам на лицу тај страшни и смијешни израз, који не сличи ничем што се иначе види на лицу човјечјем...

Можда је у почетку било и других мотива, али данас је главни страх. Од страха су људи зли и сурови и подли, од страха су дарежљиви, чак и добри...

I have seen that, *in these days*, the main and often the only motive of human action is fear, panic, irrational, often completely groundless, but true and deep fear.

*This is the second year* that I see in the faces of all this terrible and ridiculous expression which is not similar to anything which can otherwise be seen in the human face...

Perhaps there were other motives in the beginning, but today the main one is fear. Out of fear, people are evil and rude and mean; out of fear they are generous and even good...

As can be seen from the literal translation of the complete quotation, Andrić refers twice to the contemporary situation, or to the most recent past, respectively. If one takes into consideration that Andrić wrote *Ex Ponto* towards the end of World War I, it seems quite reasonable to assume that it is just this situation which Andrić refers to, and which makes people afraid and fearful. This interpretation also sheds a different light on the underlying motive of fear in *Put Alije Đerzeleza*: As opposed to the interpretation above, it would not then be a general existential fear which is associated with woman as an existential problem; also, it would not be human isolation, or the loss of idealism, in general. Instead, war-time and post-war disillusionment would be the motive which ultimately underlies the story as a whole. Additional arguments for this interpretation may be found in Andrić's *Nemiri*, published in the same year as *Put Alije Đerzeleza* (1920), where we read:

Over the years I hear the clamour of victory, but there is less and less bread on earth, less and less strength in people, just at the moment when the lie of victory runs over the world... The winners are blind, they are trembling and burn, and they don't have anything except their wild, flaming joy, of which only ashes remain.

For, what else but tomorrow's defeats are today's victories?... there are neither won nor lost battles, but it is always the same in all wars: in the won as well as the lost, it is always mankind who is beaten... But there

is no victory, only a small, bloody lie and great misfortune.

But if this interpretation holds true, and we should set the story about Alija Đerzelez into a contemporary framework and read it as an allegory of dethroned heroism, which relativizes fame by demonstrating its transitoriness, how can we then understand the overarching problem of the female question? In this context, one point should be taken in consideration, and it is here that we come back to our introductory assumption that only an intertextual reading through folklore sources about Alija Đerzelez allows for an adequate understanding of the story.

This point, which has been largely neglected in almost all interpretations, concerns the fact that in many traditional epic songs and stories about Alija Đerzelez women also play a somewhat peculiar role, and that this is not a totally original invention by Andrić.

To give but one example, the heroic '*Song of Bagdad*' (Parry/Lord 1954: 1/68ff.). In this song, Sultan Selim who has tried to conquer the city of Bagdad without success, sends a message to Alija Đerzelez, asking him to gather an army of a hundred thousand men from Bosnia to help him. Here is Alija's reaction when he gets the message (ibid., 1/71):

When Alija heard these words, he said: 'Venerable preacher and hodža! I would easily gather Bosnia for him; and with Bosnia I would capture Bagdad, but I have an aged mother at home in her well-dight chamber, and I know not what answer to give until I have asked my aged mother. I shall not go against my mother's wish ... If my mother give me her blessing, if she give me her leave and her blessing, that I gather Bosnia and the Border, even an army of a hundred thousand men from Bosnia to go to the aid of the empire and to capture white Bagdad, then shall I give my answer to the Sultan as to when I shall come with Bosnia to Bagdad'.

The hero then indeed asks his mother for permission, and the aged woman replies to her son:

My son, Đerzelez Alija! Hasten to serve the Empire and to be of aid to the Sultan. Gather Bosnia and Hercegovina, even an army of a hundred thousand men from Bosnia and go to help the Sultan.

But still, the matter is not settled; instead, it becomes even more complicated, because Alija only recently has become betrothed to a woman from Budim named Fatima. Now, he has to ask again for his mother's advice, being afraid that he might lose the girl's love while he is at war. But again, his mother does not regard this as problematic; she advises the hero to send Fatima a letter, and to make her answer his decision, a letter the content of which she even dictates to him:

Hearken to me, Fatima of Budim! Will you wait for me with honour, maiden, while I go to serve the Empire and to attack white Bagdad with an army of a hundred thousand men? ... Can you wait for me with honour? Can you defend yourself in Budim? Shall I go to serve the Sultan?

Alija Đerzelez indeed writes this letter, sends it to Fatima, and in return, he receives the following answer:

O hero, Đerzelez Alija! Why do you ask Fatima of Budim? Go to serve the empire! Gather all Bosnia and go with Bosnia to aid the sultan and capture white Bagdad! Fatima will wait for you with honour. ... Do not fear, imperial hero! If you are not willing to act thus, send me your bay horse, send me your Damascene blade, send me your belt and your weapons, and send me your horse! I shall gather Bosnia for the Sultan and go to the aid of the Empire and with God's help capture Bagdad. I shall send you my embroidery frame, my embroidery frame and my distaff, and you may spin with your mother in her chamber!

As can be seen from these two scenes, Alija Đerzelez's heroic life is completely dominated by women, both by his mother and by his fiancée. He does not make his own decisions, but instead follows these two women's advice, or rather their orders. But still, this is not the end of the story. For after Alija has succeeded in gathering the huge army, and after he has left for Bagdad, Fatima joins him in disguise without being recognized by Alija. And, ironically enough, it is not the hero with his army who captures Bagdad; in fact, it is Fatima who tricks the Queen of Bagdad, who takes the keys of the city from her, and who gives them to the Sultan, along with the Queen of Bagdad herself as a present. After his return, Alija asks his mother for news from Fatima; on her advice, he writes her a letter, asking her if the time for the wedding has now come. After her affirmative answer, and the relevant

preparations, the wedding-night arrives. Accompanied by his mother, who leads him to the door of the marriage chamber, Alija, who is afraid that he might die that night, asks for his mother's blessing. He then enters the room and, raising the veil from Fatima's face, sees that her hair is cropped; of course he does not realize that this was part of her disguise in capturing Bagdad. Alija refuses to take her for his wife, until she admits to him that it was she who set out against the enemy - after this confession the marriage ceremony starts anew.

As we see from this story, women do indeed play a crucial role not only in Andrić's story about Alija Đerzelez, but in the epic folklore about him as well. There is a significant difference, however, between the literary and the folklore figure: in the folklore tradition, the hero's fate is totally dominated by women, and without their influence, he would not be a hero at all. In the literary text, by contrast, domination by women does not become evident; rather, the hero's sexual interest in women is not satisfied and, by way of compensation, is transformed into lust for aggression, either specifically towards the women themselves, or unspecifically towards the surroundings in general.

At this point, close parallels between the behaviour of Andrić's Alija Đerzelez and psychoanalytic theory, particularly the theory of instincts *Triebtheorie* developed by Freud, become obvious. In fact, a psychoanalytic approach provides us with one major key to the story's understanding.

It has repeatedly been pointed out that it was primarily the cruel events of World War I which made clear to Freud the importance of aggression in and for human behaviour. Aggression itself, however, had not yet been thoroughly studied by the psychoanalysis of the time.

Interestingly enough, in the very same year that Andrić published his trilogy on Alija Đerzelez, Freud presented the second revision of his theory of instincts, mainly in his work *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920). In it, Freud argued in favour of the notion that aggression represents an instinct in its own right, which he called the destructive instinct *Zerstörungstrieb/Destraktions-trieb*. Freud's third version of his dualistic theory of instincts is based on the juxtaposition of life instinct *Lebenstrieb*, on the one hand, and death instinct *Todestrieb*, on the other. Under normal circumstances, both instincts - to which he also referred by the terms *Eros* and *Thanatos* - are in a state of fusion, or balance; only under pathological conditions does their unity falls

apart and display an imbalance.

In this final version of Freud's theory, the life instinct comprises not only sexual instincts, but all instincts relevant to the development and preservation of life; consequently, it is also termed 'self-preservative instinct' *Selbsterhaltungstrieb*. It is opposed to the death instinct, which operates imperceptibly, if it is at work internally; it becomes apparent as aggressive instinct *Aggressionstrieb* or destructive instinct, if it is directed extremely. The destructive instinct is thus a death instinct, directed outwards, towards an object the destruction of which is an instinctual aim guaranteeing satisfaction. In a more general sense, we are concerned with two principles, displaying constructive and destructive forces.

From this point of view Andrić's Alija Đerzelez ceases to be a hero in the strict sense; rather, he appears to be a psychopathological maniac, deprived of the ability to have normal (sexual) relationships with women. If we thus summarize the results of our discussion and try to arrive at a general conclusion, it seems to be obvious that Andrić's manner of de-throning the alleged hero is quite different from the way this is done in the folklore texts, irrespective of the fact that Alija's figure bears ambivalent features in any case: whereas the de-thronement of the Bosnian folk hero in the relevant folklore texts clearly contains comic traits, Andrić's figure rather appears as a tragico-comic hero.

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