Historical Narratives, Fictional Biographies, and Biblical Allusions in Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* as a New Literary Hybrid

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Abstract The article proposes a new perception of *The Lazarus Project* (2008) by Aleksandar Hemon. Literary transformation of the past events in light of historical experience, their reinterpretation, and adoption appear within the novel in the forms of history representation and memory production. The author's position in the book is actualised through its structure with alternating chapters and realised in two conflicting identities: a historian who just records events, and a creator who builds up the conditioned reality of the characters' world. The analysis of the novel's structure displays the hybridity of narrative strategies in historical, fictional, and biblical dimensions. Including photography in literary hybridisation highlights a means through which the forms of the representation of the author's worldview get separated from existing practices and recombine with new ones. The conjunction of biography, photography, space and time frames in *The Lazarus Project* refers to a specific type of narration that underlines its transnational character. The article also deconstructs the examples of biblical allusions and as direct so indirect references to the Bible that can be a way of transcending historical barriers. Originality in research of Hemon's novel as a representative of migrant literature consists in revealing the influence of transcultural narratives of contemporary postcolonial fiction on the migrant identity. The application of an interdisciplinary approach intends to demonstrate the diversity of narratives in the book as an original piece of postmodern metafiction.

Key words history; narration; (auto)biography; reference; amalgam

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Introduction

Modern fiction at the change of millennia is characterised by particular attention to the world history *archive*, personalities, and historical circumstances; it trends to reinterpret and reconsider the past events (Huehls 138; Hatcher 4). The beginning of the twenty-first century has been marked by a surge of novels testifying, documenting, and narrating the past (Dijk 107). A special role in this revival of memory is played not even by prominent historical figures but ordinary people, written-in history, whose lives have been the groundwork of novels. Literary transformation of the past events through the prism of historical experience, as well as drawing parallels with the author's stories, appear to be the base on which the narratives of contemporary world literature are generated. Fiction plays a vital role in describing history and transmitting culture (Polack 8). As Dijk notes, "two of the major functions of literature are the representation of history and the production of memory" (107).

Sometimes in modern writings, the interplay of real (historical) and fictional events is so subtle that they are even difficult to be distinguished from each other. And appealing to the Bible as an inexhaustible source of ideas and themes for literature, witness to the power of stories (Jones 1) seems to be one of the means of transcending the ordinary. The Bible as a sacred text attracts writers of different cultures and worldviews. This testifies to the relevance of Holy Scripture for the interpretation of today's events.

Of great interest is tracing biblical allusions in a literary text, since the illumination of ways of their transformation, perception, and adoption by author's imagination can be one of the means of reconstructing the sacred history of the universe. However, the inclusion of spiritual themes in the pieces of modern literature is not always focused on the traditional glorification of the Creator or the unconditional acceptance of biblical events. Sometimes this serves to give a balanced view on religion, art, and human as an integral part of history. Biblical motifs appear to be a ground for introducing to a literary text the author's ideas as to the true causes of human existence. This perspective allows us to revise historical narratives and how

they are transformed in a literary text.

One of the most impressive books in that respect is *The Lazarus Project* which, however, has not yet been the subject of detailed literary discussions, although it ranks high in postmodern literature. The novel was published in 2008 and immediately encouraged the attention of literary critics and readers.

The Lazarus Project was written by Aleksandar Hemon, Bosnian-American fiction writer, essayist, and critic, who was born in Sarajevo in the former Yugoslavia in 1964, of Ukrainian descent on his father's side and Bosnian, of Serb background on his mother's side (Knight 85). He articulates relational forms of (reverse) mirroring between the United States and the former Yugoslavia (Luca 43). The transcultural background of Hemon's origin has influenced the vocabulary of his novel which is rich in the Ukrainian, Bosnian, and Croatian lexical items: *dobra nych, shittychino*, *politsyant*, *Čaršija*, *kafana*, *Isus Krist, Ne volim te više*, etc.

Hemon published *The Lazarus Project* on the 100th anniversary of the death of Lazarus Averbuch, a teenaged Jewish survivor of the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, who was shot in Chicago in 1908 (Canales 93). The novel is greatly based on the life and murder of that immigrant whose biography and even the name resonate with biblical motifs to take on specific forms in the literary dimension.

All the novels by Hemon are attractive to researchers since they can provide exploring the transformations of the genre at present by crossing national as well as aesthetic borders. His approach to fiction has been highly valuable for understanding these borders that have become increasingly fluid and unpredictable in the third millennium (Ward 197).

The double time frame is mirrored by *The Lazarus Project's* structure with alternating chapters (Vervaet 239): those in which a heterodiegetic narrator tells the story of Lazarus Averbuch, and those narrated by a first-person narrator Vladimir Brik who is the protagonist of the modern-day storyline. Hemon represents the events in the following temporal dimensions: 1903—the anti-Semitic Kishinev pogrom, Lazarus's early life; 1908—Lazarus's murder in Chicago and absurd investigation of the crime; 1992—Brik's and Rora's recollections about the Bosnian War and the events in Sarajevo; 2005—Brik and Rora's journey to Eastern Europe in search of materials for Brik's book. The plot of the novel brings together two distinct temporal frames and storylines: the past and the present.

The novel's literary space, affecting the different levels of the author's worldview (temporal, social, cultural, etc.), also seems to be a principal aspect of *The Lazarus Project*. Two cities in Hemon's book dominate the fictional geographies: Sarajevo and Chicago in which the author and his characters lived or

live. The space in such literature underlines its transnational character (Ung 56).

Though a story much akin to that of Hemon himself, the writer vehemently rejects the connection between himself and his narrator in numerous interviews, stresses that he counted on people seeing the differences, and has never thought that any of his books are autobiographical (Tseti par. 5). Hemon underlines: "The 'I' in my book is not me" (Boswell 257). Nevertheless, in our opinion, the writer's biography can be associated with some plotlines in the novel as the author's experience implicitly includes the historical one.

The storyline seems to be built up with the aid of the pictures of a Bosnian photographer Rora whose photos appear throughout the novel: Chicago skyline, a dog, speeding car, corpse propped up to look alive, classroom of schoolgirls, shadows of human bodies on the lonely alley, two boys' faces, etc. Each chapter is separated with these photos; there are twenty-three photographic reproductions instead of traditional chapter titles. As Weiner mentions, "The inclusion of photography within the narrative structure initiates a dual—verbal and visual—storyline and is indicative of a consciousness that embodies multiple perspectives, typical to the migrant" (39). *The Lazarus Project* is an exploration of photography as much as it is a story. The author discloses what distress photography can cause and what light it can bring.

In *The Lazarus Project*, the collaboration with Bosnian-Canadian visual artist Velibor Božović, who features his photographs, illustrates how the Bosnian War is remembered. Aykol calls this form of remembering diplopic. Appropriated from the medical term diplopia (double vision), diplopic remembering is posited as a recurring metaphor for how the past is recollected and reconstructed in the book (180). The historical photographs were borrowed from the Chicago Historical Society, most of them taken by photographers of the Chicago Daily News in 1908. They help readers navigate the text where the past and present, fact and fiction are conflated.

Adams clarifies the affiliation between autobiography and photography, so-called life writing and light writing, stressing autobiography as "a form of narrative characterised by a desire both to reveal and to conceal, an attempt of reconciling a life with a self" (15). He asserts that both biography and photography have a strong relationship to the world and that these forms of narration correspond to the way language works. Hybridisation of text and image emphasises the conjunction of verbal and visual narrative dimensions (Suwara 252).

The Lazarus Project's tensions between biography, autobiography, and photography emerge from what Hemon calls a "conditional Americanness" that

has overtaken the American Dream (Ward 185). In this context, Carpio emphasises that immigrant autobiographies have conventionally stressed redemption through suffering as the narrative analogue to acculturation (345).

A "project" refers to the origin of this word and is understood as a time- and resource-limited process aimed at achieving special objectives. In other words, *The Lazarus Project* is almost scientific research to find out and actualise the events that took place in Lazarus Averbuch's life. This book, however, does not provide answers to eternal questions and does not even encourage us to look for the answers in the Bible but forces us to ask them to ourselves.

The purpose of the study is to illuminate the ways of the hybridisation of historical, fictional, and biblical narratives in Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* as a soul of migrant literature.

Methodology

Research of migrant literature, including *The Lazarus Project*, is complicated by the influence of transcultural narratives of modern postcolonial fiction on the migrant identity. Comprehending different culture codes in the author's worldview, the experience of being a guest under certain circumstances, and what is more, historical memory of his people, which modify artistic adaption of reality, requires accurate approaches to studying this literary phenomenon. In this context, Vervaet draws attention to how the novel stresses "the way in which temporally and geographically divergent (hi)stories of dispossession circulate, converge, and intertwine with each other" (239).

The structure of Hemon's novel allows us to consider it as a postmodern narrative that employs various strategies including an altered view of history, emphasis on the manner in which space affects one's identity, and overall hybridity in both narration and characters (Stojanović 318). *The Lazarus Project* can be considered a kind of metafiction that focuses on the very process of narration, visualisation, and is characterised by references to other sources, including the Bible. This is actualised through the particular structuring of the text by the author and realised in traditional for metafiction conflicting identities: *a historian* who just records events, and *a creator* who builds up the conditioned reality of the characters' world.

The Lazarus Project can be defined as a hybrid of the historical and the subjective, the documentary and the imaginary (Dijk 107). This implies an interdisciplinary approach to studying historical narratives as a form of the presentation of historical reality. Historical narratives, on the one hand, are realistic

because they contain plausible utterances of actual nature; on the other hand, they are subjective since they are a product of the culture and language of a subject who knows in advance the final of historical communication, bringing together all the plotlines in a common focus. Therefore, we will consider historical narratives in the novel not so much as descriptions of the past that claim to be proper, but as specific constructs for defining and understanding historical reality included in the plot of *The Lazarus Project*.

Researchers emphasise the special role of place in migrant literature, the relationship between globalisation, place, and the author. Frank proposes a new reading mode of Hemon's novel that implicates an approach that is less a "reading for the plot" than a "reading for the place" (63). The *place* is understood as an intratextual element referring to local, specific, sensuous, and concrete.

In view of the foregoing considerations, it is expedient to apply the following research methods: historical-cultural, linguistic-stylistic analyses, bibliographical, hermeneutic, and phenomenological approaches.

Lazarus's Biographical Sketches in the Mirror of History

The novel begins with an epigraph from the Gospel according to John through which there is an indirect mention of the name of the novel's central character with reference to the biblical Lazarus: "And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth" (John 11.43). This name is derived from the Hebrew רזעלא (Eleazar) meaning "God is my help" (Barclay 92).

The first lines of the book look like Brik's thoughts about now completed the "Lazarus Project": "The time and place are the only things I am certain of"[1] (Hemon 10). From the first chapter, the reader dives into the past, days of tragical events in the history of the Jewish people, which are mentioned almost a hundred years later in a newspaper article found in the archive by a Bosnian immigrant, a failed writer Vladimir Brik. The author uses flashbacks for different reasons, such as to arouse readers' interest in the events, to hang an intrigue, to explain his main character, and add tension to the story. Brik discovers that the immigrant Lazarus Averbuch was killed by a police officer and buried in a cemetery for the homeless: "the body of Lazarus Averbuch is disposed of in the potter's field at Dunning. […] In the driving rainstorm, not unlike the beginning of a biblical deluge, the body, wrapped in cloth, was rolled into the grave, half-filled with water" (LP 53-54). That same night, his body has disappeared from the grave and the writer tries to find out what happened: the miracle of resurrection, provocation, or the desire of fanatics to play on his name

1 Hemon, Aleksandar. *The Lazarus Project*. Riverhead Books, 2008; hereafter abbreviated as LP.

for the popular effect since *Lazarus* is perceived as a charactonym. The first point is not a particularly pressing issue for him, as Brik is not especially religious, and the trip looks more a journey into his and his friend's pasts than a fact-finding mission.

Brik can be characterised as *a positive agnostic*: a negative agnostic does not know whether any Gods exist and a positive agnostic does not know whether any Gods exist and no one else does either (Pennycook et al. par. 19). Vladimir says to his wife: "God knows God is no friend of mine. But I envy people who believe in that crap. They don't worry about the meaning of life and things, whereas I do" (LP 39).

Readers learn about Lazarus Averbuch chiefly from his sister Olga's and friend Isador's recollections, in which he is a kind of eccentric and naive guy. Olga claims: "He was **a religious man**" (LP 30); "He was **always prone to fantasies** […] he was **a dreamer**. He had **no anger**, **no violence** in him. He would **never hurt anybody**" (LP 32). And Isador emphasises: "He wanted **to write**. He **wanted to meet girls**, **have some fun**. He wanted **to be liked**. He wanted **to be like everybody** else. He wanted **to buy you new shoes**" (LP 83). Hemon uses anaphora "to gain more emphasis to convey strong emotions" (Zhang 121). To describe Lazarus, the author takes simple sentences which have a single independent clause and express a complete thought (Kroeger 52). Olga and Isador avoid calling Lazarus by name, using the personal pronoun *he*, and it is a decisive step in the transition from the authorial to the figural domain. The personal pronoun facilities the transfer of the reader to the consciousness of the character or the reader's empathy with the character's situation to a greater extent than does the mentioning of the name (Stanzel 189). His teacher Mr. Brik describes Lazarus Averbuch as "a faithful and persevering student of a very good character" (LP 32). His boss Mr. Eichgreen remarks that young Averbuch "seemed fond of America" (LP 67). These characteristics create a positive image of Lazarus.

But William P. Miller, journalist for the Tribune, according to Chicago Police Chief George Shippy, characters Lazarus in the following manner: "a **cruel**, **straight mouth** with **thick lips** and **a pair of gray eyes** […] **cold** and **fierce**. There was a look about that **slim**, **swarthy** young man — clearly a Sicilian or a Jew — that could **send a shiver of distrust** into any honest man's heart" (LP 12). Describing Averbuch in negative lexical items indicates the contemptuousness of the police officer towards the killed boy. Shippy chose such a characteristic as defence since it the policeman who caused his death. Mentioning the nationality of the deceased demonstrates xenophobic sentiments which, according to historical records, prevailed in American society in the early twentieth century. Later we can read a con-

cise summary of Lazarus's appearance in the autopsy report:

> Body of a man […], 5 feet 7 inches tall, weighing about 125 pounds, somewhat undernourished. […] The cranium is of peculiar formation. The hair is dark, the skin is of dark complexion. The nose is not of pure Jewish type but has a Semitic cast. From other evidence, however, it is clear that the man was a Jew. No filling in the teeth. Hands well formed, indicating manual labour. In removing the skull cap, the skull was found to be exceptionally thin. […] The thin skull cap, the large mouth, the receding chin, the low forehead, the pronounced cheekbones and the oversized simian ears all indicate a well-marked type of degeneracy. (LP 43)

The description by a coroner corresponds to the photo of shot Lazarus, where the Police Chief postures next to him (LP 29). As a narrator, Hemon uses only a few words to describe Lazarus's appearance: a scrawny young man, soiled shoes, a swarthy face, his pants are still too big for him. From the beginning of the novel, the writer uses a long sentence to describe Averbuch's death and town people's reactions to his death. This beginning creates the severe tone of the story. Besides long and complex sentences, Hemon also uses short simple sentences, particularly in dialogues to make conversation effective and to show the character's personality in the story.

Cross-References *Saint Lazarus — Lazarus Averbuch* in Literary Interpretation

Having a fairly detailed description of Averbuch's appearance and character, there is just a little about his *prototype* known as Saint Lazarus, Lazarus of Bethany or Lazarus of the Four Days who is mentioned in the Gospel according to John in the New Testament: "Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany" (John 11.1). He lived in Bethany, about two miles southeast of Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives: "Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off" (John 11.18).

One of the crucial biblical topics is the theme of resurrection. The first mention of Lazarus's resurrection from Hemon's book, but in metaphorical interpretation, is found in the text when Brik informs his wife of his creative intentions and gets her reaction: "She found my idea of a Lazarus who struggled to resurrect in America a tad pretentious" (LP 25). The journalist is familiar with Saint Lazarus's life and tells it to Rora, recreating the biblical story with a humorous undertone. Compare: "Well, Lazarus is dead and his sister is friends with **a certain Jesus Christ**, **the**

local prophet and **miracle worker**, so she asks him to do something about it" (LP 38)—"Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee" (John 11.21-22). Although it is not clear exactly what Martha asked Jesus for as she was later very surprised by Lazarus's *resurrection*: "Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days" (John 11.39); "So **Mr. Christ does his gimmick**, goes to the cave where the dead Lazarus is stashed away" (LP 38)—"Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it" (John 11.38); "He calls him forth and Lazarus rises from his death" (LP 38)—"he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth" (John 11.43); "And he that was dead came forth" (John 11.44); "And Mr. Christ becomes even **more famous**" (LP 38)—"Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him" (John 11.45).

In the novel, evident allusions to the course of biblical events can be found: two days are mentioned in the context of Lazaruses' bodies. Compare: "Your brother's body was missing for almost two days. It seems he was disinterred shortly after the burial" (LP 93)—"When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was" (John 11.6). Hermann Taube points to the parallels in the real and biblical stories when he urges Olga to agree to bury another person under her brother's name: "There are Christians who would believe that their Bible story is about to be repeated; some of them are ready for the arrival of their Messiah in the shape of Mr. Christ. Such people look forward to the Apocalypse" (LP 93). Although Assistant Chief Schuettler's *best men* "found Lazarus's body, some organs were missing" (LP 93), and Jewish customs and common decency would not allow her to bury him incomplete. He is full of contempt and disrespect for the Christian faith through jeering *Mr. Christ* and using pleonasm *Messiah – Christ.*

Taube adds: "And I do not need to tell you what a crowd of excited Christians is capable of doing" (LP 93), but he does not explain human behaviour, the details can be found in the Bible: "Master, the Jews of late **sought to stone thee**" (John 11.8). The woman reacts strangely to the news that her brother's body has been found: "Olga has reached a point beyond disbelief—she suppresses a giggle" (LP 93). The author does not explain the behaviour of Lazarus's sister, he hangs an intrigue: Olga is convinced that the police did not even try to find her brother, or she believes in her brother's resurrection. Indeed, in Olga's memory, he has already "resurrected" twice: 1) after the pogrom—"rivulets of blood spreading away from

Lazarus's nose and eye sockets, across his cheeks and mouth, down to his neck. **He is dead**" (LP 102); 2) in Olga's sick mind, after her brother's real death—"She hears knocking on the door […]. She opens the door and there **he** is […]. **Where were you?** […] **Why do you play hide-and-seek with me?** She is in utter disbelief, and gets: You have no idea **what I've been through**" (LP 46). Hemon does not reveal what has happened, and this episode is perceived as the imagination of a sick woman who is going mad.

There is a kind of story that can be found in the Bible when the inhabitants got to know about Lazarus's death: "**hundreds** have come by to view Lazarus's body that afternoon" (LP 31)—"And **many of the Jews** came to Martha and Mary" (John 11.19). In the Scripture, we find an uncommon use of the term *Jew* with a neutral connotation, since John usually refers it to Jesus's enemies. It is worth noting that antisemitism in America in the early twentieth century is a real fact the author refers to. In those days, Jews were depicted as enemies of Christianity and members of the lower race. Henry Ford, who bought The Dearborn Independent, where the anti-Semitic articles were published, joined the persecution. The example above refers to the people of Jerusalem who knew the family of the deceased. Compare: "**The Jews** then which were with her in the house, and comforted her" (John 11.31); "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and **the Jews** also weeping which came with her" (John 11.33); "Then **many of the Jews** which came to Mary, […] believed on him [Jesus]" (John 11.45).

Insanity and Fictional Reality in the Letters of Contrition

Hemon touches on the topic of madness, but it is interesting to consider and analyse the events which run through the entire novel. Lazarus Averbuch's name is perceived by some Jewish Chicagoans as a biblical anthroponym, so it is no wonder that after his death, "a demented woman had to be escorted out because she claimed the corpse opened his eyes and looked at her" (LP 31). Olga walks down the street after learning of her brother's death, and in front of her "there stands a small woman in a dirty white dress and mushroomlike hat […]. She speaks with a voice between a hiss and a whisper: — **He whom you love is ill**" (LP 73). Compare: "Lord, behold, **he whom thou lovest is sick**" (John 11.3); "But **this illness is not unto death**. It is **for the glory of God**, so that **the son of God may be glorified**" (LP 73)—"**This sickness is not unto death**, but **for the glory of God**, that **the Son of God might be glorified** thereby" (John 11.4). A psycho woman nearly quotes the Holy Scripture, she exclaims: "Unbind him and let him go" (LP 73) which refers to the Jews' funeral practices including washing corpses with water, wrapping them in linen

cloth, and sprinkling them with special incense to blunt the smell. The same words are spoken by Jesus: "Loose him, and let him go" (John 11.44). After Olga gives a mad woman a slap, the last stops and says: "Your brother will rise. […] Lazarus shall rise. Our Lord will be with us" (LP 73) and again the woman's words coincide with Christ's ones: "Thy brother shall rise again" (John 11.23). Perhaps these words affect Olga so much that she subconsciously begins to believe in her brother's resurrection and gets one step closer to an insane view of life.

The mentally composed letters to her mother seem to be a sign of mental disorder of the character who tries to solve the mystery of what really happened. A common thread running through the novel is these letters. Hemon shows them in italics, which occupy the readers' attention.

The First Letter. *"Dear Mother, Our Lazarus is asleep, but out of that sleep **we may not awake him"*** (LP 43). Olga uses the personal pronoun *we* with the meaning of generalisation, emphasising that people are not able to make the miracle. Instead, in the Bible we read: "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep" (John 11.11). The disciples did not understand Jesus, as they took his words too literally. Jesus used this metaphor to denote death the same way as it is in the Old Testament, where the word *cemetery* is used, which comes from the same root as the Greek word *to sleep*.

The Second Letter. "*Dear Mother, There is no good way to say this: Lazarus **is no more**"* (LP 43). Olga is afraid of telling her mother about Lazarus's death, so she uses the euphemism *be no more* instead of *died*. The manifestation of contrition sounds in the letter's body.

The Third Letter. "*Dear Mother, It seems we can never escape grief. We **have lost** Lazarus. What have we done to deserve so much suffering?"* (LP 43). Olga cannot accept the news about her brother's death, and that is why uses the less emotional word *lost* to speak about it.

The Fourth Letter. *"Dear Mother, Your last letter made us so happy. We're more than fine: I have a new job as a legal secretary and Lazarus is working for the Hebrew Voice as a reporter. He is contemplating getting married"* (LP 44). This mentally composed letter includes the largest list of events. It describes her brother's happy life, mentions his common wishes which would never come true.

The Fifth Letter. "*Dear Mother, Lazarus is dead, and I am mad. We're fine otherwise and think of you a lot*" (LP 44). Finally, Olga confesses to herself that her brother is dead; mourning him almost drives her crazy. This strong emotional connection can be explained by the fact that the Averbuch siblings fled their home without their parents in order to survive the anti-Jewish pogroms. From the stories

Averbuch's sister Olga tells, it is clear that Olga took over the mother-figure role for Lazarus. Hemon uses alliterated parallel constructions *is dead – am mad* which add rhyme and rhythm to the text.

The Sixth Letter. "*Dear Mother, I don't know how to begin"* (LP 46). This Olga's shortest letter hints she still does not dare to tell her mother about her brother's death.

The Seventh Letter. "*Dear Mother, This letter is coming* ***from a better world****: by the time you receive it, Lazarus and I* ***will be together waiting for you****"* (LP 63). The woman's contrition is shown by the use of *Lazarus and I* which indicates her inability to live in the world where she no longer has her brother. Metaphor ***from a better world*** emphasises the woman's faith in the existence of a fertile land where we feel safe and prosperous. Compare: "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it" (Rev. 21.23-24). The Future Continuous Tense in *Lazarus and I* ***will be together waiting for you*** points out Olga's desire to reunite with her family and her willingness to wait meaningfully for redintegration. We come across another mention of a heavenly place but in a sarcastic and ironic manner. Olga is interrogated at the police station and asks *politsyants* where her brother is, but does not know he is not alive more, when she asks where to take her and does not know that he is already dead: "'He is in a better place', Fitzpatrick says, and Fitzgerald chuckles" (LP 31).

Olga feels lonely after her brother's death: "She cannot remember her life before Lazarus's death; that life took place **in a different world**" (LP 92). Using *a different world* as opposed to *a better world* indicates that the previous life is not the dream one. It is just different due to self-perception and the existence of her brother in the world. To show Olga's suffering and contrition, the author uses zeugma. This stylistic device does not confuse the readers but inspires them to think harder as it is used to create a dramatic effect, add emotion, and produce shock value: "She **is coated in sweat and filth**, **the thick film of anger** and **humiliation**, of Lazarus's absence" (LP 92). Sister's suffering is described in the Bible as follows: "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping" (John 11.33). A more tragic image is hidden in Olga's comparison *nightmare* with *a frightened horse:* "The nightmare has assumed its own random direction, like a frightened horse" (LP 92). She looks like a helpless frightened girl who is one on one left with her tragedy.

The Eighth Letter. "*Dear Mother, Lazarus's funeral was beautiful. The rebbe spoke of his kindness, and there were hundreds of his friends, mountains of flowers"*

(LP 65). Olga tries to seek consolation in description of the imaginary interment of her brother. Oxymoron *beautiful funeral*, hyperbolas *hundreds of friends, mountains of flowers* add emotion to the statement. It seems interesting to find out about the mentioned friends in the so-called letter. We come across several mentions of **anarchist friends**, whom police officer Miller suspects of stealing Lazarus's body, as he informs Olga: "Last night […] your brother's body was not where it ought to be […]. It is obviously a flagrant desecration, a grievous sin. Perhaps your brother's **anarchist friends** […] *stole him from the grave"* (LP 84). To make the woman trust him, the police officer uses the adjectives *flagrant* and *grievous* to show his compassion. The construction *It is obviously* emphasises that such a perception of the event is common in this society. His attitude to the fact of the corpse's disappearance is just pragmatic, although "students must study. If they want to study they need **dead people**. **Dead people** are expensive. But there are free **dead people** in cemetery. Your friend Averbuch is **dead people**" (LP 54). Hemon uses epiphora and anaphora to create a greater emotional effect. The structure *Averbuch + is + dead people* is perceived as a generalisation of all the dead whose bodies are used by physicians for experiments. The police officer uses a common modal verb *must* to express obligation, which indicates that Miller sees nothing strange in such actions and accepts the statement as an indisputable rule.

On the first page of the novel, the name Isador is mentioned, but the reader is not explained who this character is. Only after Averbuch's death, we learn they were friends. The fact they were familiar is indicated by the Lazarus' reflection: "The trees here are watered by our blood, **Isador** would say, the streets paved with our bones; they eat our children for breakfast, then dump the leftovers in the garbage" (LP 11). The relative time denotation *Isador would say* forces the reader to plunge into the surrounding darkness and hopelessness, and also indicates that Isador's thoughts were not a secret to Lazarus. Hemon uses synecdoche: the character walks along Webster Street "where capitalists live" (LP 11) and realises that he lives in the world full of xenophobia and prejudice against immigrants.

The name Isador literally means *the gift of Isis*, and the main idea of God is freedom, but for such a gift to be effective, it must be accepted since "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness comes from me, says the Lord" (Isaiah 54.17). Only at the end of the novel does Isador gain the desired freedom thanks to Olga. She agrees to act in a play "because without her the whole edifice of closure and unity would collapse" (LP 110). The woman is crying during the funeral, and it is not clear that Olga mourns because she has betrayed her brother, who would not be buried according to the Jewish people's tradition: "Tears

burst into her eyes, down her cheeks, a sob heaves out of her body. […] she begins ululating incessantly: Lazarus [repeated 33 times] as though the word could recall him into existence" (LP 111). Hemon uses repetition to add emotion to the message. Charactonym is used 33 times—a number that indicates Christ's age: "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age" (Luke 3.23) and for three years he educated his disciples. The writer hints that it will only open at the end of the chapter: "WHAT STRENGTH IT takes **not to** break down, **not to** rave and wail, **not to** claw out Schuettler's serpentine eyes, **not to** push the rabbi into the grave, Rabbi Klopstock, who knows perfectly well what is in the coffin" (LP 110). Hemon capitalises the letters to emphasise the incredible effort a woman has to make to hide her secret pain she cannot reveal to anyone: "By distinguishing some units, parts of a sentence, and sometimes whole sentences, the author puts additional meanings into the context" (Bezrukov and Bohovyk 4). The parallel constructions' repetition *not to* + *infinitive* leads to the rhythm of the message and creates a sound effect of a chronometer.

The Ninth Letter. "*Dear Mother, You must forgive me for what I have done, but I chose life over death. God will take care of the dead. We have to take care of the living"* (LP 111). It is contrition in addressing the mother again: she was not able to protect Lazarus neither during his life nor after death. The woman chooses not her life. She continues to long for her brother and does not see the future, as "she cannot remember her life before Lazarus's death; that life took place in a different world" (LP 92). But Olga sets up the future for Isador who has been hidden in a coffin with Isaac Lubel's corpse: "THE CASKET LID is pried open; the corpse is lifted off Isador" (LP 111). The author capitalises words "to denote funeral objects, inducing the addressee's emotions because the reader takes in the cultural information throughout his/her life and responds to it accordingly and sometimes stereotypically" (Bezrukov and Bohovyk 6). A feeling of horror overwhelms the readers when they realise that there is an alive man under the corpse in the coffin. We see the place where Isador is with his eyes: "It is some kind of a cellar; it smells of clay and mold; it is hard to see into the dark corners" (LP 111). This is a kind of reminiscence of the biblical Lazarus's burial place: "It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it" (John 11.33). According to archaeological excavations, people were buried in natural caves in Jerusalem that were dark with mouldy clay walls. Finally, Isador and readers learn what Olga has already known: "The corpse is on the floor by the casket; his face is white as flour, splattered with dark spots, bloated like a bladder; his eyes are black patches—it takes a while for Isador to recognise Isaac Lubel [Olga's neighbour]" (LP 111). The view of the dead man resonates with the biblical

description "by this time he stinketh" (John 11.39), "he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes" (John 11.44). Isador avoids imprisoning by hiding in Isaac's coffin and perceives his "resurrection" like a miracle as he asks the police officers: "Am I dead?" (LP 111).

The Tenth Letter. "*Dear Mother, You will think me cruel and mad, but I cannot keep this inside me anymore. Lazarus has been slain like an animal for no reason at all and yet they call him an assassin. He—an assassin. There is no end to evil, it reaches us here too"* (LP 73). Olga calls herself *cruel* since she finally dares to tell the truth to her mother, but she understands that such news will not bring consolation to her or to her mother. And she names herself *mad*, since she does not believe in the inevitability of what has happened. The mention that the brother *was slain like an animal* is allusion to the rite of sacrifice the Jewish people had, where the lamb was defined by Jewish law as the Easter sacrifice. The figurative meaning of *sheep* and *flock* is enshrined in numerous figurative biblical contexts, creating a personalised symbolic name for the people of Israel who need the care of God. Extending the sentence with *for no reason at all* is allusion to Jesus who was sinless but took on the sins of the people: "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, **Behold the Lamb of God**, **which taketh away the sin of the world**" (John 1.29). But Olga is pushing to sacrifice her brother's body by Assistant Chief Schuettler to end the further anarchist attacks in Chicago: "Think of others, of their disrupted lives, he says. Imagine how they might feel. This is the time for sacrifice" (LP 33). The author uses epiphora they cal*l him an assassin. He – an assassin* as a means of adding emotions.

Hybrid Narratives of Historical and Biblical Storylines in Hemon's Theme

Olga's letters to her mother have prompted us to consider the detailed comparative analysis of the two characters' families. Vladimir Brik is the first to mention Lazarus Averbuch's and the biblical Lazarus's mothers: "And did the biblical Lazarus have a mother? What did she do when he was resurrected? Did he bid her good-bye before he returned to his undeath? Was he the same son to her undead as he was alive?" (LP 37). Hemon uses soliloquy to involve the character speaking his thoughts aloud. The monologue is shown in the form of questions the author leaves unanswered. The clarification can be found in the Bible: "Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of **Mary** and **her sister Martha**" (John 11.1). Little is known about Lazarus Averbuch's mother who was a sick woman as she "used to soak her varicose legs in a tub of hot water" (LP 12); she loved her little son as she "sang songs or recited nursery rhymes" (LP 24); she wrote letters to her matured son

to encourage and support him in his new place: "Don't despair […] but be brave and work hard. Know that we think of Olga and you, ceaselessly" (LP 32).

There is no mention of the biblical Lazarus's mother, but we read about his sisters: "Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of **Mary** and **her sister Martha**" (John 11.1).

Readers learn about Lazarus Averbuch's family from Olga's memoirs as to the pogrom of 1908, that is a historical fact: "No one moved: **Papa**'s face pressed against the floor in a puddle of blood; **Mother** lying on her side, […]; **Chaia** curled up, her knees to her chest […]; **Roza** on her back still" (LP 102). So, except for his older sister Olga, who actually took care of Lazarus Averbuch's mother, he also had sisters who died before his immigration to America.

The question is whether her character is the allusion to one from the Bible. We find a mention of Mary, the biblical Lazarus's sister in John: "It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and **wiped his feet with her hair**, whose brother Lazarus was sick" (John 11.2) and in the Gospel according to Luke: "And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner […] [who] began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet [Jesus's], and anointed them with the ointment" (Luke 7.37-38). The clergy note the two described Maries are different women but allusion of them to Olga is obvious.

Hemon describes Olga this way: "IT IS LATE MORNING when Olga limps into the Central Police Station, past a couple of policemen sniggering and exchanging lewd jokes about this disheveled tart, one shoe heel missing" (LP 62). Isador asks her: "Who is he? Is he your lover?" (LP 83). Even Lazarus, while travelling to Chicago, is not sure about his sister's moralities: "He **envisioned Isador** […] waiting for him **with Olga**. […] Or **perhaps she met someone else**; maybe she would wait for him **with her new man**, maybe even a real American goy" (LP 69). Olga, like Mary, is a sinner with a good heart: "**like the sister of the biblical Lazarus, she would go to any length to save her brother**" (LP 62).

There is allusion in Olga's behaviour. In the Bible, we find out that Mary is mourning her brother Lazarus: "sat still in the house" (Luke 11.20). After Olga learns that Lazarus is dead, she returns home: "The fire in the stove is still expiring with nauseating smoke" (LP 43). Both women are trying to survive their grief on their own. The author creates the hybrid of fiction and biblical characters.

Hemon uses a specific stylistic device of prosapodosis to connect the text with a refrain and takes the form of a rhetorical question: "Why does the Jewish day begin at sunset?" (LP 11, 43). In fact, there is the answer in the Bible: "Naming the light, Day, and the dark, Night. And **there was evening and there was morning,**

the first day" (Gen. 1.5). The biblical account of the first day of Creation is mentioned.

This is not the only technique to help the author connect the events as there are such coincidences: Lazarus and his sister Mary, Rora and his sister Azra, Lazarus and his sister Olga; a gung-ho reporter called Miller in the Bosnian War and the journalist Miller who writes up Lazarus's murder; the grant trustees the Schuettlers and Assistant Police Chief Schuettler; Brik is the name of one of the characters as well as one of Lazarus's teachers; Vladimir Brik lives in Chicago and the internet café in Kishinev is called Chicago. Similarities are flown from one chapter to another. In the beginning, the main characters' stories are represented one by one: each chapter is a story about one character but closer to the culmination events are interlaced with Vladimir Brik's life. The storyline is interrupted with the narrator's thoughts and flashbacks between the time of Lazarus's death and Brik's investigation of his life. In the last chapters, the life events are difficult to be separated from each character. Hemon seems to use the hybrid of the historical and biblical storylines in the presented theme.

What is the end of both Lazaruses' lives? After the resurrection, the biblical Lazarus lived 30 years more. While there is no further mention of Lazarus in the Bible, the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions mention his later life accounts. Lazarus Averbuch was killed by the police when "he was about 20" (LP 43), and in spite of his disappeared body he failed to be resurrected. There are only dreams of a little Jewish boy, as the allusion to the Paradise: "I imagine my life to be big, so big that I cannot see the end of it. […] You will be in it, Mother and Father will be in it […]. I will be in it […]. I have a picture of it in my head. It's a field in bloom so deep you can swim in it. I can see it now, and I cannot see its end" (LP 117). The refrain is Lazarus's words about his *big life* with the family in the big world.

In addition to its biblical, spiritual context, Hemon's novel raises more pragmatic issues of the modern world. By bringing past and present events together, the book suggests how they can communicate in order to make existence bearable via debate and acknowledgement of precariousness and interdependency (Mihăilescu 50). *The Lazarus Project* joins other Eastern European contemporary fiction and suggests how Eastern European societies and the American cultural space need to be engaged in an honest dialogue of mutual recognition.

Conclusion

The representation of historical events in fiction includes various narrative strategies

which appear to be the result of the complex interaction of existing cultural codes and the author's experience. The combination of historical facts and fiction in *The Lazarus Project* displays the hybridity of the narratives which perfectly resonates with the novel's theme of fragmented migrant identity and transcultural visions of contemporary postcolonial fiction.

The affiliation between biography and photography in Hemon's novel allows us to consider the whole text as a complex metaphor characterised by a strong relationship to the world. The forms of narration correspond to the way language works while the conjunction of text and image emphasises verbal and visual realms of the author's story, transcending national and aesthetic barriers. This also makes readers be unsure whose story is being told due to the inclusion of stories about Lazarus in the chapters about Brik and the various linguistic parallels.

Finding a balance among religion, art, and human as an integral part of history takes place, in particular, through the inclusion of the biblical themes in the text, which can be the basis for expressing the author's ideas about the real causes of human existence. In this perspective, both historical narratives and their transformations in fiction are shown.

The novel is greatly based on the life and murder of a young Jewish immigrant to Chicago whose real story captures a "new" US citizen, a journalist from a Chicago newspaper, a hundred years after his death. This stresses not only that alienation for immigrants has meant falls and murder but also draws parallels between the xenophobic fear of anarchism and the status of immigrants in today's America.

The hybrid identity allows for the perpetuation of the local in the context of the global. A reflexive relationship between the different forms of reality representation in the historical, fictional, and biblical dimensions in Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* underlines the postmodern nature of the novel as a new literary hybrid.

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