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MAPPING THE METAFICTIONAL: ALEKSANDAR HEMON'S *THE LAZARUS* *PROJECT* AS A POSTMODERN NARRATIVE

The aim of the paper is to present Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* as a post-modern narrative which employs various strategies such as an altered view of history – namely history serving purely as material to construct a new narrative – a growing emphasis on the manner in which space affects one's identity and overall hybridity in both the narrative structure and the characters themselves. We shall discuss Linda Hutcheon's notion of historiographic metafiction as the key concept around which the narrative is formed, followed by a view of the characters' search for identity in the metafictional labyrinth through Fredric Jameson's concept of cognitive mapping. These two theories combined give us a more detailed look into the narrative structure of the novel and provide evidence of its postmodernity. The aforementioned hybridity will be presented in the context of the narrative structure resembling a loop due to its metafictional nature and through the amalgam of various nationalities in each character. The paper ultimately strives to express the postmodern characteristics of the narrative and draw attention to the way the themes of the literary work are emphasized by such a structure, more so than if any other narrative structure had been used.

Key words: *maps, historiographic metafiction, postmodernism, identity, hybridity*

INTRODUCTION

Aleksandar Hemon's novel *The Lazarus Project* presents us with an intricate yet subtle style that emphasizes major themes through its narrative structure. Vladimir Brik, a Bosnian writer residing in Chicago, sets out to write the century-old story of Lazarus Averbuch, a Jewish immigrant expelled from Kishinev during the pogrom and killed by the Chicago Chief of Police in 1908. The stories of the two characters intertwine and create an effect of overall loss and confusion which enables the readers to better

grasp the perspective of the protagonists. Hemon's narrative endorses the dominant theme of social and spatial displacement. Relying on postmodern theories by authors such as Linda Hutcheon, Fredric Jameson and Donna Haraway, we shall determine how the literary techniques in question affect the narrative and its reception. Jameson's notion of cognitive mapping will be applied to Brik's journey from Chicago to Kishinev in an attempt to discover Lazarus's life, while Haraway's cyborg identity will be recontextualized so as to include the fractured immigrant identity portrayed in the novel. Hemon's usage of historical facts fits into what Linda Hutcheon defined as historiographic metafiction. Our goal is not simply to identify the novel as a postmodern narrative, but to show how this specific narrative structure serves to highlight the loss of space and identity connected with immigration. Writing a novel that functions within two temporal and spatial frames and is physically interrupted by another medium was not without cause as it strengthens the readers' experience.

THE LAZARUS PROJECT AS HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION

Aleksandar Hemon presents us with a historical event that is enriched by his imaginative storytelling, an event in which gaps have been filled in order to present a different perspective. As such, Hemon's novel can be seen as historiographic metafiction in the same rank as those recognized in detailed studies conducted by Linda Hutcheon, Patricia Waugh, Amy Elias. Some novels that display a similar treatment of historical facts, as well as that of historical figures, are Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Christa Wolf's *Cassandra*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Don DeLillo's *Libra*, etc. Hemon uses archival evidence in the form of photographs, similarly to DeLillo who makes use of official reports and testimonies given by Lee Harvey Oswald in his rewriting of the assassination of president J. F. Kennedy. Morrison's novel rewrites history from an African American vantage point in order to bring justice to those who had previously been silenced, just as Hemon gives voice to the marginalized immigrants. The paper aims not only to present Hemon's novel as a work of historiographic metafiction, as it has been already identified as such in previous research. The main goal is to discuss the novel's technique and merits by showing it in the broader context of postmodern narratives. Literary techniques may

be used to emphasize the theme and contribute to the characterization and readers' perception of the events in question.

The Lazarus Project has been presented as an autobiographical novel in previous research by Wendy Ward (2011), Johanne Helbo Bøndergaard (2017) and Angeliki Tseti (2019), drawing upon theories of memory and trauma. In an interview, Aleksandar Hemon stated that:

The biographical proximity of Brik and me might have been my tactical mistake, in many ways – I counted on people seeing the differences. For I never, ever, not for a moment did I think that any of my books are autobiographical. When I read those books, I do not see myself. Something I wrote might trigger a memory, reflect something that pertained to my life, but the moment it entered the narrative, the moment it entered this world that is built on other people, whom I imagined and made up, that's no longer anything to do with me – the 'I' in my book is not me. (Boswell, 2015, p. 256–257)

This clarification on the part of the author enables us to move away from the novel's common (mis)interpretations and direct our attention to its identifying potential. Composed in such a manner, the novel gives rise to themes of identity and the development of one's identity in relation to spatial questions.

In postmodernism, we may notice familiar contexts being used to construct new works and material which has been repurposed and repackaged to suit a new cultural logic, as F. Jameson would term it. In doing so, the notion of history is being challenged which leads literary critics to rethink the function of the past in the creation of present works. It is implied that there is no genuine historicity, but only a perception of it as the substance that aids literary creation: "Faced with these ultimate objects – our social, historical and existential present, and the past as a 'referent' – the incompatibility of a postmodernist nostalgia art language with genuine historicity becomes drastically apparent" (Jameson, 1991, p. 67). The work now becomes solely a representation of a past historical context that provides the postmodern author with ample opportunities for "building" a new narrative.

The past is presented in a postmodern manner in the *The Lazarus Project*, as a mere representation and parade of dusty spectacles that mean nothing to the spectator. This can be seen during the novel's celebration organized

for the Bosnian Independence Day. There is a series of speeches and an art exhibition, followed by a choir of kids in traditional attire that “struggles with a traditional Bosnian song, their hearing and accent forever altered by American teenagehood [...] No one in the audience has ever worn such clothes in their lives” (Hemon, 2008, ch. 1). The past in the novel is nothing more than a series of changing images toward which the audience feels no connection. It serves as material for storytelling. Iuliana's speech about the history of the pogrom merely retold the past as if it meant nothing. She mechanically memorized words with no substance, not even pausing to think about the meaning they carry: “She clearly knew these lines by heart [...] I wondered how often she delivered this speech, in her nearly fluent English” (Hemon, 2008, ch. 18).

As Linda Hutcheon (1988, p. 92) points out, metafictional novels “acknowledge their own constructing, ordering, and selecting processes, but these are always shown to be historically determined as acts. It puts into question, at the same time as it exploits the grounding of historical knowledge, in the past real” (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 92). This is what Hutcheon terms historiographical metafiction. What it accomplishes is pulling focus away from the imposed meaning of the past and shines a light on different perspectives of the same story and its multiple versions. Historiographic metafiction focuses on those “ex-centric¹ parts of society, traditionally excluded from fiction and history” (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 89). These formerly excluded figures have been highlighted in postmodern literature, modifying the way history is perceived. “Historiographic metafiction self-consciously reminds us that, while events did occur in the real empirical past, we name and constitute those events as historical facts by selection and narrative positioning” (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 97).

The way historiographic metafiction functions is by discovering gaps in the historical events in question and filling them in order to present a complete and coherent narrative. “All past ‘events’ are potential historical

¹ Based on Linda Hutcheon's view, the center in postmodern no longer holds. Room must be made for a decentered perspective of those who were previously marginalized, whom she terms the *ex-centric*. “The ‘ex-centric’ (be it in class, race, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity) take on new significance in the light of the implied recognition that our culture is not really the homogeneous monolith (that is middleclass, male, heterosexual, white, western) we might have assumed” (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 12).

‘facts’, but the ones that become facts are those that are chosen to be narrated” (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 75). The postmodern author holds the power and occupies the position of the historian. He will seek out the missing pieces of a story, just as historians “fill in the gaps and create ordering structures which may be further disrupted by new textual inconsistencies that will force the formation of new totalizing patterns” (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 87). The question of historiographic metafiction leads us to the ever elusive distinction between historical truth and historical fiction. This opposition is an unstable one as its boundaries may often be blurred and distorted in literature. Both history and fiction are acts of construction, the main difference being that history is supposed to be a faithful representation of reality, while historical fiction subjectively reinvents and reshapes past events based on ideological perspectives. In defining metafiction Patricia Waugh (1984) focuses more on the distinction between fiction and reality, while Linda Hutcheon’s definition of historiographic metafiction is based on the reworking of past events so as to emphasize the neglected voice of the ex-centric individual and the existence of multiple truths (as opposed to one Truth). Metafiction is

a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality [...] Such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (Waugh, 1984, p. 2)

When discussing the ontological status of literary fiction philosophers usually fall into two categories: “falsity” theorists, who believe fiction is lies, and “non-referentiality” theorists, who argue that it is not appropriate to discuss the status of truthfulness of a literary work. Waugh proposes a third category which metafictional authors have adopted and that is the *alternative worlds theory*.

Statements in the real world have their ‘truth’ in the context of a world which *they* help to construct. Fiction is merely a different set of ‘frames’, a different set of conventions and constructions. In this view, a fictional character is ‘unreal’ in one sense, but characters who are not persons are still ‘real’, still exist, within their particular worlds. (Waugh, 1984, p. 100)

In the case of texts which include historical people and events we may match those figures to their counterparts in the real world, but they are always recontextualized when represented in a literary work. "So history, although ultimately a material reality (a presence), is shown to exist always within 'textual' boundaries," (Waugh, 1984, p. 106) essentially making history fictional as well.

The narrator begins *The Lazarus Project* by distancing himself from the factuality and accuracy of the book, instilling doubt in the readers about the truthfulness of the account. "The time and place are the only things I am certain of: March 2, 1908, Chicago. Beyond that is the haze of history and pain, and I now plunge" (Hemon, 2008, ch. 1). Research into the life and death of Lazarus raises more questions than answers:

Was he angry when he went to Shippy's house? Did he want to tell him something? He was fourteen in 1903, at the time of the pogrom. Did he remember it in Chicago? Was he a survivor who resurrected in America? Did he have nightmares about it? Did he read books that promised better, new worlds? (Hemon, 2008, ch. 4)

Brik's decision to plunge into the narrative haze is one that is interpreted as an attempt to transform it into something more concrete. He wishes to discover the answers to the previous questions and give meaning to Lazarus's death. There were a lot of gaps in the story of Lazarus Averbuch, information which was not readily available in archives and even information which to that day remained a complete mystery. In the novel, there are descriptions of certain situations which the author could not possibly have known about from authentic historical sources, but instead used his literary imagination to complete:

Here [Chernowitz] he [Lazarus] lived at a barrack with other pogrom survivors who escaped from Kishinev to the safety of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. With the survivors he spoke Yiddish and Russian, German with the Austro-Hungarian soldiers guarding the camp. Some of those soldiers must have been Bosnian, he must have marveled at their fezzes, their wide faces and bright eyes. This was how I *imagined* it. (Hemon, 2008, ch. 10, emphasis added)

There is no historical proof of Lazarus's activity in Chernowitz, and it is implausible that one should know his innermost thoughts and aspirations.

We see the narrator of the story filling in the gap with imagined parts, as he admits himself. In order to answer questions that were left open, the narrator has to rely on his imagination and narrative skill. Another example is that it is not likely that the narrator knew what Lazarus said to the owner of the lozenge store, nor what he read on the bulletin board in the shop. Such details represent the author's creative freedom and gap-filling, as it is impossible to know if Lazarus actually read these announcements, or even if they were displayed in the store the morning of his visit. There is no historical account of Lazarus buying the lozenges. The postmodern author wishes to move away from totalizing patterns and move towards establishing new perspectives without imposed endings. A postmodern narrative is characterized by its instability and the fact that it contains multiple different voices, making more than one truth possible. The postmodern novel asserts that "there are only *truths* in the plural, and never one Truth" (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 109). Presenting the truths of previously neglected races, nationalities, and sexes is the mode in which postmodernism operates:

In the place of this universal history, the postmodern presents multiple, conflicting, 'finite' histories. No longer presented as the story of the grand, the infinite, progress of mankind from creation to salvation, history splits into multiple versions and narrative types that are generated by the needs and desires of particular communities whose conflicting ideals can never be reconciled in a universal system. (Malpas, 2005, p. 98)

We may find multiple truths within a work, depending on the perspective from which the narrative is written and upon whom the emphasis is placed. In the case of this novel, the grand narrative of the Caucasian American is replaced by the life story of a marginalized, dark-skinned Jew. The story of the immigrant is central and relating his perspective while exploring hidden aspects of his life is the purpose of narration. An immigrant in modernist literature was unheard, unnoticed, and unimportant. The main difference in characterization between modernism and postmodernism is the change in focus – the narrative strategy of making an immigrant the center of a novel. Postmodern authors strive to prevent any work from being conclusive and teleological. Narratives are no longer considered an objective retelling of past events, but a "creation" that provides new particular meaning to the past.

The metafictional element pertains to the blurred boundary between reality and fiction, that is, not having a definitive view of who is speaking. We may observe a combination of the author's and the narrator's voice, proving that there is no definitive way to determine whose voice we are hearing at any given moment in the text. Historiographic metafiction is "a self-conscious mode of writing, a writing that 'meta-fictionally' comments on and investigates its own status as fiction as well as questioning our ideas of the relation between fiction, reality and truth" (Malpas, 2005, p. 26). Novels that can be identified as historiographic metafiction have an overtly ambivalent attitude toward the separation of reality and fiction. We may observe intratextual references, as well as references to the world outside of the novel, further emphasizing the vague nature of the narrative. Metafictional novels "play freely with the idea that they are not just representations of the world but novels" (Lucy, 2016, p. 192). Another way to blur the boundaries between reality and fiction while composing a metafictional novel is to include actual archive evidence from various sources which Hutcheon sees as the fact that "postmodern texts consistently use and abuse actual historical documents and documentation in such a way as to stress both the discursive nature of those representations of the past and the narrativized form in which we read them" (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 87). The narration, in such cases, is overtly displayed, "but [events] are shown to be consciously composed into a narrative, whose *constructed* – not found – order is imposed upon them, often overtly by the narrating figure" (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 66, emphasis added). The narrator's discussion of the process of writing is overtly displayed, portraying a narrative which is indeed not only about another narrative but the nature of literary composition.

THE SPATIAL SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

A significant change occurred on the cusp of modernism and postmodernism and that is the so-called *spatial turn*. Michael Foucault states that "the great haunting obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history [...] The present epoch would perhaps rather be the epoch of space" (Foucault, 2008, p. 14). Space became an important factor in people's lives as it started to define the way the world is perceived. Fredric Jameson discusses how our experience is "dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time" (Jameson, 1991, p. 64) emphasizing the role of

space in forming one's identity. Jameson believed that a change in space greatly affects people's identities, as they need time to adapt to the new space:

My implication is that we ourselves, the human subjects who happen into this new space, have not kept pace with that evolution; there has been a mutation in the object, unaccompanied as yet by any equivalent mutation in the subject; we do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace, as I will call it, in part because our perceptual habits were formed in that older kind of space I have called the space of high modernism. (Jameson, 1991, p. 80)

What Jameson proposes as a solution to the crisis caused by this new space is cognitive mapping. A cognitive map is used "to enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of the city's structure as a whole" (Jameson, 1991, p. 90). We shall view mapping in both the literal and figurative sense in our endeavor to understand Hemon's novel. Both establishing one's physical position in space and "mapping" in the socio-cultural context can be found in the text. Mapping in the socio-cultural context refers to characters finding their place in the social paradigm, acclimating to the new environment, finding balance between their heritage and the new society they have entered.

We can see how space plays a major role in determining our identity. Immigrants are faced with what Jameson presents as the shock one goes through when switching to the postmodern hyperspace. The space they have known and felt comfortable in has suddenly changed entirely and they must learn to adapt, though not sufficiently equipped. The new space feels chaotic and frightening, violating everything they had previously believed in. A process of adaptation follows and we notice the characters starting to acclimate slowly by finding jobs, making new friends, learning the language of the new space. Their identities are starting to be shaped by the new space. Being away from home, the influence the "old space" has on one's identity starts to weaken but it does not disappear; elements of it will always remain, either concealed or visible. The difference between Brik and Lazarus in the novel is that Brik was less conspicuous as an immigrant. He was more successful in the acculturation process which can be seen by him marrying an American and completely mastering the

language, while Lazarus remained in the low stages of the process. Brik's life is what Lazarus was dreaming of and what Olga envisioned for her brother – to marry a nice girl in America and to find employment as a journalist for the *Hebrew Voice*.

The novel operates on three temporal planes and two spatial planes: the past of Lazarus Averbuch, the present of Vladimir Brik and the future of the planned book by Brik. The spatial aspect of the novel can be seen in the two trajectories, namely Lazarus's journey from Kishinev to Chicago and Brik's mapping of Lazarus's journey from Chicago to Kishinev. The novel employs "a time geographical approach to narrative structure that views space as fundamentally shaped by the complexities of several different diasporic passages" (Allen Jung, 2018, p. 53). Space is shifted from the beginning of the novel as Brik's movement away from Chicago ensues. He believes himself to be getting closer to Lazarus through this movement, but at the end of the novel we see that he gets more confused about his own life. Brik's confusion and crisis is made evident by his decision to stay in Sarajevo until he sorts some things out.

The focus of our research shall be the spatial element of identity in terms of nationality and feeling connected to the place where one was born. One's place of birth holds considerable meaning, as it shapes the behavior, memories and values of a person – or to put it in one word, one's identity. Everything that we know about ourselves from an early age stems from our feeling of belonging to a certain group, whether that is family on a smaller scale or a nation on a larger scale. We identify with our culture and feel we *are* our nationality:

Everyone imagines they have a center, the seat of their soul, if you believe in that kind of thing. I've asked around, and most people told me that the soul is somewhere in the abdominal area – a foot or above the asshole. But even if the center is elsewhere in the body – the head, the throat, the heart – it is fixed there, it does not move around [...] I realized that my center had shifted – it used to be in my stomach, but now it was in my breast pocket, where I kept my American passport and a wad of cash. (Hemon, 2008, ch. 14).

Our soul, that is, the essence of our identity is rooted in our nationality. Thus space is seen as shaping people's identities. "Place is not just a mere

ornamental background for the story's action; rather, it is (experienced by the characters and the reader as) a central event of the story and any action is (experienced by the characters and the reader as) being shaped, to some extent at least, by the event of place" (Frank, 2014, p. 63).

The journey Brik was planning to take in order to learn more about Lazarus involved physically being in the same places as he once was. He felt that this was the only way to get closer to Lazarus and discover more about his life and motivations. Brik couldn't finish his book and gain enough understanding of the subject without spatially mapping his life. Mapping serves as a tool to make sense of the various stories and material gathered from the archives. The travel itinerary was as follows: Lviv, Chernivtsi, Kishinev, as these are the cities Lazarus spent time in on his journey to Chicago: "I needed to follow Lazarus all the way back to the pogrom in Kishinev, to the time before America. I needed to reimagine what I could not retrieve; I needed to see what I could not imagine. I needed to step outside my life in Chicago and spend time deep in the wilderness of elsewhere" (Hemon, 2008, ch. 4). Brik realizes that the only way to fully understand Lazarus is by retracing his steps in Europe and investigating the space from which Lazarus arrived. "Brik's journey to the 'old world,' ostensibly in search of clues pertaining to Lazarus's origin, but in fact seeking for some clues of his own, unhinges him from his American grounding and casts him as the *perpetual migrant, the eternal transient, always adrift, never 'at home.'*" (Weiner, 2014, p. 230, emphasis added). Movement and mapping are attempts on Brik's part to regain control over his life, to reconnect with space and to overcome anxiety over the loss of a tangible experience. His disorientation is caused by his inability to precisely define both his and Lazarus's existence.

McHale claims that "postmodernist fiction draws upon a number of strategies for constructing/deconstructing space" (McHale, 1987, p. 45) one of which is *superimposition*. He defines superimposition as a strategy in which "two familiar spaces are placed one on top of the other, as in a photographic double-exposure, creating through their tense and paradoxical coexistence a third space identifiable with neither of the original two – a zone" (McHale, 1987, p. 46). This new space, or in our case, identity, can not be identified through its parts as it represents a completely new entity. The merging of spaces is central in creating an immigrant identity, thus

making an immigrant an inherently postmodern figure. Identity is constituted by space and being nowhere, being unable to find oneself in space and determine which space one belongs to leads to a crisis of identity. The space that is causing the chaotic experience must be reclaimed and internalized more coherently in order to stop serving as a source of anxiety. This is precisely what the immigrants set out to do as they accept their new environment and try to fit into it, attempting to make the most of their new spatial experience. Hybridity starts to be noticed in the identities of these characters as they merge their former identities with their new ones. This hybrid *creature*, which is created as a result of the merger of two spaces, may be viewed as a *cyborg identity*.

I AM BOTH - THE CYBORG IDENTITY OF IMMIGRANTS

Donna Haraway (1991, p. 149) defines a cyborg as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction”. A cyborg can be understood figuratively as a combination of any two elements such as race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, etc. In our case, we shall focus on the interpretation of an immigrant as a cyborg personality. A cyborg does not have an origin story in the Western and traditional sense which may be said for our immigrant characters as well, as their origin is a tumultuous one. The space of their origin is not the space they were able to remain in. Instead they were forced (either literally as Lazarus was in the pogrom, or as Brik who was trying to find better opportunities for himself) to leave their home and establish themselves in a new space. Because our characters lack the origin story which is associated with unity, we may perceive them as fragmented and fractured individuals. The identity of an immigrant is postmodern in itself because it is fragmented and has a duality about it.

“So I had a crazy, liberating feeling that my life was neatly divided: all of my now in America, all of my past in Sarajevo”. Rora disagrees and says “Sarajevo is Sarajevo whatever you see or don't see”. (Hemon, 2008, ch. 16). Brik's Bosnian and American life are not completely divided but instead elements of the life he left behind in Sarajevo are always present. Though not overtly visible, they make up a large part of his identity and cannot be completely eradicated by a change of space. The American

aspect is added to his identity creating the merged cyborg entity. In an interview Hemon once said:

I am an American *and* Bosnian writer and I like to think that what happens in my books and in my life is that those two spaces overlap. They overlap through the experience of immigration and diaspora, and they also overlap because I want them to overlap—I write about people who are finding ways to live in the States because their life is defined by their Bosnian experience. So this multiplicity of identities or double identities, these are not necessarily mutually exclusive and they don't create a vacuum but rather create an *overlapping space* where interesting things happen. (Reyn, 2010, emphasis added)

“There is nothing about being ‘female’ that naturally binds women. There is not even such as state as ‘being’ female” (Haraway, 1991, p. 155). Just as Haraway points out in the case of feminism, we shall apply this to the case of nationalities and religions. There is no inherent quality of being a Bosnian or a Jew that shapes one's identity, but rather the influence of the environment that molds the hybrid identity of the cyborg immigrant. We are not born as a certain nationality or religion. Instead, we are assigned those characteristics based on space. Our place of birth, culture and tradition define what we will be and subsequently, our surroundings and heritage influence our identity. What happens when this identity is destabilized by a change of space? We need to build a new identity around the new space. As previously mentioned, the old identity does not disappear but is merged with the new one. A third entity, that is, identity, is formed that contains elements of both. Brik is neither Bosnian nor American, he is a unique combination of the two that creates a completely new identity. Lazarus is not entirely Jewish, nor entirely American; he is a hybrid immigrant identity. They are *both*:

“See, I am actually Bosnian,” I said [...]

“You are strange,” she said. “I thought you were from America.”

“Yeah, I am now from America, *too*.” (Hemon, 2008, ch. 18, emphasis added)

Brik has two faces, that is, two sides of his identity – a Bosnian and an American face. These “faces” are elements that are combined to produce the new hybrid identity. “Mary could see no deep face of mine, because she

did not know what my life in Bosnia had been like, what made me, what I had come from; she could see only my American face, acquired through failing to be the person I wanted to be" (Hemon, 2008, ch. 8).

What Brik and Lazarus have in common is that they are both writers (or aspiring to become so). Writing is a way of expression that enables an individual to organize his/her experience and make sense of the surroundings. "Writing is pre-eminently the technology of cyborgs [...] Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism" (Haraway, 1991, p. 176). Cyborgs manifest a need to write in order to give life structure and meaning through words. Writing is how the cyborg identity gives its life meaning and order. By writing they establish their place and make sense of all of the confusion that surrounds them. The one code represents racism, hatred, stereotypes and anti-Semitism present in the novel. Writing, that is, struggling for one's own language, gives Brik the ability to fight the predominant code and give voice to silenced, marginalized and ex-centric individuals.

Brik feels that by writing the story of Lazarus he is writing his own life, attempting to understand his own confusion and sense of displacement. The novel he wishes to write is motivated both by his identification with Lazarus and desire to "become someone else" (Hemon, 2008, ch. 10). Brik states that he "absolutely needed to write the Lazarus book" (ibid). The readers are never informed when the writing of the novel begins, or even what the exact plan for its structure is (whether it is imagined as a story solely about Lazarus or a merger of juxtaposed narratives).

WHOSE NOVEL ARE WE READING?

Brik plans to write a book that is intended to be a historical narrative about the strange and mysterious death of Lazarus Averbuch:

I wanted *my future book* to be about the immigrant who escaped the pogrom in Kishinev and came to Chicago only to be shot by the Chicago chief of police. I wanted to be immersed in the world as it had been in 1908, I wanted to imagine how immigrants lived then. I loved doing research,

porting through old newspapers and books and photos, reciting curious facts on a whim. (Hemon, 2008, ch. 4, emphasis added)

The novel is metafictional in that it features the story of an author researching and writing a story about the historical figure Lazarus Averbuch – essentially, Hemon himself and Brik are undertaking the same endeavor. Could this *future book* that Brik mentions be the very novel we are reading? The motivation for Brik’s European journey is to uncover information about Lazarus in order to write a novel about his life and untimely death. Brik says: “I understood that not only did I have to find a way to go to Kishinev as soon as possible, but that Rora had to come along. It seemed to me that if he didn’t come along I would never see him again, and I needed him around, for his silence, for his *stories*, for his *camera*” (Hemon, 2008, ch. 4, emphasis added). Stories of Rora’s past, his jokes and anecdotes are interwoven in the chapters about Brik, creating a large part of the narrative. This provides material for Brik’s writing.

Another form of material provided by Rora is the photographs he would take on the journey: “He could take photos. I didn’t know how he would use them, but I could put some of them in my book when I wrote it” (Hemon, 2008, ch. 4). The novel includes contemporary photos from European landscapes which can be viewed as photos taken by Rora, meaning the photos taken by Rora have already been included and the novel we are reading is Brik’s finished product – a narrative including both the story of Lazarus and the process of gathering the information necessary to compose it. This leads us to believe that this book is the book Brik intended to write, making it a metafictional work that comments on the process of writing. Brik never specifically says what his *Lazarus project* is, whether it is a book only containing information about Lazarus or the story of his discovery of Lazarus, tales of his travels and musings on the event. During one of their conversations, Brik tells Rora:

You’re making up these stories I said.

I wish, he said.

You should write it all down.

I took photos.

You must write it down.

That’s what I have you for. That’s why I brought you along. (Hemon, 2008, ch. 6)

This excerpt points to the possibility that Hemon has been writing down Rora's stories, only to use them for the composition of "The Lazarus Project". The novel we are reading does in fact include Rora's stories, jokes and anecdotes.

MÖBIUS STRIP-LIKE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

We assume that the work we are reading in its entirety is the finished product of Brik's intentions. The narrative of Brik's journey ends when the writing is supposed to begin, thus propelling us back to the beginning of the book. There is no clear beginning or ending, as it remains unclear which segments are fiction and which reality. The novel's structure reminds us of a Möbius strip.² There is no end, just a return to the beginning. In other words, the narrative we begin reading when we open the novel represents the end of Brik's journey when he began composing it. Brik presents the readers with the idea that he has not yet written his "project", however, these sections appear side by side with a completed story about Lazarus which we do not know the origin of. There is no way to determine which parts of the novel were written first or if any elements actually precede the others. "This open-ended, cyclic, and often labyrinth-like dynamic resonates with the migratory, transient aspect of the novel, and with its unresolved quests and journeys" (Weiner, 2014, p. 217).

The Möbius strip-like narrative structure intensifies the experience of a postmodern narrative as it fragments not only its characters but the readers' experience as well. It moves away from the traditional understanding of the novel as having a clear beginning, middle and end. This type of narrative structure is not without cause. The fragmented reading experience emphasizes the fractured nature of the characters' identities and life experiences. It is perfectly suited to display the story of hybrid, cyborg, immigrant identities as they are ex-centric and marginalized perspectives. The purpose of using this type of structure, or better said, the purpose of de-structuring the narrative, is to make the readers feel just as confused and lost as the protagonists felt.

² A Möbius strip is a one-sided continuous surface, formed by twisting a long narrow rectangular strip of material through 180° and joining the ends.

Source: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/mobius-strip> [Accessed: 9 June 2020].

The two narratives, namely the story of displaced Bosnian writer Vladimir Brik and the story of a Russian Jewish immigrant, are interwoven using textual allusions and visual montage. The structure of the narrative evokes feelings of confusion and displacement. As the novel is nearing the end it becomes unclear which story we are reading as elements from the sections about Lazarus are more frequently used in those concerning Brik's journey. The line is fairly clear at the beginning of the narrative, but as the story progresses it becomes blurred. Proximity to space that Lazarus occupied brings Brik closer to him, thus resulting in a mixed narrative. Another narrative feature that confuses the readers is the various parallels between the two sections, both linguistic and in terms of the characterization.

The linguistic parallels can be found in lines spoken by the characters in both sections which perfectly echo each other. This emphasizes the connection between the novel's segments and provides further evidence of its Möbius strip-like narrative structure. The first parallel is found in the description of Lazarus's and Brik's physical appearance. Namely, when describing a picture of his ancestor and the resemblance between them, Brik says he has "the same prominent cheekbones, and large, apish ears, the same hirsute eyebrows" (Hemon, 2008, ch. 8). Lazarus was described by the police report as having "pronounced cheekbones" and "oversized simian ears" (Hemon, 2008, ch. 7). In addition to serving as a linguistic parallel that echoes in the readers' mind and connects the two separate narratives within the novel, it also leads the readers to visualize the two characters similarly. Brik sees himself in Lazarus and identifies with his struggle of first coming to America: "I had to admit that I *identified* easily with those travails: lousy jobs, lousier tenements, the acquisition of language, the logistics of survival, the ennoblement of self-fashioning" (Hemon, 2008, ch. 4, emphasis added). Brik had the chance to overcome that struggle, take control of the new space and fully establish his American identity, while Lazarus was deprived of that opportunity. His character may be seen as what Lazarus would have grown into had it not been for his premature death. This accentuates the similarities between these two characters, making it only more difficult to tell them apart throughout the novel.

Furthermore, both Olga and Brik write imaginary letters in which they use a pleading tone and demand to know why they have been left in *the woods*. Olga, in an imagined letter to her mother, writes: "Lord, why did you leave

me in these dark woods? (Hemon, 2008, ch. 7). Brik, in an imaged letter to his wife Mary, writes: "Why did you leave me in these woods?" (Hemon, 2008, ch. 22). In another letter to her mother, Olga writes "I chose life over death. God will take care of the dead. We have to take care of the living" (Hemon, 2008, ch. 21), a line which is previously uttered by the director of the Jewish Center in Chernivtsi, Chaim: "You are only interested in the dead. God will take care of the dead. We need to take care of the living" (Hemon, 2008, ch. 12). Linguistic parallels may also be seen in the names of various supporting characters, as the same names/surnames are used in both sections of the novel. The Assistant Chief of Police Schuettler in the Lazarus story shares the name with Bill and Susie Schuettler whose research grant funds Brik's project. The name Olga (Lazarus's sister) is used for Brik's aunt whom he tells an anecdote about. Finally, both stories feature a reporter named Miller – Miller is the reporter that covers Lazarus's death and one of the main figures of Rora's stories featuring Rambo.

If the chapters regarding Lazarus are seen as the finished product of Brik's project then the narrative structure of this novel features a book-within-a-book. There are two frame narratives featured in the novel, neatly alternating between chapters, that is, divided into those chapters concerning Lazarus's death and those concerning Brik's journey. But the division of the chapters is not as straightforward as is initially suggested. In the final chapters of the novel elements of the Lazarus story enter Brik's sections and the narrative boundaries become blurred as the line is crossed.

PHOTOGRAPHY-EMBEDDED FICTION

The novel includes twenty-two images, each image serving as a heading for the chapters. The photographs alternate in accordance with the story, that is, archived photos forefront chapters about Lazarus, while contemporary photos are used to introduce the chapters about Brik. When asked about including images, documents and footnotes in his fiction Hemon answered:

Photographs authenticate themselves, but they cannot interpret themselves. Language – particularly literary language – cannot authenticate itself; it is not a trace of anything material. But language in a novel, say, has interpretative possibilities inscribed in itself [...] My interest in photography is

related to my interest in constructing realities, to the relation between truth and fiction in literature. (Knight, 2009, p. 87).

A photograph provides its viewer with plenty of room for interpretation, presenting a captured moment in time that can be preceded and followed by anything. The nature of this visual medium seeks the readers'/viewers' interpretation, making it possible to inscribe any meaning. A medium such as this is compatible with a postmodern narrative because it brings forth the existence of multiple truths. Walter Benjamin saw photography as a medium capable of uncovering details not visible to the naked eye, claiming that it can "bring out those aspects of the original that are unattainable to the naked eye yet accessible to the lens, which is adjustable and chooses its angle at will" (Benjamin, 2007, p. 220). The images thus underline the postmodern, fragmented nature of the narrative, as they serve to reveal hidden aspects of a situation much like the postmodern narrative presents marginalized perspectives. The photographs of Lazarus are re-contextualized and repurposed which in turn subverts their original intention and meaning.

The fragmented identity of the characters is expressed through the novel's structure. The inclusion of photography emphasizes the fractured structure of the novel as it appropriately depicts the consciousness of an immigrant. The duality of the narrative underscores the duality of the characters, namely the fact that they simultaneously belong to two times, two spaces, two nations. The readers are presented with a narrative in which two mediums overlap – the textual and the visual. The hybridity of this narrative perfectly displays one of its main themes. Just as the identities of the characters are divided, the novel itself is divided by the images. The images are placed between the alternating chapters and their position separates the past and the present and the different spaces the novel depicts. The images used for the chapters about Lazarus are taken from the archives of the Chicago Historical Society, while the images introducing the Brik chapters are contemporary photos taken by Velibor Bozovic. While initially seemingly helpful to the readers, upon closer examination it becomes clear that the images only contribute to the fragmented, fractured and unstable nature of the novel. The images are all surrounded by a wide black frame and presented in black-and-white. This formatting makes it more difficult to discern their content, namely, it is often unclear what

the image depicts and which time frame/space it belongs to. The included images do not clarify the structure of the novel. "Instead, the ambiguous (at times indecipherable) nature of the photographs and their incorporation complicates the text and generates indeterminacy" (Ward, 2011, p. 194).

"Hemon purposefully allows his narrative to clash with the images, a strategy consistent with his belief in the plurality of truths and in his understanding of the ways in which representation (verbal and visual) can distort" (Weiner, 2014, p. 226). The clash between Hemon's verbal and visual representation can be exemplified in the photos of Olga and Lazarus heading chapters 11 and 21 respectively. The description of the characters' physical state is not in accordance with what is presented in the photographs. Olga is described as a poor seamstress and Isador as an anarchist covered in feces for most of the novel, which contradicts the well-dressed figures in the portraits. The images "clear the space for fictionalization and the narrative imagination by provoking the readers' own explanations" (Ward, 2011, p. 196). The blurred images emphasize the interpretive potential and present the readers with the power to understand them in various ways. This points to the existence of multiple truths, as more than one explanation of the images is possible.

CONCLUSION

Hemon uses a historical event as material for constructing the novel. Some aspects of the story are taken from archives while others were added by the author. The amalgam of historical facts and fiction displays the hybridity of the narrative which resonates perfectly with the novel's theme of a fragmented immigrant identity. A historiographic metafiction novel thus inherently displays hybridity. The novel's structure echoes the characters' confusion and desire to spatially establish their identities. Cognitive mapping is necessary in order to make sense of one's surroundings and better understand the subject. This is visible in Brik's attempt to retrace Lazarus's steps and the immigrants' attempts to fit into their new environment. Questions of belonging that accompany the cyborg immigrant identity are accentuated by such a structure since the characters' sense of displacement is visible in the text itself. By creating a postmodern narrative, Hemon fully utilizes those aspects which complement the plot and

themes of the novel. The fractured narrative structure is not without cause as it highlights the fragmented identities of the characters. The reader is unsure whose story is being told due to the similarities between Brik and Lazarus, the inclusion of stories about Lazarus in the sections about Brik and the various linguistic parallels. The use of photographs in the narrative seemingly emphasizes the distinction between the chapters but upon closer look, we realize that the blurred photos featuring vague objects and the very nature of photography contribute to a sense of confusion, thus making the reader feel the way the protagonists felt. The novel's themes are portrayed more vividly and convincingly due to the postmodern narrative structure. The structure of the novel is in accordance with its underlying themes and as such adds to the quality of the narration.

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MAPIRANJE METAFIKCIJE: *PROJEKAT LAZARUS* ALEKSANDRA HEMONA KAO POSTMODERNI NARATIV

Rezime

Cilj rada jeste predstaviti roman *Projekat Lazarus* Aleksandra Hemona kao postmoder- ni narativ u kome možemo uočiti izmenjenu percepciju istorije, odnosno viđenje istorije kao materijala za formiranje novog narativa, naglašavanje načina na koji prostor utiče na identitet i sveukupnu hibridnost narativne strukture i samih likova. Koncept istorio- grafske metafikcije Linde Hačion biće ključan u analizi, praćen konceptom kognitivnog mapiranja Fredrika Džejmsona u kome likovi tragaju za identitetom u metafikcionalnom lavirintu. Spoj ove dve teorije pruža nam bolji uvid u narativnu strukturu romana i pri- kazuje njegove postmoderne karakteristike. Hibridnost će biti predstavljena u kontekstu narativne strukture koja podseća na petlju i kroz spoj različitih nacionalnosti u likovima. U radu će biti predstavljene karakteristike postmodernizma i način na koji takva narativ- na struktura pojačava teme dela.

Ključne reči: *mape, istoriografska metafikcija, postmodernizam, identitet, hibridnost*