

The Winter Summer Vacation

Zimsko ljetovanje

Presented by: Marina Protrka Štimec

In the title of the novel *Zimsko ljetovanje* (The Winter Summer Vacation), Vladan Desnica uses an oxymoron to indicate the time and place of refuge, when the citizens of the city of Zadar, fleeing the Allied bombardment of the city, find shelter in the hinterland, in the houses of the peasants of the village of Smiljevci.

The adversities of war force them to live with the peasants, which they find repulsive and gradually deny them human qualities. The story takes place in the fall of 1943 until the spring of 1944, when, after the surrender, parts of the country – including Zadar – are recaptured by the fascist Italians. The plot follows the bombing of Zadar in the fall of 1943, as the city's inhabitants take shelter in the countryside. This seemingly concrete framework of historical events, as well as the appearance of Italian fascists, Chetniks or partisans, is only an insignificant part of a much more important framework for a drama centred on a conflict of mentalities and the creation of inequality by the refugees. Arrival in the countryside brings out many stereotypes carried by these "civilised" citizens, drawn in their eyes as "whites" against primitive "Samoyeds", "blacks", or "redskins". Their dislike of the peasants ("Morlachs"), who represent a different class, a different religion, and a different ethnic group, is expressed with explicitly racist vocabulary:

The refugees gradually immersed themselves in the village and became familiar with it. Their earlier views of the peasants' misery, their deviousness, and their willingness to exploit the misery of others were confirmed. Even more, it turned out that the peasants were indeed very limited and grinned like blacks to everything.

The seemingly "detached" and "objective" narrator focalises the citizens to show, with subtle irony, the grotesque extent of their perceptions. At the very beginning, the focalisation is foregrounded through the perspective of Lizeta and Ernesto Doner, a married couple who will experience a personal tragedy in the village at the end of the novel. Their view of the village gradually becomes a caricature, despite the novel's "verism" and the narrator's distance. In the first pages of the novel, the narrator emphasises that the village is terra incognita for the citizens, a place without meaning, from which they are separated "as by the Great Wall of China or a belt of wasteland" that is not fifteen but a thousand kilometres away.

The author's implicit interest in this book can be seen as an attempt to uncover various forms of subjugation and the establishment of hegemonic relations. For Desnica, colonial discourse and race are the most pronounced forms of such politics and could be interpreted as a synecdoche of Western colonialism and the politics of supremacy over oppressed groups. The exclusion he describes occurs on the basis of ethnic, cultural, social, and religious differences, the problematisation of which reveals their political impact at the level of the novel. Accordingly, his emancipatory interventions are broad and comprehensive, making him relevant beyond the loose

boundaries of the Morlach population. The concepts to which Desnica directs his interest are quite basic, human and anthropological, in the sense of a modernist interest in the mechanisms of the functioning of the community – its disputes, injustices and illogics.

Moreover, according to the critics of the time, the author abused the aesthetic codes of the proclaimed poetics of social realism by deliberately bypassing the almost inevitable theme of the era, the liberation struggle of the people (NOB), by depicting the protagonists and their process of ideological exclusion and production of the Other in a completely detached way. In the period of proclaimed equality, a novel about the politics of hegemony was perceived as a political attack on the official communist Yugoslav policy, which resulted in the author's inability to participate in public life for four years. Thus, the novel, whose poetic choice and theme explicitly refused to engage in predictable political questions, became one of the loudest political provocations.

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Video

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Article

“Perché i xe bestie?!” Politics, race and exclusion in Vladan Desnica's The Winter Summer Vacation

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