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Coldblooded, Greedy Executioners: The Gypsies of Ivo Andrić's *The Bridge on the Drina*

In his Introduction to the English translation from Serbo-Croat of Ivo Andrić's *The Bridge on the Drina*, William H. McNeil enthusiastically praises the book as "one of the most perceptive, resonant, and well-wrought works of fiction written in the twentieth century" (1). Among the numerous compliments McNeil bestows upon Andrić's novel, one also finds the following sentence: "[The ottoman civilization] was predominantly Turkish and Moslem, but also embraced Christian and Jewish communities, along with such outlaw elements as Gypsies" (my emphasis 1). Intriguing logic—apparently, the Gypsies cannot be a community like the Christians or the Jews; they are "elements." Neither can they be just any elements; they must be "outlaw." The racist implications of the word combination McNeil uses to describe Gypsies—"outlaw elements"—are certainly unsavory, but not unexpected if read in the context of Andrić's novel. A close reading exposes Andrić's representation of the Gypsies as narrow-minded, dominated by facile stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes.

In my talk, I will focus on Andrić's characterization of the Gypsies in *The Bridge on the Drina*. I intend to argue that he produces the Gypsies as intrinsically malevolent and greedy people who will sell their soul to the devil as long as they are paid. Even the Gypsy children are not spared—they are so unrestrainedly greedy that when the Vezir gives a great feast in celebration of the bridge's completion, one Gypsy child "die[s] after eating too much halva" (66). If the Bosnian Christians, Muslims, and Jews are represented in more or less humane fashion in Andrić's text, with both their good and bad sides, the Bosnian Gypsies are consistently, without exception, shown in largely negative light. Andrić's celebrated ethnic tolerance is thus essentially absent when Gypsies are concerned.