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Andrić and Byron or Transformation by Beauty – "Byron in Sintra" as a Proposal for the School Reading List –

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Extended summary

The paper proposes, within the context of the continuity of the presence of Ivo Andrić in the curricula, a new, additional reading and interpretation of the works written by this great Serbian writer. The short story that should be included in the school reading list is the story "Byron in Sintra" and there are many reasons for selecting this particular story from the writer's wide literary opus (The story appeared for the first time in the Christmas edition of the *Politika* newspaper for 6-9 January 1935, to be published again twenty-five years later in the collection of texts *Lica*). The indisputable artistic value of this story, coupled with our deepest belief that it is one of his best short stories that deserves its place in any anthology of Andrić's works, is the first and foremost reason why it should be included in the school reading list. The second reason lies in the fact that in this story, young people have an opportunity to experience, as it were, a different Andrić who does not write about Bosnia, the clashes of different religions, the inner turmoil of individuals caused by living in the country of mixed nations and in the period of treacherous history and gloomy future. Despite the fact that these themes and destinies constitute the core of Andrić's narrative, there are some short stories, including this one, where his skill of using the narrative form to talk about the complexity of human nature, the instincts unhampered by the actual historical situations and shifts in spirituality, reaches the unsurpassed perfection which continually confirms this writer's place among the timeless, modern classics. The choice of the main character whose name appears in the title of the short story is an additional reason why this story is particularly inspiring for reading in the second grade of high school. Namely, the works of George Gordon Byron, the famous poet from the period of romanticism, are included in the second-grade curricula in the form of a paradigmatic excerpt

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from his equally famous narrative poem – *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. As one of the most representative writers of his time, a promoter of the arrogance of the sophisticated and tired aristocracy, as well as of global pain, Lord Byron is significant not only because of his works, but also for his impact on the literature of his time, becoming synonymous with the sense of emptiness in the sea of experiences and the craving for the evasive fulfilment and meaning. For this reason, drawing upon Byron is necessary for the interpretation of *Evgeny Onegin*, the most significant romantic novel, whose writer was openly and deeply impressed with Byron. The life of the unfortunate Lord Byron is as intriguing as his literature. The claim that his biography surpasses his literary work is not fully ungrounded. The pendulum of the romantic writer's life swayed from one extreme to another - from an impoverished aristocrat to a respected peer, from a regular guest at wild parties to a man who publicly expresses his contempt for such entertainment, from excessive pleasures to deep loneliness among his closest people, from a life full of praise to a life in exile. The complex and subtle nature of this poet, his destiny full of attempts at fighting social hypocrisy and a constant battle with his own passions that were constantly on the verge of vice, all this was very inspirational for Andrić. Inclined to combine the factual and the fictional in his work by using real events occurring in the real space and time to tell a story that surpasses the factual and raises historical facts to the level of artistic vision, Ivo Andrić told his story about Byron in which, in his unique style, he described the highs and the lows that human beings can reach in their pursuit of meaning and serenity.

In this masterfully written short story, full of fluid hints and inner psychological drama, through what belongs to the outer world, as well as through “flashing visions”, and not by means of epic narrative, the writer confronts the reader with the effect of the beauty that in a “man of senses”, such as Byron, opens an abyss and arouses previously undreamed of dimensions where things, which even desire cannot define precisely, can be realised. The reading and interpretation of the story would provide the students with new possibilities for understanding Andrić's story-telling skills, show how literary motifs correlate and call for reconsideration in the works of the great writers, as well as confront them with the questions regarding the complexity of the human nature, the world in general and the opportunities and obstacles that it constantly provides.

Keywords: *curriculum, biography, fiction, beauty, epiphany, self-development.*

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