

Ecocritical Reading of Vladan Desnica's Novel *Pronalazak Athanatika* [The Discovery Of Athanatik]*

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1. Introduction¹

The 1970s opened new roads and formulated new beliefs about human beings and the world. Socially and politically they derived from the events of 1968 and the changes attempted by student demonstrations, from growing colonization and the liberation of Third-World countries, and from resistance to American intervention in Vietnam and fears about a possible nuclear war between cold war rivals, as well as from the oil (energy) crisis. Such times, accom-

¹ I would like to thank Darija Đurđević and Professor Jožici Čeh Stergar for their assistance in procurement of literature, my colleague Vinko Tadić on wise advice, especially regarding historical sources, and Assistant Professor Suzana Marjanić and Assistant Professor Miranda Levanat- Peričić on their assistance in the formulation of this paper, as well as anonymous reviewers and editors on their constructive, creative and well-intentioned advice and patience.

panied by technological developments based on the advancement of the natural and technical sciences, the appearance of numerous inventions which made everyday life easier, and the accelerated creation of consumer society opened new possibilities for the creation of the world in line with contemporary challenges and issues which enabled the appearance and the beginning of ecological (green), feminist (gender and women's), peace (anti-war) and other movements. They look at the everyday with different eyes and open up space for new topics, allowing for the introduction of Postmodernism. And within Postmodernism the way was paved for, among other things, cultural studies, popular culture, ecocriticism, ecofeminism, linguistic turn, discourse analysis and many other subdisciplines, directions of study and theoretical and methodological innovations.²

Ecocriticism, as one of the more recent approaches, has opened different perspectives for cultural analysis – namely, the analysis of literature and the visual arts in the context of their contact with nature. The term was devised by William Rueckert in his article “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” from 1978. He defined it as a connection between ecological concepts and literature.³ The first attempt at linking nature and literature, according to Peter Berry and Domagoj Brozović was Kar Kroeber's “Home at Grasmere: Ecological Holiness”, published back in 1974.⁴ Cheryll Glotfelty, the editor of *The Ecocriticism Reader. Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, gives the following definition:

Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies... all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature...⁵

This subdiscipline gained prominence in the late 1980s and especially in the 1990s and 2000s, when relevant professional associations were founded (ASLE⁶ and EASLCE⁷), and proceedings published. American ecocriticism is directed toward nineteenth-century authors and their writing about nature (interpretation of wilderness, landscapes, motifs and themes), interpretation of what their orientation toward nature means, and celebration of

² In the vastness of titles on changes in different aspects of social reality in the seventies see: Thomas BORSTELMANN, *The 1970s. A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality*, Princeton 2015. and Niall FERGUSON et al. (ed.), *The Shock of the Global. The 1970s in Perspective*, Harvard 2011.

³ William RUECKERT, “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism”, *Ecocriticism Reader. Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (eds. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm), Athens, Georgia 1996, 107.

⁴ Peter BERRY, *Beginning Theory. An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, Manchester – New York 2009, 240; D. BROZOVIĆ, „Čitati zeleno“, 29. See also Karl KROEBER, “Home at Grasmere: Ecological Holiness”, *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 89/1974, no. 1, 132–141.

⁵ Cheryll GLOTFELTY, “Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis”, *Ecocriticism Reader. Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (eds. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm), Athens, Georgia 1996, XVIII. pp.xviii-xix.

⁶ For the organization *Association for the Study of Literature and Environment* see their official homepage <https://www.asle.org>.

⁷ Data on the professional association *European Association for Study of Literature Culture and Environment* are available on: <https://www.easlce.eu>.

nature as such, while British ecocriticism is more oriented toward the relationship between culture and nature through the prism of anthropocentric threats to nature (namely, the environment). One of the challenges, in Domagoj Brozović's opinion, is the lack of a core methodological and terminological literature,⁸ practices and patterns. Therein one of the crucial questions is who or what is at the center of ecocritical reading of literary works: man or nature? Ecocritics interpret nature and culture as phenomena, not as linguistic, artificial constructs.⁹

The relationship between nature and culture in ecocritical readings of literary works encourages analysis of Vladan Desnica's novel *Pronalazak Athanatika*. The writer's initial idea of a cure for immortality and the changes it caused in the world is a good basis for interpretation of the interrelations between culture and nature, and observations about nature as a subject, not only as a marginalized object.

The paper comprises three thematic units: an ecocritical approach to a thematic cycle (life – death – immortality) compared to *Homo Deus* by Yuval Noah Harari; an ecocritical analysis of rain as seen from the point of view of Susan Farrell's ideas; and an analysis of *Pronalazak Athanatika* in the context of two dystopian ecological/environmental novels in contemporary Croatian literature, *Planet Friedman* by Josip Mlakić and *Mjesečev meridijan* (The Moon Meridian) by Edo Popović, with a comparison to ecocritical readings of Louise Squire.

2. Life – Death – Immortality: an Ecocritical Approach to *Pronalazak Athanatika*

Already in prehistory people had created a binary system comprising life and death. And while the first binary of that system could clearly be discerned as man's birth and life, the other one – death – remained mysterious, mystical and challenging. For those reasons stories of immortality and the search for immortality as a victory over death of sorts appears in numerous myths, religions, works of art and literary works.¹⁰ In certain mythologies immortality is connected with certain plants, spatial characteristics (mountains, sea, unknown areas) or with the lives of heroes and gods.¹¹ On the other hand, most monotheistic religions perceive

⁸ Lately significant advances have been made in the field which is evident in the works of Derek Gladwin with a comprehensive bibliography and Simon C. Estok. See: Derek GLADWYN, "Ecocriticism", *Oxford Bibliographies* (<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0014.xml>); Simon C. ESTOK, "Teorija s ruba: životinje, ekokritika, Shakespeare", *Kazalište*, 11/2008, no. 35–36, 84–97.

⁹ See: D. BROZOVIĆ, "Čitati zeleno", 29–35.

¹⁰ See: Jacques CHORON, "Death and Immortality", *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (ed. Philip P. Wiener), vol. 1, New York 1974, 635–646 (<https://web.archive.org/web/20070311081839/http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/cgi-local/DHI/dhi.cgi?id=dv1-76>).

¹¹ For example *Epic of Gilgamesh* or *A Journey to the West* reveal images of a quest for immortality in Sumerian, and in Chinese mythology. The problem of the immortality phenomenon in Greek mythology is presented in the Myth of Sisyphus and his capture of Thanatos which stopped the dying of humans until Thanatos was freed. See: Reginald CAMPBELL THOMPSON, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: Complete Academic Translation. Translated from cuneiform tablets in the British Museum literally into English hexameters*, London 2007.; Wu CHENG'EN, *A journey to the West*, Beijing 1955.; "Sisyphus", *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sisyphus>).

death as a continuation of life in another world, depending on the circumstances and earthly life of a person.¹² In the contemporary twenty-first-century world, the story of immortality has resurfaced. Immortality is today not related to the discovery of a certain flower or leaf of a plant, to eating certain foods (fruit or vegetables), or going to the mountains or unknown places, as was the case in the pre-modern world. Instead it is related to attempts at prolonging human life through the use of different technological possibilities, including artificial intelligence, inventions, robots and similar novelties.

The second binary pair, which stems from the first (i.e. man's striving toward immortality), concerns a basic issue in ecocriticism, that is, the relationship between culture and nature. This dichotomy is best defined by William Howarth, who describes an eco critic as "a person who judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action."¹³

Writer Vladan Desnica dealt with death and immortality in many of his works, choosing them as a key topic, most prominently in his unfinished novel *Pronalazak Athanatika*. This short novel is structured as a dialogue between a narrator and Krezubi (Toothless man), the narrator's acquaintance who elaborates a new idea, namely, the plot of an unwritten novel. The story is set in an unidentified future (Desnica phrases it as "a few centuries into the future")¹⁴, in an unnamed and unknown land wherein a medication (a vaccine) is invented to cure death. Desnica's terminology should be underlined, as Krešimir Nemeč argues, since the writer used the following terms: *medication*, *hormone* or *X factor* instead of elixir to refer to the invention of *athanatik* (the name itself reveals what the medicine is about: *a thanatos* – against death), as well as *permanent regeneration* or *endless duration* instead of immortality.¹⁵ He thus additionally stresses the scientific element of the medication – in addition, he literally says that the medication is a product of scientific research – which differentiates Desnica from traditional approaches to immortality and searches for elixirs.

The plot further points to social and economic consequences. Initially, the invention led to euphoria, joy and celebration, which soon started to change with the introduction of state control. It was thus revealed that not all lives are equally valuable. Immortality is realized through a special institution called "Exemption from death:", which has generated different social groups (classes) eligible for the reception of *athanatik* in different ways. The structure is pyramidal and hierarchical and presents a flow of power from the president and prime minister downwards. Such a principle is justified in the novel by a common environmental

¹²This is in Christianity manifested as the existence of afterlife in terms of heaven, purgatory (recognized only by Catholics) and hell; Islam has a similar concept with *Jannah* (heaven) i *Jahannam* (hell), while in Judaism there are *shamayin* (heaven) and *gehenna* (hell). Similar concepts exist in Buddhism and Hinduism with different versions of hell with *Naraka* being the most well known. For details on afterlife see: "Zagrobni život", *Hrvatska enciklopedija* (<http://www.enciklopedija.hr/natuknica.aspx?id=66705>).

¹³William HOWARTH, "Some Principles of Ecocriticism", *Ecocriticism Reader. Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (ur. Cheryl Glotfelty i Harold Fromm), Athens, Georgia 1996, 69. See also: Tjaša TRČEK, *Ekokritika – upodobitve narave v izbranih mladinskih delih*, diplomski rad, Univerza v Ljubljani, Pedagoška fakulteta, 2016, 3.

¹⁴Vladan DESNICA, *Pronalazak Athanatika*, Zagreb 2006, 8.

¹⁵Krešimir NEMEČ, "Pronalazak Athanatika – između utopije i distopije", in: V. DESNICA, *Pronalazak Athanatika*, 87

problem: a lack of sufficient quantities of food. Introduced measures lead to violence, theft, cheating, murder, rebellions and revolutions. The result is the establishment of a totalitarian state under the dictatorship of Maman-Mamon, who controls the life and death of his citizens. There soon follow murders, conflicts, and reuse of gas chambers, as well as the division of people in two groups: mortals and immortals. Even though the medication has been perfected into two subtypes – subtype A (which was effective in all kinds of death including violent death) and subtype B (which was effective only in death by natural causes) – the condition did not improve because of the lack of food and the consequences of medication-related disturbances) caused additional problems. The end sees the destruction of the medication, i.e., people choosing mortality over immortality. The relevance of the topic at the beginning of the twenty-first century is reinforced by the appearance of the international bestseller by Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari, titled *Homo Deus* with the meaningful subtitle *A Brief History of Tomorrow*. It is a sequel to his first bestseller *Sapiens*, subtitled *A Short History of Humankind*. In *Sapiens* Harari explains, by presenting four revolutions – cognitive, agrarian, unificational and scientific – how humanity reached its present level, while in *Homo Deus* he tackles the issue of the future.¹⁶ In the Introduction, Harari gives a short overview of history from the point of view of victory over war (he states that chances of suicide are far greater than of death in war), hunger (there is more overweight than hungry people), and disease (most contagious, epidemic diseases have been eradicated). That part of the book, as Tizian Raspor argues, is characterized by optimism.¹⁷ The first chapter is actually Harari's explanation of humanity's past, from the beginning of *Homo sapiens* until the present day, where he labels man the most powerful being on Earth. Echoing what he stated in *Homo sapiens*, the author explains that this as the result of the creation of the collective imagination, which was converted into myths, thus enabling the creation of an interconnected community comprising people unknown to one another other. Such a situation enabled the creation of nations, money, religion, human rights, laws and the like. Among other terms, he singles out the term "algorithm" as a source of conclusions and decision-making (instead of intuition). In the second chapter, he takes a step further, showing unreconciled differences between power and sense, stating that by choosing power an individual comes closer to the status of a divinity (in traditional religions) because he manages to control and coordinate different processes. In the last chapter, he discusses the idea of dataism (data religion) as a new "religion" based on the power and importance of information and the projection of a future in line with new technological achievements stating the consequences on social processes with the possible additional rise of social inequalities.¹⁸

The most important subchapter for our topic is titled "The Last Days of Death." Harari presents his thesis on immortality with a story about the sanctity of human life, which is evident

¹⁶Yuval Noah HARARI, *Sapiens. A Brief History of Humankind*, Signal Books 2011. See also: Goran ĐURĐEVIĆ, "Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: kratka povijest čovječanstva*, Fokus, Zagreb 2015, p. 479.", *Historijski zbornik*, 68/2015, no. 1, 203–205.

¹⁷Tizian RASPOR, „Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus. Kratka povijest sutrašnjice*, Croatian translation: Marija Perišić, Fokus komunikacije, Zagreb 2017, p. 461“, *Historiografija.hr* (<http://www.historiografija.hr/?p=5663>).

¹⁸Yuval Noah HARARI, *Homo Deus. A Brief History of Tomorrow*, HarperCollins, 2018. See also: Goran ĐURĐEVIĆ, "Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: kratka povijest sutrašnjice*", *Ekonomika i ekohistorija*, 13/2017, 177–178.

in numerous legislative acts as well as in everyday life. He stresses, however, that religions (Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism) have a different attitude about death because without it a whole series of religious concepts held in those communities – including heaven, hell and reincarnation – becomes impossible. Contemporary man, according to Harari, dies as a result of technical problems – the heart stops beating, a central artery gets clogged, cancer cells spread all over the body, the heart is not getting enough oxygen, or there is a genetic mutation of cells. His thesis on death can best be summarized as follows: “If traditionally death was the speciality of priests and theologians, now the engineers are taking over.”¹⁹ He believes that there is always a technical problem in the background, even when it is adverse weather conditions, car accidents and similar adversities that bring death as a result. He argues that *Google*, a search engine and one of the most powerful companies, has invested a lot of funds in research and the fight against death, engaging two prominent scientists and “promoters” of immortality – Ray Kurzweil and Bill Maris. Furthermore, Google is not the only company from Silicon Valley investing in such research. Immortality will generate different social changes in job selection, career course, marriages and family structure, and in parenting. Harari ends the chapter with a warning about what might happen once science creates the conditions for immortality. He assesses that there will be conflicts, wars and fights for immortality, which will cast a shadow on the conflicts fought thus far, as the fear of death will be replaced by wars, that is, fights for immortality.²⁰

Comparing the two authors, Desnica and Harari, it becomes evident that, irrespective of the time difference, they are both writing about the same thing from a similar viewpoint, yet with different results. They both write about immortality as a phenomenon of the future based on science and technology. And this is where we encounter the first difference: Desnica places the source of immortality in a medication, while immortality is for Harari related to technological advancement (organ replacement surgery as a result of the development of robotics and healthcare technology products). The principle of immortality medicine points to a link between a traditional understanding of reaching immortality (medicinal herbs and certain foods) with the attainments of that age (the invention of a medication). In other words, Desnica approaches the issue of immortality and mortality as an illness of a kind, and imagines what kind of events and consequences a preventive medication, one that prevents death and dying, might have. Harari's approach is similar to that of contemporary engineers. He looks at the human body as a mechanism with parts that have an expiration date, and are upon expiry replaced, which makes the mechanism more or less permanent. Desnica makes an interesting connection between tradition (a unique concoction which he calls a medication) and a scientific approach (systematic research, invention) in his approach to mortality. He thus made a bridge between tradition and the latest approaches, such as Harari's. In Desnica's *Pronalazak Athanatika* there is a contrast between a medication and an invention, which is always a product of technological and scientific work, and is thus as an idea (and realization) distant from traditional quests for cure for immortality in nature (by choosing a certain herb, travelling in distant, exotic and unknown places). This detachment, irrespective of its partially still leaning on tradition (since it is a concoction we are talking about), reveals the extent to which man

¹⁹Y. N. HARARI, *Homo Deus*, 26.

²⁰*Ibid*, 25–30.

has, through planning and producing *athanatik*, abandoned nature as an entirety in which he lives and acts, and of which he became the hegemon.

Both Harari and Desnica see mortality as a scientific and technical problem which can be solved with the development of science and technology. Such an approach to death as an illness, a technical lack, and envisioning a solution in that direction points to the exclusion of man from nature (whose life cycle is delimited by birth, life and death) as its superior, that is, its master, who creates a solution for the extension of life and the absence of death. Other animate beings have no possibility of achieving immortality, which additionally separates humankind and disrupts its relations with nature, revealing the domination and creating antagonisms between man and others (whereby I understand all animate and inanimate beings and all of nature). The expectations which people have, at the peak of cultural and scientific achievement and immortality, lead to unexpected consequences: alienation from nature (and thus also man), which results in disrupted relations toward nature (as well as society in terms of the creation of totalitarian regimes).

The second difference is to be found in the term “immortality”. In Desnica’s text the invention of two types of *athanatik* (A and B) refer to different types of death – of natural causes and violent (that is, unnatural) death. Harari, on the other hand, has a reservation toward unnatural death believing that some people shall die in accidents and war conflicts, and therefore uses the term “non-mortality” instead of “immortality”.

The third part refers to consequences. Immortality for Desnica in this novel has a pessimistic character because equality is lost in death, which leads to the creation of large social differences in power structures, which ultimately leads to the creation of totalitarian regimes which, initially controlling life, lead to an all-encompassing control of life and death. This erases all hope of equality (equality in death and the interpretation of life on earth in the afterlife gave comfort and hope to numerous religious inhabitants of the planet). However, Desnica’s ending opens a possibility of a positive ending, even though people are mortal once again. In Harari’s text immortality is (as a phenomena of the future) also given pessimistic characteristics because it is not deemed a final goal, but a means of creating *Homo Deus* out of *Homo sapiens*. Immortality fits into a whole as the first element in a sequence: immortality, happiness, divinity. In an interesting sentence, Harari shows what immortality could be (and to whom): “If Kurzweil and de Grey are right, there may already be some immortals walking next to you on the street – at least if you happen to be walking down Wall Street or Fifth Avenue.”²¹ He thus stresses social stratification with regard to immortality, since those with the greatest amount of money will secure the said privilege. Also, as a historian he is aware of former fights and conflicts within societies and states, as well as between individual states, and assesses that great wars and conflicts will arise in the fight to reach immortality.

Such cataclysmic predictions are given by both Harari and Desnica. They both see immortality as a source of new, even fiercer and more dangerous wars whose intensity and meaning shall surpass all previous conflicts. Accordingly, additional social stratification will arise. However,

²¹Ibid, 27.

Desnica and Harari foresee different results: in Desnica's text it leads to the creation of totalitarian regimes, while Harari assumes there will be a war with an uncertain ending because instead of the former economic inequality there is now biological inequality. The pessimism of both authors is connected with alienation from nature. As far as the nature – culture dichotomy is concerned, in both texts culture is in a superior position. The initial idea of man as an immortal, creator and master (in *Homo Deus*) is at its core unnatural. Because of its unnaturalness, its realization also has unnatural consequences, since both systems (totalitarian regimes and wartime events) imply supreme masters (people, namely, parts of political, military and economic elite) over others/Others (including the rest of humankind, as well as all other beings and nature).

Thus a parallel analysis of these two texts leads us to an analysis of the endings. Both authors leave open the possibility of a positive ending, namely, the possibility of choosing a positive path toward the future. The authors share a humanistic worldview which is to be incorporated into science and scientific achievements. Harari sees the right path in the choice for joint global management instead of the current national management. Desnica underlines reason and rational solution in combination with empathy as a right way into the future. The choice of a positive solution and a positive way forward that will prevent pessimism and sinking into the unnatural decadence of humanity's superiority and self-sufficiency is directly connected with renunciation of immortality as the peak of unnaturalness, which negates the connection and interrelation with nature seen as an entirety made up of man with other animate and inanimate beings.

The comparison of Desnica and Harari so far boils down to an anthropocentric approach based on the direct social circumstances of (potential) immortality. In other words, we have analyzed the cultural (civilizational) component, while the environment and nature have been neglected. The relationship between culture (civilization) and nature (environment) varies in the definitions of individual ecocritics.²² Irrespective of how we interpret it, it undoubtedly exists. In both works discussed above, nature is not clearly outlined as a central subject. Rather the authors deal with the social consequences of immortality. Still, nature is not just an object, but an important factor in this interrelation. Therefore, we can ask ourselves to what extent has man decided to leave this natural cycle (constituted by him in conjunction with all animate, and consequently all inanimate beings, as well), proving his superiority (or, as Harari explicitly says, by becoming god), his manifest aspiration toward immortality. Thus man (as well as with his relationship toward diseases, hunger and overcoming natural disasters) leaves the interrelation with other living beings by becoming a superior external element. The victory over death, as an inseparable part of nature and the life cycle of all living beings, is man's victory over the mystical and the unknown, which contributes to his abandonment of his links with nature. Such an abandonment of his relation with nature, concurrently with an increase in technological achievements (both Harari and Desnica link immortality with the pharmaceutical industry, robotics and technology) results in the dissolution of existing ingrained social relations, as well as the creation of unnatural (and thus also anti-human)

²²For example, Greg Gerrard believes that the challenge of ecocriticism is to always have in mind the ways in which nature is built by culture, and on the other hand, that it exists as a fact. See: Greg GERRARD, *Ecocriticism*, Abingdon 2004, 10.

interrelations, associations and social changes. Finally, betting everything available on development, technological and scientific achievement, and capital increases leads humanity into conflicts with nature wherein man cannot win, and everybody loses.

Ecological problems which should be analyzed here include the interrelation of food and the environment, and ideas about disease and animals. Desnica underlines that food was the biggest problem following the discovery of *athanatik* since Earth became insufficient to sustain the ever increasing number of people.²³ Immortality thus became a serious ecological problem. Desnica contrasts basic needs with the characteristics of animate beings (nutrition, namely, eating as a process of sustaining life and mortality/immortality) presenting this interrelation as a paradox, since people, wishing to attain the desired ideal of immortality and disregarding all other factors of the natural cycle, create a situation wherein there is a lack of food, which is a basic necessity for life and a prerequisite for all other achievements. It is a road toward dystopia wherein man's attempt at mastering life and death (in terms of immortality) necessarily leads to the destruction of nature, destruction of the environment and to dehumanization.

Animals are in Desnica's novel mentioned only twice. The first animal mentioned at the very beginning of the novel is a wolf, and it is mentioned in the context of the characteristics of life as it was in the past:

Human words and fears come in and out of style. What a large share of thoughts and feelings of the ancient man was occupied by the word wolf! Almost his entire life was "marked by wolf"! And who thinks about the wolf these days? Whom would it occur to fall ill of lynathropy? Man is today more afraid of death...²⁴

The second time an animal is mentioned it is in comparison with the people in the era of the *athanatik*, who became beasts:

We have said: people have become beasts. And thus all discipline and obligations, all moral and other principles, respect, consideration, prejudices or whatever you want to call those, all of them ceased to exist. Since they were now beasts, humans did not know anymore what is reckoning, appropriateness, tactics and tactical caution, appropriate economizing of powers, or wise watching of your own head. They rushed insanely towards ruin, dying like flies – but dying.²⁵

Mentioning a wolf in this case points to medieval images of werewolves as scary beings and the fear they generated in people in the past, which disappeared with the discovery of *athanatik*.²⁶ It is also a comparison of human behavior with a beast's, namely, it is the use of the word

²³V. DESNICA, *Pronalazak Athanatika*, 21.

²⁴*Ibid*, 8.

²⁵*Ibid*, 62. A very similar quote, almost identical is also on page 72, with the editor's note about the repetition of a part of a text.

²⁶For werewolf, lycanthropy in popular culture with examples from Croatia see: Ingrid KIRŠA, *Likantropija u popularnoj kulturi*, diploma paper, University of Zagreb, University of Zagreb, Faculty of Croatian Studies, Department of Croatology, 2017.

“beast” (in its direct meaning of a genus of terrestrial mammals) as a metaphor for an unregulated, wild community or a group of individuals which functions in a dystopia in which *athanatik* has been invented and on which it has an effect, and which stands in opposition to established social norms, relations and rules of behavior. The choice of this word is important, as it has a strong symbolic message about something foreign to people. With it Desnica shows the consequences of uncontrolled technological development to be pessimism, the destruction of social norms and hopelessness. Precisely because of the natural balance between people and other co-beings (because people achieve immortality and thus become both literally and symbolically superior), a pessimistic dystopia appears as the answer, with the writer leaving the possibility of an optimistic ending.

Vladan Desnica mentions transposing certain social relations onto diseases, with certain rules being laid:

So that it does not by some wild chance happen that a patient, instead of cancer, dies of infection! Because, in the internal communication among diseases there is a gentlemen's agreement. There is no grabbing or overtaking. Perhaps only, and that in extraordinary situations exclusively, some new ill-mannered disease which does not yet know the rules of the game, might cut ahead with its fork. But gets clapped on the back of the hand immediately. Because here the perfect respect of reservations reigns. Thus, for example, if someone dies of cancer, it is completely out of the question that he might, say, have a stroke. He can French kiss the pestilent (*empestés*), he can jump head first into cold water sixteen times a day, he still will not get the plague or a pneumonia!²⁷

The idea of presentating the relations among diseases as a transposition of social relations can be interpreted as a networking and linking of natural phenomena (which is what diseases are), animate beings (from man to different microbes, viruses and bacteria) and social relations. Thus we have a network established between nature and society, since certain social knowledge and relations can be applied to nature and vice versa, which points to the unity of all animate and inanimate beings in a single entirety, which is nature on Earth.

In Harari's text the power contained in people is a source of danger for the entire planet, and people should ask themselves if the prevention of hunger, wars and diseases, with the accompanying economic growth, is in line with the needs of the Earth. Therefore, the author believes that ecological stability should be chosen if catastrophe is to be avoided.²⁸ Immortality as an unwanted consequence carries certain ecological problems for humanity, for other animate co-beings, and for the entire planet.

3. Rain as an Ecocritical Phenomenon

Nature (in the widest definition of the term), with all its different natural phenomena, is relatively common in literature. Numerous writers have used natural phenomena such as rain,

²⁷V. DESNICA, *Pronalazak Athanatika*, 15.

²⁸Y. N. HARARI, *Homo Deus*, 23–24.

sun, snow or wind to create an atmosphere, to symbolically express a state, feeling or action, or to otherwise contribute to the action in their works. Ecocriticism is defined as a linking of nature and literature, so natural phenomena are here not reduced to an analysis of symbols, nor are they merely a backdrop to a plot.

In addition to death, which is the underlying theme in *Pronalazak Athanatika*, another natural phenomenon is important for an ecocritical reading of the novel, that is, the rain. One of the basic assumptions of ecocriticism is linking nature – including all natural phenomena – with literature. Rain appears a few times in the novel. At the beginning, a rainy afternoon is mentioned, one during which the narrator sits at a café with Krezubi. The rain is focalized through the narrator. It's been raining steadily for days. The narrator thinks about the rain as water – how is it produced, where does it come from, is there a cycle or is this new water?:

Is it possible that it is ever new, unused water – where would so much of it come from! – or is it the same, used already once, in a closed circle, through canals and outlets it flows away into some underground reservoir, where it is quickly filtered and regenerated, pumped up again, and then from underneath again poured, drained, leaked... If that is so, then really, outside of some unforeseen malfunction in the engines, there is no deliverance!²⁹

The novel ends with rain falling evenly “as if it has always rained and as if it will rain forever.”³⁰

Desnica looks at rain at a few levels: a) on a symbolic level, comparing it with the passage of time as a constant in which either events evolve or nothing happens, yet it flows all the same (both rain and time); b) on a natural, namely technical, level, contemplating where it comes from and how it follows the natural cycle of circulation of water in nature, whereby he imagines the process as a series of technical solutions (reservoirs, pumps, filters); c) as a link between the narrator and rain which is “typical café rain”, thus linking the beginning and the end of the novel, since the rain keeps falling throughout.

It seems important to dwell on the technical level, namely the explanation of rain as a system of technical solutions for the circulation of water in nature. In addition to giving a gradational introduction to a novel where the peak of a technological civilization creating *athanatik* will be shown, such an approach to rain as a technical solution, instead of a common natural cycle, reveals how man of the future, man of the time of the *athanatik*, sees the world around him – not as sum of natural phenomena, which stresses the negation of nature.

Natural phenomena such as rain are relatively common in literature and have different symbolic meanings. If we apply Susan Farrell's idea of linking rain with death, which is what she does analyzing *Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway, to Desnica's text, his rain gets a new meaning not only as a backdrop to the plot, but also as a backdrop to the entire story about the relation between life, death and immortality. According to Susan Farrell, in *Farewell to Arms*

²⁹V. DESNICA, *Pronalazak Athanatika*, 7.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 80.

rain and death are linked through a fear of rain and the death connected with it.³¹ This is most evident in the following quote: "...I'm afraid of the rain because sometimes I see me dead in it. ... And sometimes I see you dead in it".³² If we apply that model to *Pronalazak Athanatika*, the rain at the beginning and end of the novel points to death, namely, to mortality, which is in the background of this dialogic novel, and the discussion on immortality between Krezubi and the narrator. Moreover, Desnica's words about rain being constant ("as if it has always rained and as if it will rain forever") additionally confirm this mortality, or the natural response to man's search for immortality. On the other hand, Desnica points to a problem of "malfunction and deliverance" from rain, thus showing that nature, together with its phenomenon rain, is not just a backdrop and a background to the novel's plot and to human life, but is also an active factor, equal to man and a constant in human life, shaping human life as a part of nature, which is in touch with natural phenomena (whether it be rain or death). This is the context that the beginning and end of the novel, where rain is described, should be interpreted.

4. *Pronalazak Athanatika* as a Forerunner of Environmental Ecological Dystopian Novels

Contemporary Croatian literature does not abound in dystopian novels,³³ works in which a dystopian future would be determined by environmental/ecological factors. The most representative examples are Josip Mlakić's *Planet Friedman* and Edo Popović's *Mjesečev meridijan*. The novel *Planet Friedman* is set on the polluted planet that the Earth became as a result of the victory of Milton Friedman's economic doctrines. People are divided into a number of categories, groups or zones: A – the privileged, B – persons which might become privileged, C – discarded persons. The zones are strictly divided. Gerhard Schmidt is a central figure in the novel. Although a member of the elite, in the course of the novel – thanks to his patient Paula Bolt, a successful athletic invalid – he gets a chance to look at and grasp the lives of other, deprived social groups. In a world without emotions or books, dominated by capitalism, corporations (governed by a council of twenty-five corporations, comprised of companies such as Rosche and Natto), and reality shows as the main standards of value, a world in which being successful is the most important thing, Schmidt, thanks to books by Shakespeare and Yeats – which do not exist in zone A – which he received from Paula, discovers his human dimension. Also important is the link between Gerhard and his father Andreas, who showed humanity by bringing medicine and vaccines to the diseased and those in need from the lower group (B) during a superflu epidemic, and was therefore punished and killed for his crime of mercy. Schmidt and Paula meet Blacktooth, the leader of the rebels who prints and distributes books. However, they soon get in his way, too, because he becomes a dictator after his victory. Gerhard speaks about history as a magnetic field with two poles – revolution and

³¹Susan FARRELL, "Rainy Day Blues: The Role of Weather in A Farewell to Arms", *College of Charleston Blogs* (<http://blogs.cofc.edu/hons110/files/2011/10/Rain-in-Hemingway.pdf>). See: Ernest HEMINGWAY, *A Farewell to Arms*, New York, Scribner, 19257.

³²E. HEMINGWAY, *A Farewell to Arms*, 54.

³³For a definition of the term and differences see: Miranda LEVANAT-PERIČIĆ, "Čitanje distopija iz aspekta različitih teorija žanra: Pavličić, Suvin, Frow", *Komparativna povijest hrvatske književnosti. Vrsta ili žanr. Zbornik radova s XIX. međunarodnoga skupa održanog od 29. do 30. rujna 2016. godine u Splitu* (ed. Vinka Glunčić-Bužančić i Kristina Grgić), Split – Zagreb 2017, 249–258.

counterrevolution. *Planet Friedman* ends with Gerhard, Bruce – Gerhard's son, and Paula leaving for Ždralovi izvori (Crane's Springs), a place where they will be safe.³⁴

Mlakić's novel has numerous references to our world and its protagonists. For example, the most powerful man is called Steven Yobs. This reveals the dystopian future as implicitly present today. The novel also encompasses the global picture wherein we find ourselves.³⁵

Edo Popović wrote another novel, titled *Mjesečev meridijan* (The Moon Meridian), whose beginning follows Mirko Graf, a member of the Korov (Weeds) community, which grows organic products. Graf travels to Zagreb, presented as a dystopian city full of marginal social groups – the homeless, the unemployed, beggars. There he meets his acquaintance Josip Pavlović, a former SalarLab employee, now unemployed. People are divided into two groups in the novel, in accordance with their attitude toward the environment; the Poisoned – those who have destroyed the environment – and the Forgotten – those who live in central Europe in an oasis of unpolluted environment, drink water from the creeks, and feed on wild berries and animals. The main characters are a girl named Mila Salar – daughter of the SalarLab owner; the wealthy Zoran Salar, manager of the project of the Forgotten, a group of chosen men and women who live in an isolated location as pre-historical hunters and gatherers; and the young man Kaj – one of the Forgotten ones, whose father Jakov was in charge of inventing stories on the history and life of the Forgotten. The novel ends with Mirko's narrative about the Japodska valley, the place where the commune in which Mila, Josip, Kaj and others live is situated.³⁶ Popović's novel has numerous references to the present, since, in addition to certain imaginary and imagined events, it also includes events we were part of or have heard about.³⁷

Pronalazak Athanatika, as a significantly older predecessor to *Mjesečev meridijan* and *Planet Friedman*, can be comparatively analyzed with the two on a number of layers. Such a comparison reveals similarities in the pattern of changes, primarily referring to ecology and the protection of nature, that is, a lack of care about the environment (pollution, a devastated environment, death-immortality). The authors create a causal series because ecological changes, as a cause lead to significant consequences in terms of social changes – manifested in a society firmly divided into two (Desnica, Popović) or three groups (Mlakić). The ultimate consequence is the creation of a totalitarian world, whether it be a dictatorship with Nazi-fascist characteristics (Desnica) or an unscrupulous corporative-capitalist world (Mlakić, Popović). The projection of an ecologically polluted future and humankind walking toward an abyss is conditioned by enemies from the past (or present). Therefore, the fears of Vladan Desnica are directed toward a possible return of Nazism and fascism, which were recent memories in his lifetime, while the texts of the contemporary writers Popović and Mlakić are directed toward the negativity of a very current corporate and capitalist world. Gradationally laid out, Mlakić's society is a link between Desnica's and Popović's society, because the novel, in addition to corporate capitalism,

³⁴Josip MLAKIĆ, *Planet Friedman*, Zagreb 2012.

³⁵Strahimir PRIMORAC, "Imamo li komu slati poruke u boci?", *Vijenac*, 21/2013, no. 495 (<http://www.matica.hr/vije-nac/495/imamo-li-komu-slati-poruke-u-boci-21432/>).

³⁶Edo POPOVIĆ, *Mjesečev meridijan*, Zagreb 2015.

³⁷Strahimir PRIMORAC, "Potraga za svijetom slobode", *Vijenac*, 23/2015, no. 561–562. (<http://www.matica.hr/vije-nac/561%20-%20562/Potruga%20za%20svijetom%20slobode/>).

also introduces a dictatorship in which knowledge, emotions and the entirety of life as designed by the Maker, Friedman, is controlled.³⁸ This is how Mlakić describes the peak of corporate capitalism, which necessarily becomes a dictatorship and has totalitarianism as its basic goal.

All three authors present the indivisibility of man and nature and the consequences of attempts at its division. A lack of ties with nature and the destruction of relations with it – treating human culture, civilization and development as superior – lead to ecological problems which are necessarily reflected in social problems. This analysis leads to a very pessimistic view of such a dystopian future – destroyed, dehumanized, unnatural and anti-natural, wherein people also have no future, having destroyed it with their unnatural behavior.

The second layer of analysis is the analysis of the time of the action and its setting. Desnica and Mlakić create a far more indefinite world, without stating the year or years in which the action is set, without a detailed description of the setting, or of the territory in which the action unfolds. The only thing that can be said is that these territories and spaces are global, and many countries can be identified with them. Popović is far more specific (Zagreb, Japodska valley, Croatia, central Europe). Time wise, the action is set in an indefinite, yet near future.

The thematic cycle of immortality – death – life is common to all three authors. Desnica bases his entire novel on the theme of immortality and the discovery of *athanatik*, while Popović touches upon immortality only marginally, with the most illustrative part being the link between immortality and money (capital), namely, the replacement of deteriorated organs. Here Popović comes close to Harari's understanding of immortality. Mlakić presents death without any emotions or empathy. He observes everything in terms of success, benefits and personal advancement through greed. In relation to Popović's and Mlakić's texts, we can talk here about mortality, namely, the death of planet Earth as a result of long-term pollution and ecological problems. Desnica foreshadows one such ecological problem in his description of the shortage of food following the discovery of *athanatik*. All three authors make a connection between the immortality of an individual and the mortality of nature, which ultimately, in the long run, leads to the mortality of humankind.

These works can also be analyzed through the binary pair: freedom – domination. Common to all three authors is the creation of a world of domination and power, where the privileged (if we imagine them as a group) dominate all others, and humanism as a determinant is completely lost in this future built on – or perhaps, better said, lost due to – ecological problems. Therefore, freedom becomes the most important term through which Desnica's, Mlakić's and Popović's texts should be analyzed. Matko Vladanović states the following of Popović's novel: "In a sea of false information, imposed and constructed identities, manipulation and propaganda the answer to the question of the meaning of freedom is different for each individual."³⁹ These words describe the notion of freedom in these works excellently, irrespective of certain common characteristics among individual characters. Between domination and superiority,

³⁸Tea ŠITUM, "Planet Friedman", *Citajme.com* (<http://citajme.com/planet-friedman/>).

³⁹Matko VLANANOVIĆ, "Edo Popović: Mjesečev meridijan", *Moderna vremena* (<http://www.mvinfo.hr/clanak/edo-po-povic-mjesecev-meridijan>)

as a binary pair, and freedom is in an indivisible relationship with the natural, a devastated environment. In all three works there is the domination of man (as a corporate, rational, technological being) in contrast with the freedom of other animate beings, and the freedom of man (an individual who has emotions and empathy, which make up part of the natural balance and cycle of life). Having analyzed freedom and domination, we now arrive at the issue of the authors' projections for the future and the end of the novels. Desnica's and Mlakić's endings offer optimism: in Desnica's text there is the final destruction of *athanatik*, and Mlakić opens up an unspoiled world (*Ždralovi izvori*) as a place for a new beginning, although with a degree of skepticism (an open question about messages in the bottle).⁴⁰ Popović's end has some optimistic inklings because it enables different ideas of freedom defined in accordance with the desires of each individual character (the journeys of Kaj and Josip, Mirko's contemplation of the future, and the places we can visit and where we can stay).⁴¹ A common characteristic among all of these endings is that optimism lies in a certain form of return to nature – in Desnica it is the destruction of the anti-natural *athanatik*, which destroys the natural balance; in Mlakić it is the departure to a protected space, one wherein the natural balance is not destroyed; and in Popović, similarly, it is a journey, a search for freedom and for places with an undestroyed nature.

Using the methodology presented in her article "Death and the Anthropocene: Cormac McCarthy's World of Unliving," where she refers to the ideas of Paul Crutzen about the Anthropocene, a geological era dominated by man's impact on geological and environmental changes, and the ideas of Jacques Derrida on death, Louise Squire reframes literary theory and analysis of literary works. She analyzes a literary work by Cormac McCarthy using the experience of death as described by Jacques Derrida: "Learning to live should mean learning to die, learning to take into account, so as to accept, absolute mortality (that is, without salvation, resurrection, or redemption – neither for oneself nor for the other) ... to philosophize is to learn to die."⁴² Furthermore, Squire contemplates the extent to which two Derrida's concepts of death and the archive are applicable to literary works: "the impossibility of our discovering death's 'border' as such, and, b) the 'thinking' of ends by which deconstruction becomes responsible for a future beyond experience, then the Anthropocene era may be a time wherein what we fear is contamination of the archive by the physical events it has led towards, hence it deconstructs (while we seek to reconstruct) who we [think we] are."⁴³ She wonders whether death and the Anthropocene can be linked as two concepts, and whether the concept of Derrida's archives can be read as a matrix in selected literary works (which is what she does in the works of Cormac McCarthy). Linking ecocriticism and deconstruction is an open question in the contemporary methodology of ecocriticism and the formulation of its relation with postmodernism. Irrespective of their common roots in poststructuralist analyses, postmodernism and ecocriticism differ when it comes to deconstruction. This is how Domagoj Brozović discussed it:

⁴⁰J. MLAKIĆ, *Planet Friedman*, 253.

⁴¹E. POPOVIĆ, *Mjesečev meridijan*, 171.

⁴²Qtd. After: Louise SQUIRE, "Death and the Anthropocene: Cormac McCarthy's World of Unliving", *The Oxford Literary Review*, 34/2012, no. 12, 21.

⁴³*Ibid*, 218.

What differentiates ecocriticism from mainstream Poststructuralism is the development of a mature counter-system to the postmodernist inclination to unrestrained symbolic, linguistic and cultural play, where a reconstructive approach to language with a firm support of the superstructure of nature is advocated. Behind the seemingly main ecocritical problem of the link between the environment and discourse an axiom about extra-textual and extra-discursive nature is developed which openly problematizes deconstructive erasure of the relation with a real referent which can potentially result in serious epistemological consequences for contemporary literary and cultural theory, and be the incentive for the reconstruction of the notion of poetic representation, which postmodernism treats as *a priori* inadequate. The ecocritical challenge of postmodernism and a key issue is who can discursively and materially be linked again.⁴⁴

The opinion of Domagoj Brozović and the authors to whom he refers is one of the possible interpretations of the relationship between postmodernism and ecocriticism.⁴⁵ However, I would like to cite Timothy Morgan who believes that deconstruction is a secret friend of ecocriticism,⁴⁶ and say that a connection can be made between ecocriticism and postmodernism.

The ideas of Louise Squire on the link between death and Derrida's archives can be applied to ecocritical readings of the works discussed here by Desnica, Mlakić and Popović. Ecological disaster is an inevitable consequence of man's actions in the Anthropocene, and our behavior in the present and in the future shall advance this process. To what extent does it pay to live in the worlds of *Pronalazaka Athanatika*, *Planet Friedman* and *Mjesečev meridijan*? In the worlds of different types of terror, control and monitoring with very clear and pronounced divisions of people? These novels, and especially Mlakić's and Popović's novels, remind us of Derrida's idea of archives, where most characters do not have any connection to the past. Exceptions are characters who are anarchists and their leaders, later Schmidt and Paula in Mlakić, the Forgotten, Mila and Mirko in Popović, who facilitate a departure from the polluted world and planet by remembering the past and preserving certain values from the past, such as books, reading, emotions (in Mlakić), or life in harmony with nature (in Popović). In Desnica's text "promatrači" (observers) – a collective term for people "who outlive history and observe its funeral," come closest to it;⁴⁷ as well as the heretics who wanted to know the truth. It is precisely the connection with the past that has opened the possibility for change and optimism. I believe that the interruption of relations with nature has necessarily led to the interruption of relations with history and tradition. These relations are reflected in the pessimism awaiting us in a dystopian future. A source of optimism lies in reconnecting with nature and rebuilding relations with the past. Human emotions, empathy, individual bravery, hope and rational approach allow for traces of a better life in the future.

⁴⁴D. BROZOVIĆ, "Čitati zeleno", 31.

⁴⁵For different opinions on the relationship between postmodernism and ecocriticism see: Serpil OPPERMANN, "Theorizing Ecocriticism: Toward a Postmodern Ecocritical Practice", *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 13/2006, no. 2, 103–128.

⁴⁶Timothy MORTON, "Deconstruction and / as Ecology", *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (ed. Greg Garrard), Oxford 2014, 291–304.

⁴⁷V. DESNICA, *Pronalazak Athanatika*, 64.

5. Concluding Remarks

An ecocritical reading of the novel *Pronalazak Athanatika* underlines two natural phenomena. The first is the idea of death and immortality as a basic motif in the novel and the central axis of the plot. Comparing and linking⁴⁸ the works of Vladan Desnica and Yuval Noah Harari, we observe that both of them, having analyzed the potential of immortality, see a series of issues it opens up – from ecological and social problems to economic and political changes. Irrespective of the differences in the way immortality is achieved – Desnica’s discovery of a medication or Harari’s technical solutions – they both come to similar conclusions, whereby immortality is conditioned by scientific research and has widespread consequences in terms of social changes, which lead to permanent and dangerous conflicts. These conflicts stem from man’s attempts at supremacy over nature and other animate co-beings, basing these attempts in the technological dimension and so-called development and advancement, exclusively. Nature becomes an object of man’s road to superiority which is presented in attempts at immortality and the finding of solutions for it as the peak of technological and scientific success. Therefrom stems man’s self-sufficiency, which necessarily leads to existential, and then social, crises in which that same man becomes a loser trying to rule nature, simultaneously separating himself from it.

The second phenomenon analyzed through ecocriticism is rain. I believe that with his description of rain at the beginning and end of the novel, Desnica contrasts the discussion of the narrator with Krezubi on immortality, because rain, if interpreted pursuant to the readings of Hemingway, denotes death, or in this case, the mortality of people. Rain is presented as a technical problem, and not a natural phenomenon, because man from the *athanatik* era rejects natural phenomena and interprets the world around him in terms of technological processes exclusively. This additionally underlines the separation of man from nature. By mentioning rain at the beginning and end, irrespective of the plot concerning immortality, the writer indirectly warns of the permanent mortality of man and presents nature as an active factor, and not just as a backdrop for man’s actions. The question of to what extent *Pronalazak Athanatika* corresponds to the genre characteristics of speculative fiction according to the analysis of Miranda Levanat Peričić remains open:

The alternative world in these novels is twice removed from the author’s empirical reality – in time, which is the future, and in nationally unmarked cultural space. Therefore, the meta-genre characteristic of dystopia in Croatian literature is reflected in the fact that the Croatian novel projects the history of the future in a different literary tradition, most commonly that to which dystopia originally belongs.⁴⁹

I believe that *Pronalazak Athanatika* comes close in terms of genre to speculative fiction. Not defining the setting and time of action is indicative of this. The novel could therefore be

⁴⁸For the possibility of comparing and connecting in historical studies see: Diego OLSTEIN, *Thinking History Globally*, New York 2015, 59–98.

⁴⁹Miranda LEVANAT-PERIČIĆ, “Metažanrovska obilježnost spekulativne fikcije u hrvatskoj književnosti: od Šuffiaya do Mlakića“, *Komparativna povijest hrvatske književnosti. Fantastika: problem zbilje. Zbornik radova sa XVIII. Međunarodnoga znanstvenog skupa održanog od 24. do 25. rujna 2015. godine u Splitu* (ed. Cvijeta Pavlović, Vinka Glunčić-Bužančić and Andrea Meyer-Fraatz), Split – Zagreb 2016, 316.

grouped among similar lines as *Planet Friedman and Mjesečev meridijan*. In addition to the common environmental cause of the problems, there is the social division into a privileged class – irrespective of whether or not they are immortal; it is those with social and economic power – and everyone else. The ecological cause of the problems results in social changes and an ever larger and clearer social differentiation which ends in totalitarian systems – fascism, Nazism and corporative capitalism in all its variants.

Desnica's idea about the immortality of people in comparison with the death of planet Earth is interesting and detectable in Popović and Mlakić, as well. Can the two arguments be linked? What is the maximum number of people who can live on Earth at the same time?⁵⁰ What impact will that have on the environment?⁵¹ To what extent shall human actions and the desire for power, including immortality, contribute to the extinction of species on the planet? What will be the social consequences of the ecological changes we are witnessing (global warming, melting of glaciers, expansion of deserts, destructive storms, wars for energy sources and water, pollution of air, water and soil, overuse of natural resources, etc.)? These questions are just an incentive for contemplation and additional work, especially in the context of artificial intelligence, bioengineering and potential immortality or non-mortality in the future.

The importance of *Pronalazak Athanatika* lies in the link with the very topical issues of life and death as a relation toward overcoming death with immortality, a method for contemplating the latter which is important for its relation with Harari, as well as contemporary challenges posed by death and its avoidance. Desnica can be considered a predecessor who correlates with current scientific considerations (Harari) and literary works (Mlakić, Popović) in warning that ecology and ecological factors (immortality and population increase, lack of food) can have a serious influence on social changes, the division of power, and formulation of our future. From a work of speculative fiction, Desnica's *Pronalazak Athanatika* thus becomes a signpost for the near future and the challenges it brings. Deliberation on the choices and the humanistic outlook are steps toward a better and more enjoyable future for all of humanity, the animate world and planet Earth, which could be formulated as the joint conclusion of Vladan Desnica, Yuval Harari, Josip Mlakić and Edo Popović.

translated by Tihana Klepač

⁵⁰According to UN research a significant growth to about 11.2 billion people is expected by 2100. See: *World Population Prospects. The 2015 Revision. Key Findings and Advanced Tables*, New York 2015, 2 (https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Publications/Files/Key_Findings_WPP_2015.pdf)

⁵¹See: Dražen ŠIMLEŠA, *Ekološki otisak. Kako je razvoj zgasio održivost*, Zagreb 2010.

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KEYWORDS

Vladan Desnica

ecocriticism

CROATIAN NOVELS

ABSTRACT:

The author gives an ecocritical reading of a short, unfinished novel by Vladan Desnica *Pronalazak Athanatika* (The Discovery of Athanatik). The paper comprises three thematic units: an ecocritical approach to a thematic cycle (life – death – immortality) in the novel, compared with *Homo Deus* by Yuval Noah Harari; an ecocritical analysis of rain as seen from the point of view of Susan Farrell's ideas; and an analysis of *Pronalazak Athanatika* in the context of two dystopian ecological/environmental novels in contemporary Croatian literature, *Planet Friedman* by Josip Mlakić and *Mjesečev meridijan* (The Moon Meridian) by Edo Popović, with a comparison to ecocritical readings of Louise Squire. The author concludes that *Pronalazak Athanatika* – defined in genre terms as speculative fiction – makes Desnica a predecessor to current scientific considerations (Harari) and literary works (Mlakić, Popović) in warning that ecology and ecological factors – immortality and population increases, a lack of food, and ultimately the destruction of the planet – may have destructive effects on social change, the division of power, and the shape of the future.

dystopia

ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES

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