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Images of Brutal Violence, Terror, Hegemony and Genocide in the Poems

*Samo ti dete radi svoj posao* by Novak Đukić and Ivan Goran Kovačić's

*Jama*

The theme of brutal crimes in the Independent State of Croatia during the 1940s and the hegemony carried out at that time is one that literature does not frequently address, especially not in poetry, which is often considered an unsuitable medium for events of such epic proportions. However, despite the pressures that existed during the establishment of the camps themselves, under the communist regime that lasted for decades afterward, and amidst the current chaos of polyphonic currents, some authors have chosen to confront and give voice to this challenging topic.

Croatian poet Ivan Goran Kovačić (1913–1943) was a witness and contemporary of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH). He wrote his poem *The Pit (Jama)* while with the partisans, just a few months before his tragic death. The poem was inspired by the Ustaša's atrocities of throwing Serbs into karst pits near Livno (present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina). On the other hand, Novak Đukić (1984–), a contemporary Serbian poet of a newer generation, writes about Jasenovac from a distance of eight decades in his poem within the collection of the same name, *Just Do Your Job, Child (Samo ti dete radi svoj posao)*. Both events immortalized by these authors were consequences of Ustaša hegemony during the NDH. In both poems, the motif of the pit appears. A connecting detail is that Kovačić's verses from *The Pit* are inscribed at the base of the *Stone Flower* monument at Jasenovac, the concentration camp that serves as the setting for Đukić's poem.

Critics of Đukić's collection have already observed an invisible thread connecting Kovačić and Đukić. This analysis begins with the motif of the eyes, which appears at the beginning of both works. Kovačić's lyrical subject is blinded (oslepljen), both literally and physically, while Đukić's, who is hinted to be the elderly Vukašin Mandrapa, speaks to his executioner, who is blinded (zaslepljen) by hatred. Both authors depict horrors; however, while Kovačić calls for revenge in his final verses, Đukić takes a Christian approach. Mandrapa not only forgives but does not even fundamentally hold grudges for the atrocities committed against him, elevating himself to the level of a saint.

Đukić's verses are filled with biting irony, which might cause the reader to laugh in anguish, entirely devoid of the pathos into which Kovačić's lofty and skillfully rhymed verses might easily slip. The conclusion reached in this analysis is that the pain for the victims does not fade with time and finds its most profound expression in poetry. However, there is a noticeable shift in discourse after eight decades, leaning towards accepting violence as a conscious sacrifice for the Kingdom of Heaven.