

The Lazarus Project Study Guide

The Lazarus Project by Aleksandar Hemon

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Plot Summary

NOTE: Due to the nature and structure of this novel, this study guide references page numbers instead of chapter numbers. This guide refers specifically to the Riverhead/Penguin Books First Trade Paperback Edition, May 2009.

“The Lazarus Project” is a combination historical-contemporary novel by Aleksandar Hemon, which recounts the efforts of modern-day journalist Bosnian-American Vladimir Brik to get to the bottom of the 1908 killing of suspected anarchist Lazarus Averbuch. The novel alternates between the years 1908 and 2004, telling the stories of the aftermath of Lazarus’s killing, and Brik’s investigation, concurrently.

On March 2, 1908, 19-year-old Lazarus Averbuch, a Jewish immigrant from Eastern Europe, goes to the home of Chicago Police Chief George Shippy. Upon being given a letter by Lazarus, and discovering that Lazarus is armed, Shippy opens fire himself. His son comes rushing down the stairs just as Shippy’s police driver enters the room. In the confusion, Shippy accidentally shoots his own son and his driver, while the driver and Shippy shoot and kill Lazarus. A search is immediately conducted for more information about Lazarus, during which time it is discovered he is a member of the anarchist movement, and he was apparently in a suicide pact with anarchist associate Isador Maron.

Among those questioned is Olga, the older sister of Lazarus. She denies having any knowledge of Lazarus’s anarchist activities as well as any knowledge of where Isador has gone. Olga is beside herself with grief after what has happened to her brother. She later discovers Isador hiding in the cesspit of the outhouse. She gives him shelter by hiding him in her wardrobe. Olga demands to know how Isador could have dragged her brother into anarchism. Isador says that Lazarus was his own person, and made his own decisions. He tells her that there is more to the killing of Lazarus that meets the eye, and that it is being used as an excuse to drum up anti-immigrant support. When Lazarus’s body is buried unceremoniously in potter’s field and stolen by grave robbers to be sold for medical study, public concern mounts. The police recover the body, though many organs are missing. They request Olga attend the reburial as a statement of supporting law and order, as well as to keep calls for violence on both sides down. Olga reluctantly agrees only when immigrants siding with the police agree to smuggle Isador to Canada.

In Chicago nearly 100 years later, Brik has accidentally stumbled across the little-remembered story of Lazarus’s death and has decided to write a book about it and the immigrant experience. Unable to find out much about Lazarus in Chicago because so much has changed and been forgotten, Lazarus’s old friend, photographer Rora suggests traveling to Ukraine and Moldova to learn about Lazarus’s roots. With a grant in hand for the project, Brik and Rora travel to Bosnia, Ukraine, and Moldova. Having both survived the genocide in Bosnia some years before, both men are sensitive to the importance of cultural diversity and are haunted by the past the way the Jews of Eastern Europe are after the repeated pogroms they endured. One such pogrom led to



the death of the father of Olga and Lazarus, prompting their mother and older siblings to send them on to America.

As Brik comes to learn, the message for Shippy that Lazarus carried was a warning from Lazarus's employer that Emma Goldman, leader of the anarchist movement, was coming to Chicago. It is believed it was the employer's way of trying keep Lazarus out of trouble. Brik learns that the devastated Olga later returned to Europe, where she was presumably killed during the Holocaust. As Brik and Rora travel back to Sarajevo to wrap up their journey, Rora is gunned down. The official account in the papers is that Rora was killed by a drug addict who stole and sold Rora's camera for drug money. Brik, however, believes the killing was orchestrated by people Rora had crossed paths with during the war in the early 1990s who believed Rora took pictures of something he should not have, most probably a murder.



Section 1: Pages 1 – 63

Summary

A photograph of a moderate, upper class residence building is presented. It is March 2, 1908 in Chicago, Illinois. Theresa, the maid at 21 Lincoln Place, owned by Police Chief George Shippy, answers the door to a young, thin, suspicious man with a foreign accent. Theresa advises the man to come back at nine, for the Chief is not yet receiving visitors. The young man agrees to do so and notices a pretty young girl look at him through the window across the street. The young man looks with disdain at the upper classes as he walks down Webster Street, knowing the blood, sweat, and tears of the lower classes have made Chicago possible. The young man, having emigrated to Chicago seven months before, misses the heat of the summer and thinks of Isador.

The young man goes into Ludwig's Supplies, a grocer, on the corner of Clark and Webster. Mr. and Mrs. Ludwig carefully watch the young man. A customer, Mr. Noth, comes in for some camphor for his flu, then leaves. The young man then buys some sour apple lozenges and returns to Chief Shippy's, where Shippy invites him in. Shippy is given an envelope with his name and address on it. Suspecting the young man is an anarchist, Shippy grabs hold of young man, having his wife search him. The young man has a gun, so Shippy opens fire with his own revolver. Foley, Shippy's police driver, rushes into the house just as Shippy's son, home on leave from Culver Military Academy, rushes downstairs. In the confusion, Shippy accidentally shoots Foley in the wrist, and Henry in the lung. Shippy and Foley both end up shooting the young man seven times. He dies quickly. In newspaper accounts, the injuries sustained by Shippy and Foley are blamed on the young man.

A photograph of the dim Chicago skyline is presented. It is now February 29, 2004. Vladimir Brik, a Bosnian immigrant and journalist, celebrates Bosnian Independence Day. Brik considers himself a reasonably loyal citizen of the United States, and of Bosnia though he rarely travels back to Bosnia. Brik is married to an American girl, Mary, and comes together each year with the Bosnian community to be thankful the horrors of Bosnia in the past are in the past. They also come to celebrate Bosnia to impress American benefactors who like to donate to such groups to demonstrate their tolerance. Among them are Bill Schuettler and his wife Susie, board members of the charitable group Glory Foundation. Brik gets to know the Schuettlers, explaining he writes for "The Reader", teaches English as a second language, has no particular religious or ethnic affiliation in particular, that he is working on a book about a 1908 Chicago murder, and that his wife is a neurosurgeon. Brik and Susie share a dance during which time their picture is taken by Rora, a photojournalist. Good friends in the distant past, Brik and Rora have not seen one another since 1992 when Brik was preparing to leave for America as the war was beginning, and as Rora was returning to Bosnia from Berlin to cover it.



A photograph of the living room, hallway, and stairwell of the Shippy residence is presented. It is March 2, 1908. Assistant Police Chief Schuettler takes charge of the investigation while William P. Miller of the Chicago Tribune arrives to write a story. Information on the dead young man, including a streetcar transfer, suggests the young man lives in the South Side Jewish ghetto. The lozenges are found and assumed to be poison pills. A scrap of paper with the numbers 21-21-21-63, the 62 around which has been drawn a broken circle with an X is discovered on the young man. A piece of paper with sentences on it, describing shoes as big, a room as small, a book as thick, a soup as warm, and a body as very strong, is also discovered. Both are assumed to be tied into the anarchists. The police determine the young man is Jewish based on the fact that he has been circumcised.

A photograph of Brik is presented. It is 2004. In an effort to remain in touch with Rora, Brik requests to purchase the photo of himself and Susie dancing. Rora agrees. They meet a few weeks later in Andersonville at Fitzgerald's, a pub. Rora reveals he has lived in Edgewater for a few years, while Brik reveals his in-laws are Irish and are anxiously awaiting grandchildren. Rora explains that after escaping from the siege of Sarajevo, he went on to take photos of tourists in Medjugorje, pretending to be Christian in order to cheat them into giving him good tips.

Brik explains that he wants his book to be not only about the murder of the young man who escaped the Kishinev pogrom, but about how immigrants lived back in the early 1900s and how they struggled to resurrect themselves in new lives in America, like Lazarus. He explains to Rora that Mary finds this pretentious because Brik's life is nothing to complain about. Likewise, nothing of Lazarus's old neighborhood survives, as that section of the city is being rebuilt. Shippey's old neighborhood is largely changed, but still inhabited by the wealthy. Rora suggests tracing the young man, Lazarus, all the way back to Ukraine and Moldova. Brik is unable to go away to Kishinev at that moment, he explains, because he would want Mary to come and Mary can't suddenly take off work. Brik soon after learns from Bill that he has been awarded a grant for his book. He cannot wait to tell Mary when she gets home from work, so he calls Rora to invite him along on the adventure in Eastern Europe. Rora agrees.

A photograph of Captain Evans holding up the dead body of Lazarus Averbuch is presented. It is March, 1908. Detectives Fitzgerald and Fitzpatrick are dispatched to gather clues. A 23-year-old fellow employee of Lazarus's, Gregor Hellor, positively identifies Lazarus's body. Hellor explains he and Lazarus worked packing eggs at W. H. Eichgreen, a commission merchant, and that Lazarus lived at 218 Washburn Avenue. There, the detectives encounter Olga, sister of Lazarus, and her neighbor, Isaac Lubel, who is beaten for answers. Olga denies any knowledge of the murder plot, or ever hearing Lazarus speak about anarchism. The police learn that Lazarus planned to commit suicide with a fellow Jew, Isador Maron.

The police spread out to track down Isador. Joseph Freedman, after speaking openly of anarchism on a streetcar, is arrested, as are numerous other suspects. In further beatings, Lubel confesses to having seen Isador at Lazarus's apartment, and that Isador brought Lazarus to anarchist meetings. Olga is stunned by all of this, wondering



when she lost her younger brother to rage and anger. She is horrified but must accept an anonymous burial of her brother to show her support of law and order. In letters from Lazarus's mother, the police recognize that America was not the dreamland that Lazarus imagined it to be, which would reveal why he got involved with the anarchists.

Analysis

"The Lazarus Project" is a combination historical-contemporary novel by Aleksandar Hemon, which recounts the efforts of modern-day journalist Bosnian-American Vladimir Brik to get to the bottom of the 1908 killing of suspected anarchist Lazarus Averbuch. The novel opens in the past, in 1908. The past will become an important theme in the novel, not only as events of the past are told concurrently, but in that the past – both distant and recent – deeply affects the characters of Brik and Rora. This comes through not only the killing of Lazarus, but through Brik and Rora's experiences as Bosnians during the genocide committed there in the early 1990s, a little more than a decade before the events of the novel take place.

Brik and Rora are both haunted by their days spent in Bosnia. It is why the case of the immigrant Lazarus seems to speak to them so much, because it is a tragedy of the past that suddenly seems fresh and relevant given their own immigration. Herein, immigration becomes essential to the novel as Lazarus had been in America for mere months, while Brik has been in America for about a decade. As Brik notes, he wants the book he is writing to be contextualized by the immigrant experience. In many ways, the immigrant experience has changed versus what it was 100 years ago. Mary notes this in reference to Brik's own experience as an immigrant. Likewise, the fact that Brik retains dual citizenship demonstrates that he is not a full immigrant, for he keeps one foot in his country of birth – the past – and his country of the present – America.

Immigration in the early 1900s was often a difficult and challenging experience at the very least. Americans, including previous waves of assimilated immigrants, looked with disdain on the new waves of immigrants for various reasons, including the dangerous ideas they were then importing, such as anarchism. Note that the general store owner, Ludwig, is clearly of immigrant ancestry given his name – but he has thrived, achieving the American dream through successfully owning his own store. He looks warily upon the immigrant Lazarus, suspecting him of being up to no good. The police have no compunction about breaking into the building where Lazarus lives, and roughing up even his neighbors for more information about Lazarus. Likewise, what appear to be English lessons found on Lazarus are assumed to be anarchist code for assassination instructions.

The maid who first turns Lazarus away from Shippy's door notes that Lazarus was "foreign", meaning he is a recent immigrant and an unassimilated American, which in turn means he is probably dangerous. These assumptions are emblematic of bigotry that existed in such widespread form in the early 1900s, and should be contrasted with the tolerance and acceptance of the early 2000s – such as the American groups and organizations who willingly and happily invest in immigrant communities. This includes



the Schuettlers, who ensure that Brik receives a grant. (The reader should note that their ancestor, Assistant Chief Schuettler, ensured that the case against immigrants – Lazarus and Isador – be strongly built.) Whether or not the interest the Schuettlers have in the Bosnian immigrant community is genuine or, as Brik thinks, merely a way to demonstrate their tolerance (which, if fake, is merely another form of bigotry), is uncertain.

However, it is a fact that America has made great strides in handling immigration between 1908 and 2004. Consider that the desire for immigrants to assimilate into American society in 2004 is complemented by a respect for the culture and customs immigrants have brought with them – such as the Bosnian Independence Day celebration that many Americans attend. In 1908, a foreign accent was worthy of suspicion, and the immigrant was to be avoided at all costs. In 1908, many of the rich did not freely associate with the poor; in 2004, it is considered bad form and bad manners for a member of one class to refuse to associate with another. Likewise, the American dream is far closer for new immigrants than it was for immigrants in 1908. Men like Ludwig were less common than they are today, for quick disillusionment because dreams did not come true overnight often led men like Lazarus into disastrous and dangerous states like crime, or movements like anarchism.

Meanwhile, as Mary has noted, Brik's immigrant experience is largely dissimilar to Lazarus's. Mary serves as the principal income earner, while Brik writes well-received but poorly-paid articles. Brik's dream is to be a writer; his wife's hard work provides the financial stability to make sure Brik can do as he wishes. Lazarus, on the other hand, had no choice but to go to work to pack eggs all day. No one supported Lazarus, and his dreams of becoming a writer quickly led him to disillusionment, which in turn led him into anarchism. Likewise, the America of 2004 is full of Americans genuinely wanting to see immigrants achieve their American dreams, whereas in the past the primary concern was ensuring the immigrants to the country did nothing to undermine the United States.

The change in the country is also demonstrated by the past no longer being the past. The emotional and mental mindset of Americans – wanting immigrants to assimilate while retaining respect for their cultures – has changed, and is physically manifested in the changed landscape of Chicago. Nothing looks the way it did in 1908, so Rora suggests going back even further in time. The decision to travel to Bosnia, Ukraine, and Moldova is, in essence, traveling into the past – both of Lazarus, and of Brik and Rora.

Discussion Question 1

Mary asserts that Brik's immigrant experience is mostly dissimilar from Lazarus's experience. Why? Do you agree or disagree? Why?



Discussion Question 2

Why has the 1908 story of Lazarus captivated the mind of Brik? Why, in turn, has Lazarus's story so quickly captivated Rora?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Rora suggest traveling to Ukraine, Serbia, and Moldova to learn more about Lazarus? What is hoped can be gained by these travels?

Vocabulary

redoubtable, ominously, maliciously, arbitrarily, whimsically, immaculate, quietude, malevolence, vociferates, supplication, vestibule, dubious, nascent, invariably, studious, nostalgically, travails, endemic, presumptuously, incongruous, flabbergasted, moribund, promulgated, degenerate, atrocities



Section 2: Pages 64 – 149

Summary

A picture of a dim city alleyway at night is presented. It is 2004. Brik and Rora travel to Ukraine, stopping first in Kotkiy, where Brik's grandparents were from. As they head to Bosnia, the journey brings back bad memories which remind Brik of the dangers of the early days of the war. From Lviv, Sarajevo, Brik calls home to Mary to see how she is doing. It makes Brik wonder about Lazarus writing home to his parents to see how they were doing. Brik goes on to wonder about the Lazarus story, about old lives and new lives. Brik believes in God, and he believes God is not a friend to him. Rora begins recounting old stories, which Brik urges him to write down. Rora explains he has taken the pictures, but has Brik to write the stories down.

A picture of a group of Jewish girls exercising on a large deck on a building rooftop is presented. A routine autopsy is performed on the body of Lazarus. Olga contemplates how to write to her mother of Lazarus's death, and she looks at her brother's possessions, including the photo of the Jewish girls clipped from the newspaper and put up on the wall. She comes across her brother's dictionary in the outhouse, which he liked to read to learn new words in English. It is then that she sees Isador down in the outhouse hole, seeking to avoid the police. Olga is angered at Isador for taking her brother to see Emma Goldman and the anarchists, but Isador says Lazarus made his own choices. Isador asks to be helped out, and for a blanket, but Olga will not help him. As she goes to bed, all she can think about is how Lazarus wanted to be a writer.

A picture of a darkened street, taken while driving, with a single building on the left at night is presented. As the journey continues, Brik and Rora take on a man named Andriy to drive them. Brik cannot help but think of what Lazarus's life would have been like had he never been killed. Brik and Rora travel to Krotkiy, where they enter a cemetery and discover that one of Brik's distant relatives died only a week before. The cemetery is largely overgrown, with many of the dead forgotten. This makes Brik think about how God never forgets anyone although everyone else might.

A photograph of a banner bearing the words "Für Freiheit und Recht" is presented. The body of Lazarus is buried in the potter's field at Dunning after dark. Only reporter William P. Miller and Assistant Chief Schuettler are present. At Sam Harris' Place, a bar, William meets with a man named Guzik, who has information on Lazarus. If William wants the information, he is to pay a short fat man who refuses to give his name. The man reveals that Emma Goldman is scheduled to appear the following day, along with a large number of followers, and that many other locals are angry at the police. The man also passes along word that grave robbers routinely steal bodies to sell to medical students. The man hints at the fact that the recently-buried Lazarus is just such a commodity. Meanwhile, secret meetings of anarchists endorse and celebrate the near-killing of Chief Shippy. Miller attends such a meeting with the fat man at which Goldman and others speak, all condemning the same social injustices. A man named Ben



Reitman especially rails against the powers that be, speaking in defense of Lazarus. Lazarus is a martyr, Ben shouts, and the laws are not worth the paper they are printed on. These violent remarks are included in Miller's story about the rally.

A picture of a shaggy dog is presented. Andriy drops Brik and Rora off at the Business Center Bukovina before heading back home. Brik wonders about Lazarus, and what it was like to slip into death and then reawaken in new life. Brik also reflects on traveling to Vienna with Mary for their anniversary in the late summer of 2001. When a prostitute offers herself to Brik, Brik turns her down. He recalls how, in his research, Lazarus had been brought to a brothel by Isadore, and there went to bed with a pretty young prostitute who kept a dog. Outside of the Center, some cruel young men kill a dog by throwing it into a bin of broken bottles.

A picture of Olga is presented. Across Chicago, the clergy of every religious faith condemn anarchism and the attempt on Shippy's life. Anti-immigrant sentiment is in high gear, with the worst coming against Russian Jews and Italians. Olga heads into the police station to see Assistant Chief Schuettler, where she shouts obscenities at him and tells him the laws and the powerful will come tumbling down. She is sent home. On the way, a man named Hermann Taube stops to speak with her, telling her that he and others believe there is more to the story of Lazarus's death. Taube is a lawyer, and brings Olga to his office. Taube reads from newspaper accounts condemning the anarchists. Taube reports these accounts could lead to violence, and that it is imperative Isador Maron is found to avoid violence against the peaceful immigrants in Chicago. Isador must face justice, Taube explains. With Goldman being in town, things could get nasty.

Analysis

The recent past comes back to haunt both Brik and Rora as they travel into Eastern Europe. The memories of the war and the slaughters that took place deeply disturb them. The past has tremendous bearing on the present as the reason Brik and Rora have come to Serbia, Ukraine, and Moldova – to learn more about Lazarus – is challenged by their own experiences in the region some 12 or so years earlier. As Brik notes on page 67, “Your nightmares follow you like a shadow, forever.” The assertion that the past is that haunting does not only matter for Brik and Rora, as it also comes to heavily matter to Lazarus (this will be revealed by the end of the novel).

It is also in this section of the novel – as Brik travels both literally and physically into the past – that he begins to reflect on mystery. Mystery will become an important theme in the novel. There are two prominent kinds of mystery explored – religion and crime. Brik draws parallels between the past and the future, the old and the new, and between life and death. Brik references the account of Lazarus in the Bible several times throughout the novel, in which Lazarus is raised from the dead by Jesus. The immigrant experience is like the Biblical Lazarus's experience – leaving the old for the new, leaving a place where life seems like death for a place where life truly seems like life (America). In



effect, the immigrant is the Biblical Lazarus, being raised from the dead for new life. It is a religious mystery of faith and devotion.

Meanwhile, in 1908, the police investigation into Lazarus's death yields two mysteries. First, was Lazarus truly at Shippy's to kill Shippy, or was there something else going on? Second, where has Isador disappeared to? As Olga soon finds out, Isadore is hiding in the cesspit of the outhouse. Olga blames Isador for introducing her brother to anarchism, but Isador insists that Lazarus made all of his own choices. The reader knows this is a cheap refusal to accept responsibility for introducing Lazarus to anarchism. It would be akin to a dealer telling the family of a drug user who has overdosed that all he did was introduce the dead user to the drugs, and that the user made his own choices.

The pressure is on against not only the anarchists, but the immigrant community because it is primarily immigrants who support the anarchist movement. Taube, a lawyer representing a large group of immigrants who want peace and to assimilate peacefully, press on Olga the importance of working with the police, and that there is more to the death of Lazarus than meets the eye. What this is presents yet another mystery for Olga, and for the reader. It should also be noted by the reader (with a subtle reference to the Biblical account of Lazarus, later to be made crucial to the novel) that medical students routinely pay grave robbers to dig up bodies (or do it themselves) for the purpose of the study of medicine and science.

Considering God, Brik believes in God, but does not believe God believes in him. Likewise, Brik comes to the idea that God must remember an individual person even when no one else does. Such is the case of Lazarus in 1908, whom history has largely forgotten except for Brik who stumbled across the event. Here, the reader should note the important symbolism of the overgrown cemetery. The overgrown cemetery means it has largely been forgotten, and the growth itself represents both history and time. History and time obscure the past – the person buried underground and the tombstone denoting who that person was and when he or she lived. Brik is now cutting back the growth to learn more about, and to understand who Lazarus truly was.

William P. Miller attempts to understand the immigrant community and its fascination with anarchism. Miller comes to the conclusion that immigrants, for various reasons (including dissatisfaction with how much work and time it sometimes takes to be successful in a free country such as America), see anarchism and the overthrow of law and order as the way for them to be successful. To Miller and to many other Americans (including immigrants like Taube who genuinely want to be a part of the fabric of America), immigration is dangerous because it is the arrival of people from other countries who want to radically and fundamentally transform the United States. Miller and those of his point of view see immigrants as not melting into American society, but seeking to overthrow it because life hasn't worked out exactly the way that they want it to. Bigotry herein erupts on both sides because each side becomes highly suspicious of the other. To the new immigrants, the established immigrants and Americans hold them back and use them; to the established immigrants and Americans, the new immigrants



threaten their stability and way of life. And the threat of violence from both sides is mounting.

Discussion Question 1

Who is Taube? Who does he represent? Why does he want Olga to work with the police?

Discussion Question 2

Olga blames Lazarus's death on Isador. Why? Isador contends he is not to blame? Why? Who do you believe is correct? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why is the immigrant community suspicious of the established immigrants and Americans? Why are the Americans and established immigrants suspicious of the new immigrants? How does this affect their behavior towards one another?

Vocabulary

habitually, obsolescent, evanescence, vouchsafing, unwieldly, wafture, verdant, implausibility, edentate, enumerates, baneful, depravity, assiduously, malodorous, slumberous, tranquility, miniscule, licentious, irrespectively, denunciation, fathomless, affable, nihilistic, impervious, indubitably



Section 3: Pages 150 – 215

Summary

A picture of a nude young woman from the breasts up engaging in a porn film is shown. Brik explains to the reader that someone once asked him how he saw America. Brik explains that he said that each morning, he wakes up and sees his wife. Rora recounts to Brik how he and several other journalists visited a brothel after one of them scored an important interview, but how Rora just couldn't go through with forcing a young, drugged girl to have sex with him for money. Brik and Rora find the Jewish center, where they speak with a man named Chaim Gruzenberg about Brik's book. They ask Chaim about the Averbuchs, to which Chaim responds there is an old, frail woman still living named Roza Averbuch. Roza, Chaim explains defensively, should not be bothered due to her physical and mental health. While determining their next move, Rora later explains his parents were killed in a bus accident, and that his sister did not have a happy life.

A picture of a Sunday market in Spring, 1908, is presented. Olga drifts through her days, barely sleeping or eating, not bathing, and believing she has lost everything important in her life. She passes a woman doing Christian ministry on the streets who tells her that Lazarus will rise again. At home, Olga considers how no matter where she and the other Jews may wander, they always encounter hatred.

A photograph of farm fields rushing past outside a bus window is presented. Brik and Rora board a bus to Moldova, during which time Brik thinks about death and how death itself, despite how it arrives must be a pleasant experience. Brik wonders what it was like for the Biblical Lazarus to reawaken from the dead, and what it was like for the Lazarus of 1908 to come across the border, seeking the coast and a way to America.

A picture is presented of distant city lights at night. Isador is hiding in Olga's wardrobe. Olga demands to know what her brother was doing at Chief Shippy's. Isador says again that he had nothing to do with Lazarus, and says that he has no idea why Lazarus went to Shippy's. Olga presses Isador about his whereabouts on the morning of the event. Isador says he was out playing cards with Stadlwelser all night. He denies having anything to do with Lazarus having a gun. He also contends that Shippy killed Lazarus simply because Lazarus happened to be there. William P. Miller, a photographer named Hammon, and Officer Patterson later come to see Olga. Patterson waits in the hall while William speaks with Olga. William wants to know where Isador is. Olga denies knowledge of his whereabouts. Olga then tells William to leave her alone.

A photograph of two boys in oversized top hats is presented. Brik and Rora take a room at the Chisinau Hotel overlooking a square in the city of Chisinau, Moldova. Brik and Rora go out through the city to explore and see what they can find to eat. They end up at McDonald's. This causes Brik to think about Lazarus packing eggs, and how much Lazarus came to hate eating eggs. This causes Brik to think about the past and the

present, and how his life seems neatly divided between the past in Europe, and his present in America. Rora contends that the past and future exist with or without people, and that what one sees is never all there is.

Analysis

Brik and Rora continue their journey into the past by visiting local museums and cultural centers for more information. They are at once encountering not only their own history in the region, but Lazarus's history as well. Brik and Rora consider the past, what it means, and how it exists at all. Rora believes that the past and the future exist with or without people. Brik believes the past and the future need people in them to exist, such as how he has one foot in the new world and one foot in the old world. This references Brik's earlier assertion that, while people may forget about someone, God never does. The old world, the past, has forgotten about Lazarus; but the new world, through Brik, has remembered Lazarus. The past is only truly the past, it seems Brik believes, if there is someone to remember it – otherwise it might as well not have happened at all. Rora takes the opposite view, that the past is the past with or without someone to remember it.

Regardless as to how the past and the future exist in spite of one another, Brik and Rora continue to unravel the past in the present. Their own experiences during the Bosnian War continue to compare to those of Lazarus and his family, and provide strong reason to leave. These reasons are in contrast with how Brik comes to see America. As he notes, he was once asked what it was like to wake up beside America each and every day. It is a world of difference from what he left behind – though he still feels pulls to the old world, as any immigrant in any country anywhere in the world might. The roots of a human life run deep, and this is especially true of Brik.

Mystery also runs deep in this section of the novel, as a number of references are made to the Biblical account of Lazarus. As Brik travels throughout Eastern Europe, he consistently finds himself wondering about the Biblical Lazarus, including what it must have been like to be dead and to be reawakened. Indeed, Brik continues to have something of a religious transformation as the man who once claimed that God did not believe in him now genuinely considers Biblical mysteries and what relevance they might have in his own life and work.

The reader should also note that a Christian missionary on the streets insists, as Olga passes, that Lazarus will rise again. While it is clear that this encounter is certainly unnerving for Olga, it is not a literal exploration of Christian mystery, but a metaphorical reflection of the Biblical account. The missionary's insistence that Lazarus will rise again is reflective of the fact that the memory of Lazarus, and what happened to him, will be raised up once more. What Olga cannot possibly know is that Brik is the one who will make this possible.



Discussion Question 1

How do Brik and Rora approach the past philosophically? How do their thoughts and ideas about the past differ? Do you believe either one of them is right? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Biblical references to the raising of Lazarus are strong in this section of the novel. What are some of these references? How do they reflect Brik's search?

Discussion Question 3

What was Rora's past like? How did this help drive him on to leave Bosnia?

Vocabulary

surfeit, tenaciously, exudation, febrile, eschatological, recalcitrant, futile, precociously, nefariously, desultory, benumbed, ubiquitous, existential, erratic, vacillating, mediocrity, mirthfully



Section 4: Pages 216 – 265

Summary

A photograph of the exterior of a ransacked, searched house is presented. Olga is brought into the police station, followed by William P. Miller. Assistant Chief Schuettler allows Taube to come in to impress upon Olga the seriousness of the situation. Taube reveals that Lazarus arrived at Shippy's with a message from Eichgreen to Shippy letting Shippy know that Goldman was going to be in the city. Taube believes that Eichgreen was trying to help Shippy, and that Lazarus's body has gone missing and been recovered with missing organs, probably thanks to medical students. Further, it is revealed, some in the Christian population are seeing a connection between Lazarus's name, the Bible, and Lazarus's missing body. They are convinced the Second Coming is imminent. There must now be a public reburial. To keep peace, many leading Jewish religious leaders are willing to be present at the burial. Olga maintains that a Jew cannot be buried without his or her entire body, or the soul will wander for eternity. Taube counters that Rabbi Klopstock is willing to give special dispensation in this case to overcome this worry. God values life and peace, Taube explains, and so must the Jews. Olga is enraged by this, thinking Taube and his friends should stand up to the police and nativists, rather than folding before them.

A picture of two Jewish gravestones is presented. Brik reflects on how he and Mary always love to have their pictures taken side-by-side. Brik and Rora meet with a local young married woman named Iuliana at the local Jewish Center. She is strikingly beautiful and has studied the history of Jews in the area, including the pogroms of the early 1900s. Brik tells her about the book he is writing, and about Lazarus Averbuch. Iuliana begins crying, and says her grandmother's maiden name was Averbuch, but too young to be Olga. She directs Brik and Rora to a cemetery with many buried Jews. She explains that much of the cemetery was dug up by the Soviets to build a park. Brik has been considering life and death, doing his best not to let the story of Lazarus Averbuch be forgotten. But with so many dead in the world, there aren't enough people to remember them all. To Brik, the world only seems to be about death. Iuliana disagrees. She believes life is truly about life, because when someone is alive, they are alive for someone – whether it is themselves or someone else. The living don't remember death because they have not experienced death. The living remember life because that is what they are experiencing.

A picture of Captain Evans holding up the body of Lazarus from the side is shown. The novel jumps back to the pogrom of 1907. Lazarus, Roza, Chaia, and others report the widespread violence and murder being committed against the Jews of the area. Olga is horrified by it all. A mob arrives at the Averbuch household. Papa and Lazarus try to fight them off, but are beaten. The women of the family are all beaten and raped as well. Papa dies. The novel jumps ahead to 1908. Olga continues to meet with Taube. He tells her they must do anything they can to avoid a pogrom in America. Taube says he and his friends will do anything they can for Olga in exchange for her help.



A blurred photograph of a car rushing by on a residential street is presented. Iuliana helps arrange transportation for Brik and Rora to travel to Belgrade, from where they will leave for Sarajevo. Before leaving, Brik asks Iuliana about the pogroms. She explains they are stamped forever into the consciousness of the Jews, and that she is also Bosnian which sickens her. On the way to Sarajevo, Rora explains he hopes to see his sister, a surgeon named Azra, whose husband left to go up in the hills and fight her side. The husband demanded she join him as was her wifely duty, but she refused and continued to tend to the injured in Sarajevo. Brik and Rora catch a ride with a man named Seryozha who is bringing a young girl named Elena across the border to sell her into prostitution, which Elena hopes will end up being her ticket to a better future. Arriving at the train station, Brik beats Seryozha into a bloody pulp in the bathroom so that Elena will have a fighting chance to live without having to sell herself. Brik breaks his hand in the process. Rora gives Elena money, who then heads off on her own.

Analysis

Mystery returns as a central theme in this section of the novel, both with respect to religion and to the killing of Lazarus in 1908. Taube has learned that the reason Lazarus was even at Shippy's house to begin with was to deliver a message to Shippy from Eichgreen regarding Emma Goldman. Accordingly, Eichgreen seemed to consider Lazarus something of a protégé, and nothing like the typical anarchist, so he ensured that Lazarus would be seen as a trusted messenger. It was hoped this would keep Lazarus out of trouble – or so claims Taube.

Religious mystery is also central to the novel here as either medical students, or body-snatchers working on behalf of medical students, have stolen the body of Lazarus. Word of this theft has been spreading throughout the city. The disappearance of a body belonging to a man named Lazarus in the spring around Easter is having a chilling effect on many of the city's faithful. They easily draw parallels between the Resurrection of Christ, the resuscitation of the Biblical Lazarus, and the disappearance of the body of the 19-year-old Lazarus. This has set many on edge, either as a question of religious mystery or as a concern about the disturbing effect the body's robbery has had on people. Likewise, Olga maintains serious concerns of a religious nature, in that part of the mystery of the Jewish faith theologically is that a body cannot be buried without all its parts.

Through mystery, immigration also continues to remain critical thematically. Taube's concerns about the grave-robbed body of Lazarus being reinterred have much to do with keeping the peace between the immigrant community and the existing community of Chicago. As the reader will recall, there are immigrants who refuse to assimilate and would rather commit to a course of anarchy, and there are immigrants who genuinely want to be at home in their new country. Taube is of the latter variety of immigrant, wanting to be a part of the American experience and wanting to keep peace between the immigrants and the locals. This is very telling in Taube's insistence on reburying Lazarus, noting that there is a rabbi who is willing to grant a dispensation that would settle Olga's religious concerns about her brother's reburial.



Keeping the peace is important to men like Taube, for they have lived through the horrors of bigotry in the old world. Here, themes of the past and of bigotry intertwine in immense ways. While many immigrants face discrimination in Chicago, and sometimes even violence, this is nothing compared to the systematic persecution and pogroms of Eastern Europe. Indeed, Lazarus and Olga – and their family – suffered through such pogroms, resulting in the deaths of loved ones. This is why men like Taube want to do everything they can to ensure such a situation does not arise in America. They realize they have a sanctuary in America, and it is a struggle to maintain it when groups like the anarchists are running around preaching violence. It thus becomes easy to see why Taube would want to keep peace between new immigrants, old immigrants, and locals. This immigrant experience is to be contrasted with the case of Elena, wherein Brik and Rora ensure that Elena will have the ability to start fresh without the attached strings of prostitution – which also ensures she will have a better chance than so many others.

Discussion Question 1

What trouble is caused by the stealing of Lazarus's body? Why is this so? What is Taube's solution? Why does Olga oppose this solution?

Discussion Question 2

What is the immigrant experience like in Chicago versus that of the old world? How does this affect the attitudes and actions of immigrants in Chicago? Select three characters from the novel to explain this.

Discussion Question 3

Should Taube be commended or criticized for his desire to keep the peace in Chicago? Why?

Vocabulary

superstitions, dispensation, profound, globule, philosophically, curvaceous, chortled, idyllic, serpentine, volition



Section 5: Pages 266 – 292

Summary

A photograph of a young man sitting in a chair is presented. Isador continues to hide in Olga's wardrobe. Suddenly, the door is flung open by two large men with a casket who say they are there to help Isador. When Isador hesitates, they knock him out. When he awakens, he is in the darkened casket along with the corpse of Isaac Lubel. Meanwhile, Olga attends her brother's reburial. For her help, Isador is to be smuggled to safety in Canada in a day or two. Olga now has no idea what her life may bring in the future.

A photograph of a darkened Sarajevo street is presented. Brik and Rora arrive in Sarajevo. Brik feels like a ghost, as hundreds of people pass by and do not even look at him. Brik and Rora find Azra, who examines Brik's hand. An X-Ray of the broken hand makes Brik proud, both of his bones and of why he has broken them. On the phone with Mary later, Brik learns that her father's cancer has spread to his stomach and brain. A few days later, while having lunch, Rora is shot to death by a muscular young man who takes his camera. Brik arrives too late, long after Rora has died. Brik tells all he knows to the police and the papers. After the funeral, he cries himself to sleep. As Brik later learns, there are two possible reasons for Rora's death – either that he photographed something he shouldn't have and knew too much from years before, or that the killer was merely a drug addict who later sold the camera to buy drugs. The authorities maintain that the killing was drug-related, but thinking on Lazarus, Brik doubts this. Brik intends to stay on in Sarajevo a little longer than he expected, he later explains to Azra. Azra then begins to set Brik's hand so that he may get to writing.

Analysis

The immigrant experience continues through the end of the novel. Isador is still a wanted man, both in conjunction with his being suspect in the death of Lazarus, and in his association with the anarchists. Much of the anger directed at Isador comes through his status as a recent immigrant. Because of this, regardless as to whether or not he is responsible in any way, shape, or form for the death of Lazarus, Olga cannot abide the idea that another immigrant may be killed on her watch when she has the ability to do something about it. She reaches out to friends who spirit Isador away to Canada to avoid being brought to justice in exchange for her participation in Lazarus's reburial. She may not have been able to save the immigrant Lazarus, but symbolically, she can save the immigrant Isador, as the past will ever after haunt her.

In Eastern Europe, Rora is shockingly killed. While the true motive for Rora's death remains a mystery – either a drug crime or based on some incident from the past – Brik doubts the official position on the murder as a matter of having dealt with Lazarus's case as well. Brik, something of a pseudo-immigrant now even to his own native region, maintains the immigrant position of skepticism towards the established powers. For



Olga, this skepticism is directed toward the authorities in Chicago; for Brik, this skepticism is directed toward the authorities in Sarajevo. The reader will note that Azra herself is unconvinced of the cause of her brother's death, just like Olga. And Just as Olga helps Isador to escape, Azra sets Brike's hand so that Brik may himself, in effect, escape – by way of writing.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Brik come to doubt the official version of events relating to Rora's killing? Do you believe Brik's suspicions are founded, or do you believe he is merely being skeptical?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Olga help make it possible for Isador to be sneaked out of Chicago and into Canada? Why does Taube's group agree to make this possible?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Brik decide to stay on in Sarajevo longer than he expected? Does Azra approve of this? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

undulating, malignant, insidious, absorption, supine, vehemently, commodiously, incoherently



Characters

Vladimir Brik

Vladimir Brik is the main character and narrator of the novel “The Lazarus Project” by Aleksandar Hemon. Brik appears to be in either his late thirties or early forties, and is a native of Bosnia who moved to Chicago during the Bosnian War in the early 1990s. There, Brik married a local girl named Mary, and has committed to a life of writing based on the financial stability provided by his wife’s work as a neurosurgeon.

In the present, Brik has stumbled across the story of Lazarus Averbuch, and believes it needs to be treated in a book that relates the immigrant experience of the early Twentieth Century as a whole. Brik sees much of himself in Lazarus, and many similarities in his own immigrant experience.

Together with his old friend Rora, Brik sets out for Eastern Europe to learn more about Lazarus’s past as well as his time in Chicago. There, he comes face-to-face with his native country, as well as Lazarus’s struggles before emigration. Brik is largely disillusioned by the trip, feeling listless and homeless. He breaks his hand beating up a pimp, ensuring the man’s prostitute has a better chance at life as an immigrant. Brik is later shocked by Rora’s murder and decides to stay on longer than planned in Sarajevo in order to begin writing.

Rora

Rora is a friend of Brik’s from Sarajevo before the Bosnian War, but the two have been out of touch since the early 1990s. The two meet again in Chicago, where Rora agrees to accompany Brik on his Lazarus expedition to Eastern Europe.

Rora’s parents are long dead, though his sister still lives and works in Sarajevo. Rora has spent years traveling the world as a photojournalist, and helps spur on Brik’s search for answers relating to Lazarus. Rora is killed while in Sarajevo, though the exact motive is left unclear.

Mary Brik

Mary Brik is the wife of Brik. A brilliant and beautiful neurosurgeon, Mary is deeply Catholic and utterly realistic. While she lovingly supports her husband’s work as a writer, she keeps him grounded by reminding him his own immigrant experience in Chicago pales in comparison to Lazarus’s experience as an immigrant in Chicago. Mary remains in touch with Brik throughout his journey into Europe, providing encouragement along the way.



The Schuettlers

The Schuettlers – Bill and Sue – are a married Chicago couple who are extraordinarily wealthy, and who distribute grants to the immigrants of the community in order to facilitate their adjustment and to ensure they have good opportunities to succeed. Bill and Sue meet with and befriend Brik early in the novel, as Brik is interested in obtaining a grant. Bill later confirms to Brik that he has indeed been approved for a grant by the philanthropic board on which Bill and Sue serve. Bill Schuettler is a descendant of Assistant Police Chief Schuettler, who helped to handle the Lazarus investigation.

Azra

Azra is the sister of Rora. She works as a doctor at one of the hospitals in Sarajevo, having remained there during the war, during the siege of the city itself, and after the war had ended. Aza is a brave and beautiful woman who is quick to the point and very serious. When Rora is killed, Azra is saddened but not surprised. She doesn't challenge the official version of events relating to Rora's death, but instead encourages Brik to write his book.

Lazarus Averbuch

Lazarus Averbuch (an actual historical figure) is a 19-year-old Ukrainian, Jewish immigrant who moves to Chicago with his older sister, Olga, in late 1907. He hopes that life in America will give him a new start and help him to become a writer. He quickly becomes disillusioned with America, however, for instead of the overnight success he expects he realizes there will be hard work involved in achieving his dream.

Through his friendship with Isador, Lazarus is drawn into anarchism. For reasons still not entirely clear, Lazarus travels to Police Chief Shippy's house, where Lazarus is suspected of preparing to stage an assassination, but is killed himself instead. His body is then buried, stolen, dissected, and reburied, while his entire case becomes the subject for Brik's research nearly a century later.

Olga Averbuch

Olga Averbuch (an actual historical figure) is the older sister of Lazarus, and is a Ukrainian Jewish immigrant to Chicago. Olga is a sweet, thoughtful, and pretty girl who deeply cares for her brother. His death shocks her both in terms of his actual death, and her discovery of his association with anarchists. Heartbroken, she grudgingly agrees to the burial and reburial of her brother in order to help keep peace among the locals, the established immigrants, and the new immigrants. This also allows her to help Isador escape the country in exchange for her participation in the reburial, which in turn allows her to symbolically save the life of one immigrant even though she could not save the life of her brother.



Isador

Isador Maron is an immigrant in Chicago who befriends Lazarus and brings him into the anarchist fold. Isador is a cowardly and irresponsible young man who refuses to accept any blame for Lazarus's death, and likewise shows little remorse for having brought Lazarus into anarchism. Isador's primary concern through the novel is his own safety and security. He is ultimately smuggled out of Chicago and into Canada. His fate is unknown.

Shippy

George Shippy (an actual historical figure) is the Chief of Police in Chicago. Shippy is a successful man who takes his work as chief very seriously. When confronted in his home by Lazarus, and believing Lazarus to have come there to kill him based on the weapon that Lazarus carries, Shippy leaps to defend himself and his home. Shippy accidentally shoots his own son and driver in the ensuing gunfight, but also kills Lazarus.

William P. Miller

William P. Miller (an actual historical figure) is a respected, veteran reporter for the Chicago Tribune. Miller is very defensive of his home country, the United States, and writes glowingly of immigrants who wish to assimilate, while writing passionately against immigrants who refuse to participate in American society, such as the anarchists. Miller becomes the primary reporter on the Lazarus investigation, taking a hardline stance against Lazarus and using the killing to turn public scrutiny on the anarchist movement in general.



Symbols and Symbolism

Letter

A letter is delivered to Chief Shippy by Lazarus on the morning of March 2, 1908. Shippy believes the letter to be a symbolic harbinger of death, wherein Shippy will momentarily be killed. This compels Shippy to shoot Lazarus instead. It is later learned the letter was written to Shippy by local business owner Eichgreen, who wanted to warn Shippy of Emma Goldman's coming to Chicago. Taube believes the letter was Eichgreen's way of keeping Lazarus out of the anarchist web by presenting him as a trustworthy messenger only nominally associated with the Anarchists. The letter itself ultimately becomes symbolic of the mystery of Lazarus's true purpose in being at Shippy's.

Revolvers

Revolvers are carried by Lazarus, Shippy, and Shippy's driver. When Shippy discovers that Lazarus is armed with a revolver, Shippy opens fire on Lazarus first. Shippy's driver also opens fire on Lazarus and, between both men, hit Lazarus a total of seven times.

Newspaper articles

Newspaper articles about the Lazarus killing are written by William P. Miller in the Chicago Tribune. The articles not only recount the killing of Lazarus, but the investigation into the killing as well. The articles slam immigrants who refuse to assimilate, and especially slam the anarchist movement. Quotes from several of Miller's actual newspaper articles are found sprinkled throughout Hemon's novel.

Investigation photos

Investigation photos relating to the killing of Lazarus appear throughout the novel. The investigation photos – some of which include Police Captain Evans holding up the dead Lazarus – appear at the beginning of several chapters. The photographs also include images of Olga, Shippy's house, and the sights of Chicago in the early 1900s. These photos provide visual context for the reader relating to the killing of Lazarus, and also help the police to build their case against Lazarus.

Camera

A camera is carried by Rora throughout the novel. Rora is a photojournalist and photographer, so he is never without his camera. He brings the camera with him when he and Brik travel to Sarajevo and Eastern Europe. At the end of the novel, Rora is



killed and his camera is stolen. According to the authorities, the camera is then sold for drug money.

Grants

Grants are given to members of the immigrant community by philanthropists like Bill and Sue Schuettler. The grants consist of money which enable immigrants to pursue cultural, educational, and other projects and pursuits. The Schuettlers award a grant to Brik so that he may write a book about the Lazarus case, as well as the immigrant experience in early Twentieth Century Chicago.

Brik's Book

Brik plans to write a book on the killing of Lazarus Averbuch in Chicago in 1908. He receives a grant to travel with Rora to Lazarus's home region in Ukraine to learn more about Lazarus and the past. The book will not only detail Lazarus and his life, but the immigrant experience as a whole in early Twentieth Century Chicago. Brik's book – Lazarus's story – becomes juxtaposed with the narration of his own efforts at writing the book, as well as his own immigrant experiences in general.

Coffin

A coffin containing the body of Isaac Lubel is used to smuggle Isador Maron to Canada toward the end of the novel. The coffin becomes symbolic of death and life, for Isador is the living dead: he has disappeared from the land of the living in Chicago, and is traveling with the dead to reemerge with a new life in Canada. Isador is not happy about having to travel in a coffin, but he is happy to be escaping with his life. Coffins are designed to be resting places for the dead, but for Isador, the coffin is protective place for life.

X-Rays

X-Rays of Brik's hand are taken by Avra following his savagely beating Elena's pimp. The X-Rays help Avra to diagnose Brik's injuries, as well as to set his hands and prepare treatment. The X-Rays may be seen as symbolic of the utter reduction of a person to his or her bone's, demonstrating that all people are the same deep down. For example, just as Avra cares for her dead brother's friend through the X-Ray and medical treatment, so too does Olga care for her dead brother's friend.

Money

Money is granted to Brik and Rora as they travel through Eastern Europe researching Lazarus. The money allows them to carry on their research, but also has unexpected

consequences. Brik and Rora end up gifting Elena with money to begin her new life away from her would-be pimp. Money also comes to be listed as the official cause of Rora's death, in which Rora is killed for his camera which is then sold for drug money.



Settings

Chicago

Chicago is a major city in the state of Illinois in the United States of America. Chicago serves as a main setting for the novel, both in the time of Lazarus in 1908, and in the time of Brik in 2004. In 1908, Chicago is heavily industrialized and is split largely between the wealthy, middle class, and settled immigrants, and a massive population of unassimilated immigrants. Chicago becomes a hotbed of radicalism – such as anarchism – as a result. As such, the immigrants become a target for assimilated immigrants and locals who resent and oppose the dangerous ideas and movements the unassimilated are sowing. It is into this environment that Lazarus emerges and is killed. While working on his book about Lazarus nearly a century later, Brik is dismayed to discover that so much of Chicago has changed based on what it was like back in 1908. Precious few places, such as Lincoln Place and Webster Street (which remain residences for the wealthy), retain any trace of what they had been. This compels Brik and Rora to travel to Europe, thereby traveling further into the past.

Shippy's home

Shippy's house is located at 31 Lincoln Place in an upscale neighborhood in Chicago, Illinois. A large, well-furnished house attesting both to Shippy's position as police chief and his earned wealth. It is at Shippy's house where the novel begins when Lazarus arrives to deliver a letter to Shippy, which in turn leads Shippy to suspect he is about to be assassinated. It is at Shippy's house that Shippy, his driver, and Lazarus exchange gunfire, leading to the injury of the driver, Shippy's son, and the death of Lazarus. It is at Shippy's house that the investigation into the Lazarus/anarchist situation begins, and it is at Shippy's house where several photos of the dead Lazarus are taken.

Ukraine

Ukraine is the country in Eastern Europe where Lazarus and Olga were born and raised, and where they lived with their family until the pogroms of 1907. Jews, Lazarus and his family were routinely persecuted by the locals, often leading to great acts of violence and murder. It is from Ukraine that Lazarus and Olga finally decide to emigrate to the United States. It is to Ukraine that Brik and Rora later travel in 2004 to learn more about Lazarus's life and the past. There, they learn about the horrors that Lazarus and his family faced, and learn why the United States seemed so appealing based on everything they had previously endured.



Sarajevo

Sarajevo is the capital city of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and is the hometown of Brik and Rora. Sarajevo is where Brik and Rora spend much of the time while traveling in Eastern Europe to learn more about the life of Lazarus Averbuch. It is where the past comes back to haunt Brik and Rora in the form of tragic memories from the war, and it is where Rora is murdered and has his camera stolen. Sarajevo is also where Rora's sister, Avra, still lives and works. It is in Sarajevo that Brik decides to stay on longer to let his hand heal and to begin writing his book about Lazarus.

Cemeteries

Two cemeteries are visited by Brik and Rora while they are traveling through Eastern Europe. The first is in Krotkiy. The overgrown cemetery here means it has largely been forgotten, and the overgrowth itself represents the passage of both history and time. History and time obscure the past – the person buried underground and the tombstone denoting who that person was and when he or she lived. This person is, symbolically, Lazarus. Brik is now cutting back the growth to learn more about, and to understand, who Lazarus truly was as he travels throughout Ukraine and Moldova. The second cemetery visited is in Ukraine, where a local Jewish woman explains the cemetery is primarily composed of dead Jews. The Soviets, she explains, dug up much of the cemetery for an amusement park – evidence of how ill-treated even the Jewish dead have been in the past.



Themes and Motifs

Immigration

Immigration is an important theme in the novel “The Lazarus Project” by Aleksandar Hemon. Immigration, both legally and illegally accomplished, involves the moving of one or more individuals from country to another. Immigration, its effects, its consequences, and its experience are treated extensively throughout the novel. The immigrant experience is seen through the eyes not only of Lazarus in Chicago of 1908, but through the eyes of Brik in Chicago in 2004 as well.

Brik’s own interest in the immigrant experience comes from the fact that he himself is an immigrant from Bosnia, having fled genocide there in the early 1990s. He has since married an American girl and settled down, though he retains dual citizenship with his home country because he no longer feels at home in Bosnia, but does not quite feel at home in America, either. Brik reads much of his own experiences into Lazarus’s experiences, but Brik is reminded that his own experiences pale in comparison to Lazarus’s.

While Lazarus and Brik both fled their native countries for Chicago to avoid violence and brutality, apart from feeling as though they are strangers in a foreign land, their experiences diverge. In the early 1900s, there was great pressure on immigrants to assimilate into American society and culture as quickly as possible. Many immigrants voluntarily sought to do this as a means of making themselves at home and fitting in. In some situations, this was for practical as well as philosophical reasons – such as Taube seeking to avoid violence breaking out against immigrants because of the anarchists and avoiding a repeat of the pogroms in Eastern Europe. Interestingly enough, many of the established immigrants in the early 1900s considered themselves more American than Old World, so their efforts to compel new immigrants to assimilate oftentimes outpaced that of American-born locals.

While there was widespread discrimination and some violence against immigrants in the early 1900s, in the present day, this is largely unheard of. In the early 2000s, Brik notes that Americans are much more accepting and urge immigrants to retain something of their old ways as well as assimilating. Brik’s decision to write about Lazarus and the immigrant experience are what earn him a grant to do so – a very quick windfall profit. Lazarus, meanwhile, who expected quick success in America, was disappointed by the hard work required to succeed. This ultimately led him to associate with anarchists. Brik experiences some of these same feelings upon his return to his home country. Having been gone for so long, he now feels a stranger even in his native land. Indeed, the other people in Bosnia now see Brik as a non-native. Brik thus becomes suspicious of the authorities, casting doubt on the official explanation for Rora’s death.



Bigotry

Bigotry is an important theme in the novel “The Lazarus Project” by Aleksandar Hemon. Bigotry includes thoughts, words, attitudes, and actions of prejudice, hatred, and discrimination against a group of people, or an individual representative of a group of people, for reasons such as nationality, race, religion, ethnicity, and so on. Bigotry appears in many places throughout the novel, most often associated with immigration.

Lazarus and Olga immigrate to Chicago from Ukraine following the pogrom of 1907, in which locals target the Jewish populations throughout the region. Jews are targeted as scapegoats for the comparative poverty and difficulties in which the locals find themselves, and because the Jews in the area are Jewish. Seeking a better life, Lazarus and Olga leave Ukraine behind. While the situation in Chicago is vastly improved compared to Ukraine, Lazarus and Olga still face discrimination not only for their Ukrainian roots, but to some degree for their being Jewish as well. Lazarus, for example, is greeted with suspicion based solely upon his complexion, his accent, and his manner of dressing by everyone from the Shippy maid to the owners of local stores.

Ironically, some of the strongest bigotry new immigrants face comes from established immigrants, such as in the case of the store owner on Webster. Established immigrants have, for practical and philosophical reasons, gone through great lengths to assimilate and blend into American culture and society. They want, in most cases, to truly be a part of the American experience, and so resent their fellow immigrants who arrive and refuse to work hard and struggle the way that they have. Their resentment turns to outright bigotry in their distrust and refusal to deal with new immigrants, or their efforts to force these new immigrants to comply with their way of doing things.

The bigotry that Brik faces in the early 2000s is of an entirely different kind than faced by Lazarus and his fellow immigrants, but it is still bigotry nonetheless. While some Americans are genuinely interested in ensuring that new immigrants maintain something of their old customs and culture, some do it merely as a way of demonstrating their supposed tolerance and acceptance. They are patronizing and condescendingly reaching out to immigrants rather than truly embracing them. Brik himself notes this, that there is less genuine interest in reaching out to immigrant communities than in creating the appearance of reaching out to immigrant communities.

Mystery

Mystery is an important theme in the novel “The Lazarus Project” by Aleksandar Hemon. Mystery is that which is unknown, unknowable, or inexplicable. Mystery appears in several places throughout the novel, and mystery takes on two primary forms: that of crime, and that of religion.

The criminal mystery in the novel has to deal with Lazarus’s killing in 1908. It is a historical mystery that has not been solved to the writing of this study guide (in March, 2016). While many of the facts are known – that Lazarus had associations with



anarchists, that Lazarus was an unhappy immigrant, that anarchists were known for their violence and assassination attempts – what is not known is why Lazarus was truly at Shippy's house on March 2, 1908. While Eichgreen and others maintain that Lazarus was there merely as a messenger to alert Shippy to Emma Goldman's coming visit, others maintain that Lazarus was at Shippy's house in order to assassinate him. While the official account claims the killing of Lazarus was a matter of self-defense, the truth of the scuffle that resulted in Lazarus's death may never be known.

Religious mystery also matters greatly in the novel. The mysteries of God and of faith appear through the latter parts of the novel, as Brik's journey into the past brings him closer to God. Brik believes that God exists, but does not believe that God believes in him, though he later comes to realize how important religion has been not only to the immigrant experience of Lazarus, but to much of Chicago's population shortly after Lazarus's death. Great parallels are drawn between the Biblical account of Lazarus being raised from the dead by Jesus, and the immigrant who leaves an old life behind for a new life in a new country. Likewise, comparisons are made between the Biblical Lazarus and 1908's Lazarus when the latter's body is stolen from the grave, leading some Christians in the city to become concerned that the body of a Jew named Lazarus should suddenly go missing.

It is later learned that Lazarus's body was stolen either by medical students or grave robbers acting on behalf of a payday with medical students. Many of Lazarus's internal organs are missing, which calls into question the Jewish religious tradition of needing to bury a fully intact body. Olga cannot fathom burying her brother's body without all of its parts present, but Taube insists that a Rabbinical dispensation will allow Lazarus to be reburied in peace without an intact body. The question of the body is truly a mystery of religious faith, both in terms of it needing to be reburied either intact or with dispensation, or in rising from the grave – with both having serious implications revolving around 1908's Lazarus.

America

America is an important theme in the novel "The Lazarus Project" by Aleksandar Hemon. The United States of America is known as a place for second chances, starting over, and new life as well as its freedom, acceptance, and opportunity. America, thematically, includes the experience of America both for native and immigrant citizens. In some ways, it is immensely positive, while in other ways, it is decidedly negative.

America truly, and universally, offers a chance for a better life. However, the success that many enjoy is often wrongly assumed to be easy and quick. While success is possible in America, it takes hard work to make it happen. This is the case with established immigrants, such as Taube and the general store owner on Webster that Lazarus encounters early on in the novel. As it is explained, Lazarus wanted to be a writer in America, but ended up packing eggs instead. Although Lazarus has only been working this job for six months, he has already become disillusioned and thrown in his lot with the anarchists instead of trying to make something of himself. To those like



Taube and William P. Miller (a native Chicagoan), this is unacceptable. Both locals and established immigrants have struggled hard to make it to where they are now, so Lazarus's decision to join the anarchists is tantamount to an insult.

Apart from the hard work that people like Taube and Miller have put into their lives, their feelings of betrayal by the new immigrants like Lazarus comes from the fact that the life the immigrants have in America is inarguably better than what they left behind. True, there is often discrimination and even sometimes violence faced by new immigrants, but compared to the mass persecutions, pogroms, and institutionalized brutality orchestrated against them in their old countries, what is being experienced in America is nothing. Likewise, those established immigrants like Taube, who have done all they can to fit in and assimilate to America both as a matter of pride and practicality, are angered by the refusal of the new immigrants to truly participate in their new home country and their embracing of radicalism like anarchism.

While Brik shares much of the experience of America with Lazarus, Brik's own experience has been relatively easier. While most of the emotional turmoil of fleeing one's home country for a new home in another country is difficult no matter the time or place, Brik has faced little, if any, discrimination for his being from a place other than America. Likewise, pressure to assimilate is minimal, and indeed, the retention of cultural customs is now encouraged. Brik likewise has the freedom to maintain dual citizenship both in America and Bosnia. Brik also has achieved success relatively quickly through being a writer based on his wife's comfortable income, and based on his ease of access to a writing grant courtesy of the Schuettlers. Brik is given a kind reminder by his American-born wife that his own American experience has been vastly different and vastly better than Lazarus's own experience.

The Past

The past is an important theme in the novel "The Lazarus Project" by Aleksandar Hemon. The past – essentially a person's history and past experiences – is essential to the characters of Lazarus, Brik, and Rora. The past matters greatly to Brik, especially, because the past so largely consumes his present.

Brik and Rora converse at great length about the past in the novel. They converse about the past based on their return to their native Sarajevo, and the ghosts that come back to haunt them. These are the terrible experiences Brik and Rora faced during the Bosnian War. They are nightmares, Brik explains, which never leave them. Brik and Rora are at once encountering not only their own history in the region, but Lazarus's history as well. As Brik and Rora consider the past, what it means, and how it exists at all, they come to different conclusions about it. Rora believes that the past and the future exist with or without people being a part of them. Brik believes the past and the future need people in them to exist, such as how he has one foot in the new world and one foot in the old world.



In other words, the past only exists as long as someone can remember it. This references Brik's earlier assertion that, while people may forget about someone, God never does. The old world, symbolizing the past, has forgotten about Lazarus; but the new world, through Brik, has remembered Lazarus. The past is only truly the past, it seems Brik believes, if there is someone to remember it – otherwise it might as well not have happened at all. Rora takes the opposite view, that the past is the past with or without someone to remember it. That Lazarus died is history and cannot be erased or undone even though someone might not be there to remember that it happened.

Regardless as to how Brik and Rora approach the past, both nevertheless must approach it at all in order to learn more about Lazarus. They learn that the pogroms orchestrated in Eastern Europe led to the death of family members, which in turn prompted Lazarus and Olga to leave for America. This forces Brik and Rora to confront their own past, and how their own lives were ultimately irrevocably scarred and changed by the Bosnian genocide. Likewise, it seems as if part of Rora's past catches up to him when he is murdered, or so Brik comes to believe.

Styles

Point of View

Aleksandar Hemon tells his novel “The Lazarus Project” in both the first and third-person points of view. The novel is divided into alternating chapters which take place both in 1908 and 2004, respectively. The sections occurring in 1908 are told in the third-person point of view from the standpoint of an objective narrator, Brik. These sections of the novel are the book that he has written about Lazarus. The 2004 sections are Brik’s own personal experiences as an immigrant and in his attempt to learn more about, and write about Lazarus. The alternating points of view and chapters compare and contrast Brik and Lazarus’s experiences as immigrants, and bring attention to a story – Lazarus’s – that has not received the attention Brik believed it due. The stories of Brik and Lazarus also mirror each other in many ways, providing parallel realities in the past and present. For example Avra and Olga both help their dead brother’s friends – Olga in helping Isador flee Chicago and Avra in helping Brik to set his hand. Each chapter of the novel is likewise given a visual representation instead of a title or a chapter, which create a literal picture in the reader’s mind regarding the contents of that chapter.

Language and Meaning

Aleksandar Hemon tells his novel “The Lazarus Project” in language that is simple, casual, and straightforward. This is done for at least two reasons. First, the novel was originally published in the contemporary era (2008), so the language utilized by the writer, Hemon, is reflective of the time in which the novel was written. Secondly, because half of the novel occurs in the contemporary era (2004), the language utilized is reflective of that time period in order to create a sense of realism and believability. Additionally, because the half of the novel presented as a history of Lazarus was written by Brik in 2004, the language used in the recounting of history is also reflective of the time in which the book was written by Brik.

Structure

Aleksandar Hemon divides his novel “The Lazarus Project” into unnumbered, untitled chapters and sections preceded by black-and-white contemporary and historical photographs. The chapters themselves alternate between the past and present, between the stories of Lazarus and Brik, respectively. Chapters occurring in the past are the summation of Brik’s book about Lazarus’s experiences in 1908, while chapters occurring in the present are the summation of Brik’s experiences in 2004. Each chapter of the novel is likewise given an absolute visual representation instead of a title or a chapter, which creates a literal image in the reader’s mind regarding the contents and events of that chapter. For example, the chapter which begins on page 136 includes a

photograph of Olga Averbuch, while the chapter chiefly deals with Olga's experiences at the police station and her meeting with Taube.



Quotes

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 now I plunge:

-- Brik (Section 1)

Importance: From the very start of the novel, Brik explains to readers that what he is about to recount is very vague, and largely unknown due to the passage of time. Only a few facts are known for sure, including the date (March 2, 1908) and the place (Chicago). What history may have written off as a simple murder, Brik believes to be otherwise. Brik's quest for the truth about the murder and the supposed murderer will form the core of the novel.

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.

-- Brik (Section 1)

Importance: As Lazarus wanders around the streets of the upscale neighborhoods awaiting to be received by the police chief, he looks with disdain upon the upper classes. Lazarus knows the blood, sweat, and tears of the poor, working, and lower middle classes have made the lifestyles of the wealthy possible. For this, Lazarus believes all wealthy look down upon him and the lower classes. It angers him immensely.

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.

-- Brik (Section 1)

Importance: Brik reveals that his book about the 1908 event isn't meant only to be one focusing on the murder, but on immigrant life in general in that era. Brik's effort will help to contextualize the young man's situation, and will explain much more about him and his motives – as well as the killing. Yet, as Brik attempts to see Chicago the way the immigrants saw Chicago in 1908, he finds much of it has changed both physically and culturally. This means he must go back further in time, to the country from which the young man originally came.

She found my idea of a Lazarus who struggled to resurrect in America a tad pretentious, particularly, she said, since my own American life was nothing to complain about.

-- Brik (Section 1)

Importance: Brik explains to his wife how he wants to write about immigration being akin to Lazarus in the Bible. He explains that immigrants are like Lazarus, starting over again in a new life in a new place as though they were returned to life. Mary, however, is



less than impressed because Brik has had nothing to struggle about in his own immigrant experience, especially because she does so well as a neurosurgeon.

Your nightmares follow you like a shadow, forever.
-- Brik (Section 2)

Importance: Here, Brik explains how returning to Bosnia brings back many bad memories of the war. This also explains how, no matter where he goes, the nightmares of the war haunt him – such as a rumbling truck outside his apartment sending him beneath his bed in terror. However, Brik’s observation can also be applied to a girl like Olga, who must forever live with the thought that her brother is a would-be murderer and anarchist.

There are so many stories that could be told, but only some of them are true.
-- Brik (Section 2)

Importance: While traveling toward Ukraine and Moldova to investigate Lazarus’s old life, Brik wonders about what Lazarus’s life in America might have been like had he never been killed. There are many possibilities, including that Lazarus may have come to achieve the American dream. Despite all of these possible endings, they are only stories – and only some stories are true, because only some stories ever actually happened. None of these potential lives, or stories, ever came true for Lazarus.

I am running out of life, Olga thinks. What am I going to do? What is there without life?
-- Narrator (Section 2)

Importance: Olga’s situation grows serious, with Isador hiding in the outhouse, the police looking for Isadore, a group of concerned immigrants wanting to turn him in, and the anarchists who want to pull down the existing order. Olga, however, feels horrible as it is with her brother being dead. She feels as if all of her life in America has gone out of her with Lazarus’s death. Olga feels trapped, and does not know where to go or what to do.

They are lying. Shippy killed him because he was there.
-- Isador (Section 3)

Importance: While speaking with Olga, Isador denies having anything to do with Lazarus’s death. Olga wants to know why Lazarus would have gone to Shippy’s, but Isador denies knowing why. He contends that the papers are lying about Lazarus, and that Shippy only killed Lazarus because Lazarus happened to be at Shippy’s at all. This confuses Olga, because now she is hearing contradictory things about her brother. She is no closer to the truth than she was before.

What you see is what you see, but that is never everything.
-- Rora (Section 3)

Importance: While eating at McDonald’s in Moldova, Brik thinks about Lazarus packing



eggs, and how much Lazarus came to hate eating eggs. This in turn causes Brik to think about the past and the present, and how his life seems neatly divided between the past in Europe, and his present in America. Rora contends that the past and future exist with or without people, and that what one sees is never all there is. Just because someone doesn't recall something, doesn't mean it never happened. Just because something appears to be a certain way, doesn't mean it is true. This can be extrapolated and applied to the killing of Lazarus in Chicago in 1908 as well. The newspaper accounts present what is perceived to be true, not what is actually true.

If there are more dead than living, then the world is about death, and the question is: What are we to do with all the death? Who is going to remember the dead?

-- Brik (Section 4)

Importance: While searching for the roots of the Averbuch family in Moldova, Brik and Rora meet with Iuliana, a descendent of the Averbuch family. Brik has been considering life and death a lot as he travels. He has been doing his best not to let the story of Lazarus Averbuch be forgotten, but with so many dead in the world, there aren't enough people to remember them all. To Brik, the world only seems to be about death.

I think it is about life. I think life is always more life than death... Those who lived are always alive for someone. Those who are alive remember life, not death.

-- Iuliana (Section 4)

Importance: While Brik believes life is more about death than anything else, Iuliana disagrees. She believes life is truly about life, because when someone is alive, they are alive for someone – whether it is themselves or someone else. The living don't remember death because they have not experienced death. The living remember life because that is what they are experiencing.

She was like everybody else because there was nobody like her.

-- Brik (Section 5)

Importance: As Brik spends time in Sarajevo, he reflects on his wife, Mary. Mary is a wonderful person, and utterly unique in the world because there is no one else like her, Brik thinks. Yet, his examination of his wife is an examination of everyone else in the world – there is no one like them, either, including people like Lazarus, Olga, and Isador.