

Article

Title: Does autobiography matter? : fictions of the self in Aleksandar Hemon's The Lazarus project

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Abstract(s):

In this article, I examine Bosnian writer Aleksandar Hemon's relationship to and intervention in life-writing. Hemon's fiction provides rich terrain for exploring the key shifts and obstacles facing the genre(s) at present by crossing national as well as aesthetic borders. In doing so, I trace his first autobiographical gestures in his earlier fiction against his recent insistence that his stories are "antibiographical" since they are the very "antimatter to the matter of my life. They contain what did not happen to me" – thus, an alternate, unrestrained space in which Hemon can flesh out multiple fictional selves. With his novel, *The Lazarus Project*, he delivers, in essence, a fictional biography on two levels: a main narrator (Brik) who enacts the author's own exodus but also traces and retells an immigrant stranger's past (Lazarus) in order to work through his present conflicts, anger and sadness. The novel's tensions between biography, autobiography and photography emerge from what Hemon calls a "conditional Americanness" that has overtaken the American Dream. Hemon employs photographic imagery not only to refute given notions of history and archive but also to craft a narrative imagination that builds on late German writer W. G. Sebald's own transgressions within (auto)biographical writing, yet targets and questions more American and cross-cultural identity categories.

Keywords:

autobiography; photography; Aleksandar Hemon; intermediality; immigrant identity; W. G. Sebald; photo-fiction; genre hybridity

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