

ALEKSANDAR HEMON'S TESTIMONIAL METAFICTIONS: RESISTING NARRATIVIZATION OF
THE SIEGE OF SARAJEVO AND REPRESENTING THE EFFECTS OF EXILE

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By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the fictional works of Sarajevan writer Aleksandar Hemon can be viewed as testimonial texts. I examine his novels and collections of short stories in conversation with the literary response to the siege of Sarajevo and as representations of the effects of exile, which he suffered when he was displaced during the siege. Though testimony is generally told in first person narratives, Hemon's works deconstruct narrativization to resist the reductive employment of the Bosnian War and to better represent the incomprehensible nature of trauma. He testifies to the complexities of the Sarajevan peoples and the psychological effects of exile to personalize the war.

I would like to thank every student I have had, especially those who are Bosnian, who allowed me to pick their brains about their "identity." I would also like to thank my sister, Stefanie Howell, and my dear friend Sonia Valencia, for all of their efforts to improve my writing and keep me sane. Finally, I would like to recognize Eddie Maloney for the support he provided from the start to finish of my time at Georgetown.

Many thanks,
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Sarajevan War Literature and Aleksandar Hemon as a Testimonial Writer	1
Chapter I: Resisting Narrativization of the Bosnian War – Historiographic Metafiction and Representing American News Media	12
Chapter II: Chapter Two: Personalizing the War – Representing the Effects of Exile .	50
Conclusion	81
Bibliography	83

Introduction: Sarajevan War Literature and Aleksandar Hemon as a Testimonial Writer

In *Testimonio: On Politics of Truth*, John Beverley defines testimony as a narrative “told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events” (31). The implication is that the author, a witness, provides a detailed account of the traumatic events that occurred. As Anne Cubilié asserts in her book, *Women Witnessing Terror*, “testimony is a continually shifting ground of memory and present experience that refuses easy categorization or assimilation” (192). Beverley similarly recognizes the fluidity of the genre. Addressing its complicated nature, he declares, “It is the intentionality of the narrator that is paramount” to a text’s classification as testimony (Beverley 32). He insists on the importance of the author’s motivation toward his/her writing; the intent to communicate what one has witnessed or experienced outweighs any necessity of convention. After all, testimony’s legitimacy lies “not in its uniqueness... but in connection with a group or class situation marked by marginalization, oppression, and struggle (Beverley 39).

Sarajevan writer Aleksandar Hemon was not in Sarajevo during its siege, nor does he create retellings of the war and its direct consequences. He traveled to the United States shortly before the Bosnian War started and became stranded in Chicago as events unfolded in his hometown. I argue that his fictions nonetheless contribute to Sarajevan siege literature as a particular type of testimony. As this thesis will show, he (re)presents the hardships of the siege, aligning him with the motivations Beverley clearly defines in his book. As I will demonstrate, his novels and short stories the

concerns he shares with other writers representing the siege, including rectifying misconceptions of war and personalizing the conflict. I will discuss how, through his postmodern play with narrative convention, Hemon is able to create testimony that expresses his unique perspective as an exile during the siege.

Understanding the siege and the literary reaction of its witnesses is integral to unfolding Hemon's work. This introduction will outline the major controversies of the war and the coinciding motifs within Sarajevan siege literature. The aim is then to posit Hemon within this literary conversation. I begin by noting that the tensions that led to the siege developed as positive ties between the regions of Yugoslavia began to fray after the death of President Tito in 1980. The communist leader had developed an image of "Brotherhood and Unity" among the nations' varying ethnicities (Weine 13). During his rule, there existed a "conception of Yugoslavia as a supranational, federal union based on equality between its constituent peoples" (Bose 116). However, in the early 1990s, as Croatia declared independence and Serbia demanded more power, Bosnia became a warzone between the two regions. Bosnia declared independence in 1992, and the Serbs laid siege to its capital city, Sarajevo, even as its multiethnic population strove against ultranationalism via artistic outlets. The siege continued^a as writers, visual artists, and musicians resisted the politicians' oversimplified rhetoric and reckless killing.

A primary concern for the artists representing Sarajevo became rectifying misunderstandings about the nature of the war as well as the city itself, specifically

^a Until 1996

denying the narrativization of the war as laid out by political officials. According to Michel-Rolph Trouillot, in *Silencing the Past*, narratives “necessarily distort life” to adopt the perspective or agenda of their creators (6). That is, narratives are selective and metaphorical in ways in that real life is not; therefore, they cannot represent historical events without in some ways politicizing their realities to favor the story they seek to tell. Trouillot explains that narratives are also “necessarily emplotted in a way that life is not,” meaning they take on themes and other plot devices absent in the real world (6). This emplotment, however, is also highly politicized. As Susan Sontag notes in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, the public seeks to identify clear protagonists and antagonists of a war so that they can ally themselves with the righteous “side” and condemn the other (10). As former Yugoslavia split, politicians sought to rally their people on the so-called right side to gain support for their campaigns. According to Siniša Malešević, Serb president Slobodan Milošević was the first “to break the taboo of speaking to an audience consisting solely of one ethnic group (Serbs) and openly using ethnic-national rhetoric” (177). Milošević presented the war as a necessary step in granting Serbia its deserved power and economic stability. His ultranationalism justified the siege of Sarajevo and destruction of its non-Serb ethnicities (Glenny 15). Sontag explains, “To the militant, identity is everything;” soldiers and the public will unite in support of those who are like them (10). Milošević used identity to clear his warpath.

Several writers, including Hemon, attempt to represent the ways in which the war’s political rhetoric translated to everyday people. Often in siege literature, readers find scenes of Sarajevans arguing about which group is to blame. In Nenad Veličković’s

novel, *Lodgers*, several characters, even those from the same family, debate whether the Bosnians or Serbs or Croats started the war. The narrator explains:

Davor says that the war is being waged because the Croats have Croatia, the Serbs have Serbia, but the Muslims don't have Muslimia... Dad says that Davor is a dunce and that the war is being waged because the Serbs and the Croats want to divide Bosnian and kill and drive out all the Muslims... No! I don't think I'll be able to explain objectively and impartially to the average reader why war is being waged here. (6-7)

This passage demonstrates how convoluted the war was for Sarajevans; family members with access to the same media outlets cannot easily or definitively decipher the reasoning behind the siege. This scene also alludes to propaganda and its frightening power. As I show in my first chapter, Hemon's work, especially *Nowhere Man*, reflects on the reductive employment American media utilized to explain the complicated conflict to a largely ignorant and apathetic audience. I will also look at how Hemon resists the narrative of 'good guys versus bad guys' and demonstrates how the power of narrativization lays in the readiness of the public to accept it.

The ethnic differences Milošević used to support his campaign were interpreted across the globe as simple, irrefutable fact. For example, the Bush administration of the United States accepted and portrayed the conflict as an insoluble tragedy resulting from historical hatreds between ethnic groups (Power 282). This led to the conclusion that Yugoslavia's split was inevitable and intervention from the United States would be futile. Sabrina P. Ramet, like many other Balkans commentators, condemned the

“Serbian national myth,” stating that an ideal that so callously denies or shrugs off the suffering of its victims should be considered an “unhealthy, collective neurosis” (151). While her conclusion seems conscientious, I argue that she still places too much stock in nationalism as the cause of the war. Michael Ignatieff, in his book, *Warrior’s Honor*, explains: “nationalist sentiment... is a secondary consequence of political disintegration, a response to the collapse of state order” (45). He emphasizes that it manifests after the conflict has already begun; therefore, claiming that it is the reason for conflict is unreasonable. He asserts that there is “nothing timeless about [a] man’s national identity” since it largely a “relational” term (37). Though ethnicity proved a useful marker for simplifying the wars in Yugoslavia, it was never more than a construct of emplotment.

Regardless of this sensibility, identity proved to be a powerful political tool, and Sarajevo artists have focused much of their efforts on resisting discriminatory ethnic labels. To complicate the war’s notions of identity, they emphasize Sarajevo’s diversity and its peoples’ previously peaceful co-existence.^b Perhaps the best example of this is Zlatko Dizdarević’s *Portraits of Sarajevo*. Dizdarević compiled brief vignettes depicting a variety of Sarajevo’s citizens. This work captures yet deemphasizes the multiethnic nature of Sarajevo to depict a level of equality amongst its peoples. Authors of fiction, like Veličković, sprinkle their narratives with characters from an array of ethnic and religious backgrounds to convey simultaneous notions of multiplicity and

^bBosnia’s population in 1991 was divided as such: “45 percent Bosnian Muslim, 35 percent Bosnian Serb, and 18 percent Bosnian Croat” (Bose 107). Sarajevo especially was a center for “secular cosmopolitanism” with “significant intermixing including intermarriage” amongst ethnicities (Bose 118).

sameness. As I will convey in the following chapters, Hemon's fictions vehemently object to reductive conceptions of identity through his use of tools like character doppelgangers and scenes depicting the news media's faults. Overall, a sense of commonality amongst Sarajevo's people surges through literature concerning the siege, reiterating their sameness/diversity.

Another important motif of Sarajevo siege literature is the connection between the city and its citizens. Images of the broken city, whether depicted in words, photography or film, reflect the destruction of the Sarajevo way of life. Journalists visiting the city during the war often comment on the devotion of its residents. Anthony Loyd, from England, writes: "Serbs, Croats, Muslims: there were none in that room. Just Sarajevo Bosnians" (180). He refutes the accusations that the war was waged between clearly defined opponents or that Sarajevo's citizens were a divided people. Juan Goytisolo, originally from Spain, reports on the equal harm inflicted on the supposedly different groups in the city: "nobody, absolutely nobody can feel secure in any part of the city" (11). Loyd's and Goytisolo's statements describing the situation, as they found it in Sarajevo homes, blatantly reject the political narratives of the war that stressed ancient ethnic hatreds and irreconcilable differences. At the same time, they draw attention to the relationship between the city and its peoples. Sarajevans identify precisely as such and continually resisted the labels of politics and global media.

Given the strong attachment to the city, it is not surprising then that the destruction of Sarajevo traumatized many of its inhabitants. Goytisolo explains that the Serbs committed "memoricide," the crime of erasing a society's written history, by

destroying culturally significant buildings such as the National Library (25). Stevan Weine, a psychiatrist who worked closely with siege victims, explains:

When survivors from Sarajevo talk about the siege's destruction, they talk about the destruction of individual lives, but also the damage done to apartment buildings, roads, offices, trams, parks, mosques and churches, hospitals, museums, restaurants, and theaters... but by far the single greatest act of physical destruction, in Sarajevans' minds, happened in the summer of 1992, when Serb forces destroyed the National Library. (57)

Weine notes the deeply personal tie inhabitants felt to the city; the physical city was an integral part of their lives and fundamental in understanding their identity as Sarajevans. Weine goes on to argue that "the primary target of the Serbian nationalists' genocide in Bosnia was the multi-ethnic way of life" represented by their intermingling in city spaces (14). Writer Ammiel Alcalay agrees, stating: "The war in Bosnia is also a war against everything Sarajevo represents: its unique amalgamation of peoples, cultures, faiths, and styles; in short, its urban civilization" (268). Locals and visitors alike realized the symbolic importance of Sarajevo as a multiethnic cultural hub before the wars. Such analysts testify to the pre-existing cosmopolitanism of Sarajevo as well as its horrific demise.

In her essay, "Notes on Trauma and Community," Kai Erikson explores the effects that this kind of collective trauma can inflict on a population. She claims that, in situations where entire populations are inflicted with trauma, the individual experiences "a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of

support and that an important part of the self has disappeared” (*Explorations* 187). As the citizens of Sarajevo witnessed their city’s destruction, they also experienced the crumbling of their Sarajevan identity. Though they asserted their Sarajevan-ness, they were acutely and painfully aware that their community identity was disintegrating. This is important to the individual, because the community provides the individual with support and context. Erikson explains how traumatic experiences can create a “loss of confidence in the surrounding tissue of family and community (*Explorations* 198). The constant shelling of the city scattered the population physically but also sociologically. It dissolved the sense of a stable, supportive “we” that could unite against outsiders (*Explorations* 187). The shelling and burning of Sarajevo contributed directly to the annihilation of the one identity all Sarajevans proudly shared.

Sarajevan writers address the destruction of the city and its way of life in a variety of ways, but for many the answer is simply to publicize Sarajevan resilience. In his introduction to *Portraits of Sarajevo*, Dizdarević affirms that the city’s residents “remain Sarajevans, in every sense of that terrible word,” even as they are indiscriminately targeted by snipers and shelling (x). For writers like Hemon, identifying as Sarajevans becomes an act of resistance against the rhetoric and destruction of the war. When describing testimony, Beverley emphasizes the “struggle for survival, implicated in the act of narration itself” (32). The novels and war diaries published during and after the siege embody its strife as well as a struggle against suppression. Weine borrows the term “fantastic reality,” from Yugoslav writer Danilo Kis, to describe the surreal experience of witnessing a city leveled and its people dazed

(175). He explains how Dizdarević's *Sarajevo: A War Journal*, along with other war diaries, attempts to represent experiences of that fantastic reality. He applauds their efforts to "make bystanders see" as they testify to the atrocities of the siege (182). As Beverley states, it is the intentionality of the narrator that makes the work testimonial.

Representing the fantastic reality of a traumatic event is no easy task. According to literary theorist Cathy Caruth, in the moment of the traumatic event, the survivor cannot understand or process what has happened, thus making it impossible to portray (*Explorations* 5). Since the actual trauma cannot be (re)presented, one can only simulate feelings in the reader that might allude to that of the traumatic experience. Caruth argues that such experiences, including fantastic reality, are simply "incomprehensible" (*Explorations* 5). Therefore, the artist can only depict the absence of understanding that one experiences during trauma (*Unclaimed* 6). This explains Veličković's and Dizdarević's attentions to the convoluted and uncertain aspects of the war. The narrator of *Lodgers*, discussed above, never deciphers the causes of the war. *Portraits of Sarajevo* refuses to explain where its subjects come from or what destinies followed. Each author portrays the surreal by accentuating the unanswered questions of the siege. Caruth claims, it is this feeling "of experiences not yet completely grasped — that resonates" with the audience (*Unclaimed* 56). This thesis seeks to demonstrate how Hemon represents the incomprehensible to his audience in his uniquely fictive set of what I argue are testimonial works.

Hemon's intention in depicting his life as an exile of the war is important because in order to classify Hemon as a testimonial writer, the current definition must

be expanded to include literature that is not written in the first person, not told by a single narrator, and not written in traditional narrative in form. In my first chapter, I will explore the ways in which Hemon utilizes postmodern techniques to deconstruct narrativization. I will examine traits of historiographic metafiction, as defined by Linda Hutcheon, in each of his works to demonstrate the emphasis he places on the reductive and selective nature of emplotment. Then, I will turn my focus to specific scenes wherein Hemon addresses the narrative framing of the news media in the United States. I will argue that Hemon rejects the oversimplified stories the media conveys to audiences via his portrayal of the discrepancies between the war's actuality and the viewer's misconceptions. His constant attention to deconstructing narrativization, especially as it relates to the siege of Sarajevo, positions his work alongside other literary responses to the siege and allows him to alert the reader to alternate sources of truth, such as testimony.

In my second chapter, I will discuss the theoretical challenges that face Hemon as a writer on trauma as well as how Hemon overcomes obstacles of representation to provide a testimony that reflects his rather unique position as an exile of the war. I will argue that Hemon's manipulation of narrative conventions assist him in his portrayal of what Edward Said calls "a fundamentally discontinuous state of being" (140). I will also examine some of Hemon's motifs to demonstrate progression in his works despite his nonconventional style and "incomprehensible" subject matter. I argue that classification of testimony should be centered upon the intentionality of the author and the resulting reader experience instead of being focused on the narrator. Therefore, Aleksandar

Hemon should be counted among testimonial authors even though his metafictional form does not conform to the traditional notion of a testimonial narrative.

Chapter I: Resisting Narrativization of the Bosnian War – Historiographic Metafiction and Representing American News Media

As a Sarajevan writer, Hemon positions himself within the literary tradition of siege writers. As I explain in my introduction, the literary response to the Serb attack on Sarajevo is characterized by a resistance to intentional attempts to revise the narrative of the conflict, specifically concerning the motivations behind the war and the general demographic of the region. Serb President Slobodan Milošević in particular used ultranationalist rhetoric to divide the peoples of former Yugoslavia and gain support for his goals of conquest. Global politicians and media also aided in the oversimplification of the conflict by narrativizing complex social and economic issues. Their narrative emplotment of the war contributed to a reductive version of the war that depicted ethnic groups in dispute due to their ancient hatreds of one another. My interest in Hemon's works stems from what I see as his attempts to reject this narrativization and nationalist rhetoric and to construct alternative narratives—often through the use of complex narrative techniques—that explore the issue of telling the story of the ineffability of trauma in the Bosnian war. As John Beverley notes, testimony is “by nature a protean and demotic form not yet subject to legislation by a normative literary establishment” (31).

I will argue that Hemon's works demonstrate the flexibility of testimony as he utilizes postmodern techniques to depict his experience as an exile of the Bosnia War. Linda Hutcheon explains in *The Politics of Postmodernism* that postmodernism is

politically effective due to its positioning as “where documentary historical actuality meets formalist self-reflexivity and parody” (7). In other words, it is the simultaneous acknowledgement of reality, representation, and self-consciousness of that representation that Hutcheon finds so powerful. Hutcheon also explains that postmodernism’s “mode is resolutely contradictory as well as unavoidably political” due to the emphasis it places on intention and motivation behind narrativization (1). In my first section, I will show how Hemon’s testimony relies heavily on complicated postmodern forms to generate reader-fueled skepticism of emplotment. In the second section, I will examine his treatment of American news media to demonstrate his deconstruction of its dehumanizing narrative frames, which he counters with his personalized accounts.

Historiographic Metafiction

Before beginning an analysis of Hemon’s work, I would like to establish a foundation of postmodern ideas and techniques that I will be implementing in my discussion. Linda Hutcheon observes that the “doubled use-and-abuse of conventional expectation” is a common tool utilized by postmodern writers (82). Presenting the common element in an uncommon way complicates the reader’s understanding of and interaction with the text. Many readers are familiar with some level of convention manipulation, such as in William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, wherein Benjy’s narration is so nonlinear and sporadic that it seems nonsensical at first, though he actually introduces the novel’s motifs and conflicts. Postmodernism often pushes

conventions even further, resisting and deconstructing form altogether, which creates what have been called “tensions” by James Phelan within the text. Phelan defines tensions as “some disparity of knowledge, value, judgment, opinion, or belief between narrators and readers or authors and readers” (*Narrative* 30). In other words, a tension is the discrepancy between what the reader perceives or expects and the author’s/narrator’s portrayal or fulfillment (or lack thereof) of that expectation. For example, the reader expects a coherent point of view and an account of events but receives Benjy’s incoherent memories mixed in with his observations. Faulkner creates a tension wherein the reader senses a gap between their understandings of what a narrator should do and the actuality of Benjy’s role.

Throughout his four texts, Hemon manipulates familiar narrative conventions to create tensions that draw attention to and challenge the fabricated nature of narrative, including, specifically, the war’s emplotment. As I mention in my introduction, Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that narrative cannot represent historical events without politicizing them (6). Beverley suggests that testimony offers “a new form of truth” that highlights or gives voice to the subaltern experience (18). I view Hemon’s works as directly opposing the mainstream, or Western, narratives of the war in his attempts to deconstruct familiar plot forms. Hutcheon declares that a plot “is always a totalizing representation that integrates multiple and scattered events into one unified story” (*Politics* 65). She argues that postmodern fiction often resists totalization and uses the term “historiographic metafiction” to discuss novels which “are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages”

(*Poetics* 5). She uses Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as an example since it can be seen as "both metafictionally self-reflexive and yet speaking to us powerfully about real political and historical realities" (*Poetics* 5).

I will show how each of Hemon's works draw attention to their fictive qualities to demonstrate the fabrication behind narrativizing historical events. As Hutcheon points out, "all past 'events' are potential 'historical facts,' but the ones that become facts are those that are chosen to be narrated" (*Politics* 72). According to Hutcheon, this process lends to the "distinction between brute event and meaning-granted fact" (72). I will show how Hemon creates alternative plot progressions or manipulates form to problematize the reader's notions of narrative form. These unsettling tensions break down the reader's sense of how to read or digest a story, which in turn requires that they reconsider their notions of emplotment altogether.

As I have suggested, Hemon draws attention to his own role as a writer and to the process of storytelling to create tensions that will develop his reader's awareness of narrativization, which politicizes traumatic events. In certain stories in *Love and Obstacles*, for example, Hemon directly comments on the fabricated nature of so-called non-fiction, or truth. In "The Bees, Part 1" the narrator's father decides to write a non-fiction book to combat the frightening existence of fiction and writings about things that never happened. The narrator states, "Whatever conveyed reality earned my father's unqualified appreciation" (*Love and Obstacles* 129). The father trusts in the distinction and exclusivity on either side of the fiction/non-fiction line. However, as he struggles to write a completely true story, he ends up extending a beekeeping metaphor and relying

on memory rather than traceable fact. Referring to one character in particular the narrator states, "I've inquired about the Japanese tailor, and no one else remembers him or has heard of him" (135). The father nonetheless counts the tailor as one of the seventeen nationalities he remembers in the town of Prnjavor. In this example, Hemon draws attention to the questionable reliance the father places on memory to highlight the ease with which an author can unintentionally fabricate data, even in a non-fiction piece. Also, in a move similar to Hutcheon's distinction between "brute event and meaning-granted fact," Hemon demonstrates how that which "conveyed reality," or asserts itself as non-fiction, may not be based on actual fact or could mark otherwise negligible information as highly important. The father claims to "stick to what really happened;" yet, his narrative is based on perspective and memory, and he highlights beekeeping as the most important event of the time period (130). This demonstration forces the reader to recognize the politics of narrativization and reevaluate the author's own facts and emphasis.

In "American Commando," Hemon further draws attention to the creative position of storytelling as he unveils his own role as writer. His narrator, who closely resembles the implied author, admits to the poetic license authors take to make their stories more fascinating or digestible. While discussing the film student who studies his work and life, the narrator states: "I told her the stories of my life, embellishing here, flatly making up lies there, for I frankly wanted to help her write a good script and get the funding for her project" (151). Following Hutcheon's logic once again, I argue that the information that the narrator presents to the film student will be taken by her as

meaningful fact since the narrator selected it for his narration. The tension here arises from the reader's expectation that the narrator will tell the truth and his blatant admission that he does not do so. In a story with a reliable narrator, such as *Pride and Prejudice*, the reader can trust that Miss Bennett marries Mr. Darcy. In contrast, the reader cannot believe Hemon's narrator, who admits to "flatly making up lies."

Regardless of his established unreliability, the audience is without any other source and still expects the narrator to convey important information. Yet, the narrator continues to assert his unreliability. He insists that even when the film student asks him "thorny questions," he responds with "ramblings about anything that came to mind" (150). I argue here and in the following sections that Hemon accentuates unreliability to lead his reader toward questioning the process behind narrativization and the motives of the author. Though the narrator's honesty (about being dishonest) seems endearing, the reader must be wary of the ways his good intentions affect his text. He might want to "help" the student researching him, just as the father wanted to write a story that would finally express "what really happened," but both stories fabricate evidence and skew the focus of the narrative to their perspectives. Trouillot explains that participants (witnesses, authors, storytellers) actively partake in actual events and compose subjective, linear story lines to recount what occurred. Therefore, history is "both 'what happened' and 'that which is said to have happened'" (2). This notion affirms the importance of how history is conceived and delivered to the masses.

The unreliability of storytelling is a crucial motif in *The Lazarus Project* as well. The protagonist's companion, Rora, fills their time together with tales of the Bosnian

war, the siege of Sarajevo, and the compelling characters involved. Brik, the protagonist, admits that he becomes “enchanted” by Rora’s stories (*The Lazarus Project* 291). Here Brik’s readiness to believe Rora’s testimony is mirrored by the reader’s readiness to believe Hemon’s. In an essay entitled, “Failed-State Fiction,” John Marx explains that ‘fiction specifies a range of types—the child soldier, the witness to atrocity—whose specialized knowledge grants them authority’ (623). In *Things Fall Apart*, for example, the reader grants expertise to Chinua Achebe due to his experience growing up in Nigeria. The reader believes that the perspective provided by his text should be valued over that of another author who does not have firsthand knowledge of the region, even if the second author has other credentials that demonstrate his education in that field. Applied to *The Lazarus Project*, Marx’s observation justifies Brik’s acceptance of Rora’s stories as authentic accounts from a person who was actually there. Similarly, the average reader will accept Hemon’s representations of the war, because the typical reader lacks Hemon’s direct experience with Bosnia or being Bosnian.

As I discuss in my introduction, testimonial writing presumes authenticity. Anne Cubilié observes, a “personalized account of trauma, with its claims to a truth of individual experience, is a powerful and difficult document to deny (199). I argue that the reader expects Hemon to be a reliable source as an expert (Marx) and as a witness (Cubilié). In my view, the reader-author relationship is reflected in Brik and Rora’s interactions. Brik recognizes his own inexperience (since he was in the United States during the siege) and grants Rora the authority to inform him. Rora reminds Brik, “You

know nothing about these people, Brik. Nothing about the war” (*The Lazarus Project* 184).

As Rora fills Brik’s head with stories of gangsters and noble causes, Brik feels more and more attuned to his lost Sarajevan identity and the struggles of his people. Referring to his wife, he declares; “Now she had to believe me, that I had had a life, that my family had a history, that it was all connected through a powerful and loving, if perished, empire” (129). From Brik’s perspective, Rora testifies to Brik’s background, proving to non-witnesses, such as his wife, that he came from somewhere. For Brik, Rora’s stories of his people create a context in which he belongs. As an exile, Brik has felt detached and displaced from Sarajevo, but he feels “connected” to his homeland through the familiarity of Rora’s stories. For example, referring to the destruction of a Viennese Café in Sarajevo, Brik explains that he “mourned it from afar;” yet, he takes on a nostalgic tone as he recounts the story of Rora’s grandfather, a “regular” at that same café (128). Through Rora’s stories, Brik relives the familiarity he once knew in his homeland.

Brik also finds comfort in Rora’s emplotment of the siege of Sarajevo; Rora’s narratives give significance to the war by creating “one unified story” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 65). He assigns protagonists and antagonists, defines their conflicts clearly, and even provides resolutions. He completes the narrative for Brik: “Rambo won. He cannot be touched these days, so he does not care. And I don’t care. Nobody cares” (*The Lazarus Project* 214). Hutcheon notes the natural “desire for closure as well as for the order usually implied by systematic plot structure” and suggests that historiographic

metafiction foregrounds both (*Politics* 61). Rora provides closure for Brik, completing the testimony of his experiences in the war with a (too) neat ending that suggests the finality of the war's end.

However, I find that Hemon exposes Rora's unreliability in *Lazarus Project*, which in turn undermines his own authority to create narratives. When Rora is killed, Brik assumes a criminal mastermind is behind Rora's death and asserts to Rora's sister, "Things happen for a reason" (*The Lazarus Project* 291). His reassuring words provide little comfort, since Rora's actual killer was a young boy who wanted to steal Rora's camera. The sister, a Sarajevan who has witnessed countless meaningless deaths, can only smile, "her eyes tearing up" (291). As Brik comes to grips with Rora's false emplotment, he realizes the power that he gave Rora. Though Brik tries desperately for a few moments to cling to the stories Rora told him, he begins to accept his "apparent foolishness and gullibility" (291). Yet, as the novel closes, Rora's sister insists that Brik write down Rora's testimony as he intended. In the final line, as she mends Brik's hand, she affirms that he will "need it for writing" (292). This scene accentuates Brik's realization that Rora's stories were fiction and his role in perpetuating those fictions. I would argue that, as Brik makes the decision to tell the stories regardless of their factuality, Hemon draws attention to his own delivery of the stories to the reader. Though the narratives are fabricated, they were Rora's (and now Brik's [and implicitly Hemon's]) only conduit for expressing his perspective of the war. As I will discuss in more detail in my next chapter, the challenge of testimony lies in the paradox that narratives cannot adequately express trauma, yet they may be the only tool for doing so.

According to Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction plays with this problem through its “self-reflexive” techniques.

Hemon draws attention to the unreliability of the narrator, in both *Love and Obstacles* and *The Lazarus Project*, to develop, I believe, readerly awareness and skepticism toward narrative constructs. He brings to light the “paradox of the desire for and the suspicion of narrative mastery” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 61). Readers naturally desire a familiar narrative style, and providing an alternative or challenging style creates tensions. I argue that Hemon develops these tensions to foreground the reader’s assumptions and expectations. He then highlights the problematic nature of narrativization, specifically narrator and author unreliability. The narrator’s father in “The Bees, Part 1” is unreliable due to his faulty memory and obsession with bees, the narrator of “American Commando” admits to lying, and Rora fabricates plotlines to make sense of the war. After all the stories he has told Brik, Rora still asserts: “You still know nothing...you will never know anything” (*The Lazarus Project* 210). I argue that Hemon instills in his reader wariness toward storytellers, himself included, due to the exclusive and constructed nature of narrative. As Beverley observes, “In some cases [testimony] actively resists being literature” since its motivations reject the simplification of marginalized issues (49). Hemon alerts his readers to the dangers of emplotment as Rora tells Brik, “There are so many things I don’t mention, you could write a book about them” (*The Lazarus Project* 161). This comment alludes to the selection process inherent in narrativization that motivates Hemon’s deconstruction of emplotment.

In *The Question of Bruno*, Hemon experiments with the form of his stories to challenge the reader's understanding of narrative conventions. "The Life and Work of Alphonse Kauders," for example, is a short story formulated out of listed biographical details and authorial notes. A standard biography generally tells, in chronological order, the important and necessary details of a person's life. However, in "The Life and Work of Alphonse Kauders," each supposed fact selected by the imagined biographer seems more absurd than the last in its apparent randomness. The narrator indiscriminately relays information about Kauders's hygiene and sexual habits, and records his most ludicrous quotes. The notes lack any obvious order or importance and could just as likely be a continuation of the haphazard biography as a list of miscellaneous bibliographic material. Only the title suggests that the piece is intended to be a biography. I feel that Hemon dislodges the reader from their expectations of the genre to highlight his role as author and the process of narrativization.

Hemon's play with biography in "The Life and Work of Alphonse Kauders" emphasizes what Hutcheon noted as the selection process that distinguishes "brute event and meaning-granted fact" (72). Since they lack numerical ordering or any clear organization, each piece of information selected for the biography and its notes appears to be as (un)important as the next. For example:

There are records that Alphonse Kauders spent some years in a juvenile delinquents' home, having set seven forest fires in a single week.

Alphonse Kauders said: "I hate people, almost as much as horses, because there are always too many of them around, and because they kill bees, and because

they fart and stink, and because they always come up with something, and it is the worst when they come up with irksome revolutions. (*The Question of Bruno* 28)

Hemon's indiscriminate inclusion of each fact actually equalizes their value as well as their worthlessness. Their inclusion seems to defy the logic of Hutcheon that asserts the narrativization of only important, designated facts. Instead, Hemon highlights the mundane, the vulgar, and the despicable equally in this jumbled collection. Hemon thus rejects the reader's understanding of biography, which should in theory select and elaborate on the most important and meaningful moments in a person's life. By collecting arbitrary facts and calling it a biography, Hemon forces the reader to evaluate the construction of biography, a supposedly non-fiction genre.

Hemon resists a conventional approach to lead the reader toward an investigation of that convention. This tension encourages readers to reexamine their expectations as they relate to historical narratives. Hemon makes this connection clear when his narrator comments on the use of an encyclopedia: "This great book teaches us how the verisimilitude of fiction is achieved by the exactness of the detail" (39). Hemon uses the comparison between the encyclopedia and a piece of fiction to equalize the act of reporting history to the act of storytelling. He asserts that the minuter the detail it contains, the more believable a story becomes until it is eventually considered fact and history. After a second glance, the reader recognizes that seemingly mundane or crass biographical information about Kauders actually lists details that make him seem more real, though his existence is just as fabricated as the list. Hemon presents both the

encyclopedia and the biography, which are generally considered genres of non-fiction, as “fiction” derived from a selective process of details that are granted importance. He collapses, I argue, the difference between brute event and meaning-granted fact by implying that they are interchangeable depending on the author’s intention.

Hemon further develops the slipperiness of history and fiction in several other stories in *The Question of Bruno*, and especially in “The Sorge Spy Ring,” in which footnotes take over the page. Hemon’s use of footnotes in such an unusual way results in the “simultaneous inscribing and subverting of the conventions or narrative” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 47). He creates a tension wherein the reader no longer knows how to locate or follow the narrative. While footnotes usually briefly specify the source of a citation or clarify meaning, as when they translate Shakespeare’s diction in an edited edition of a play, the footnotes in “The Sorge Spy Ring” contain dialogue and pieces of an alternative narrative. Hemon draws attention directly to his misuse of footnotes. They are so long they become visually striking. The footnotes interrupt the flow of the story, as readers attempt to take note of each reference. Eventually the footnotes overtake the page. On page 51, for example, the main body only takes up three lines; the footnote describing yet another piece of Sorge’s adventure covers the rest of the page. The reader does not know whether they ought to focus on the main text or the story presented by the fragmented footnotes. Hemon is thus able to accentuate the reader’s assumptions; tension arises from the reader’s traditional understanding of footnotes and Hemon’s use of them.

In “The Sorge Spy Ring,” Hemon encourages the reader to recognize the tendency of narratives to place emphasis here or imply historical fact there, and to remember that the author remains in control of the information and its delivery. I view Hemon’s use of footnotes as a tool to draw attention to the abundance of details available to the author as well as to the absurdity of their selection. Similar to the biographical listing in the previous story, the footnotes bombard the reader with details that the reader expects will support or explain the text with historical information. Instead, like the facts about Alphonse Kauders, the footnotes about Sorge do not appear to carry any more historical weight than the rest of the story. For example, one footnote quotes the work of “Herr Alexander Hemon, a researcher at the German Foreign Office Archives” (*The Question of Bruno* 71). As the reader recognizes the author’s name and wonders if a German Foreign Office Archives even exists, they question their expectations of a footnote’s functionality. Hemon’s subversion of a footnote’s conventional use “foregrounds and thus contests” tools and practices that we generally take for granted (Hutcheon, *Politics* 51). His repurposing and unique deployment of footnotes requires the reader to rethink the relationship between the main text and its supposed supplemental materials. By manipulating conventions that generally relay information and reference citations, Hemon challenges the reader to address their assumptions regarding non-fiction texts. He highlights the choices and intentionality of the author behind how history is constructed and given legitimacy. He therefore challenges the so-called truth of non-fiction and encourages the reader to find it elsewhere.

Though I will closely examine the form of *Nowhere Man* in my next chapter as a conduit for exploring the effects of exile, I would like to note here a few key points about its content and structure that will demonstrate Hemon's continued resistance to historical narrativization. In *Nowhere Man*, Hemon presents a fragmented narrative delivered by a variety of narrators. The chapters do not follow a chronological progression or develop an obvious plotline for protagonist Jozef Pronek, a young Sarajevan. Each narrator depicts a moment or situation of Pronek's life, whether it is back in Sarajevo before the war or in Chicago where he becomes stranded during the siege. I argue that the disjointed construction of the narrative resists typical emplotment. As Hutcheon notes, "Familiar narrative form of beginning, middle, and end implies a structuring process that imparts meaning as well as order" (59). In *Nowhere Man*, Hemon refuses to provide a clear beginning, middle or end. His second chapter chronologically precedes the first, and the narrative lacks all but one major event (his cathartic outburst) that happens in Pronek's life. Following Hutcheon's logic that a linear progression creates a sense of "order" for the reader, I argue that the lack of resolution following the climax causes reader discomfort.

As I explore in my next chapter, the reader's inability to digest Pronek's story easily contributes to Hemon's depiction of the complicated experiences of exile. Hutcheon notes, "The notion of [a narrative's] 'end' suggests both teleology and closure" (59). Hemon denies his reader a sense of both. A more conventional novel begins with an exposition, develops its characters, reaches a climax, and concludes. As I have mentioned, the reader finds comfort and satisfaction in this familiar progression.

The form of *Nowhere Man*, on the other hand, unsettles the reader and forces the reader to reconsider the construction of narrative. Hutcheon observes that, “among the consequences of postmodern desire to denaturalize history is a new self-consciousness” (54). Hemon’s crafted historiographic metafiction develops reader consciousness of the presumably non-fictional narrativization of history.

Hemon often emphasizes the fickle and constructed nature of non-fiction to demonstrate the absurdity of its employment and, in *Nowhere Man* especially, he accentuates the selective and arbitrary nature of history. He quotes Bruno Schulz in a prelude:

Ordinary facts are arranged in time, strung along its length, as on a thread. There they have their antecedents and their consequences, which crowd tightly and press hard on the other without any pause. This has its importance for any narrative, of which continuity and successiveness are the soul. (*Nowhere Man* i)

Schulz comments on the simplification process of creating a narrative, or writing history. Similar to Hutcheon’s observation on employment, he observes that narrativization views events and sorts them, giving them importance and lending them as justification for the events that then follow. Schulz emphasizes that narratives use a linear structure (beginning, middle, end) to develop a sense of “continuity and successiveness,” which promotes an easier understanding of the issue at hand. However, he also notes the “ordinary” nature of the facts that are selected. That is, he acknowledges that the importance of those facts comes from how they are “arranged” in the author’s narrative; their importance is not innate or even deserved so much as it is

granted based on usefulness to fulfill the author's intention. Schulz then questions, "What is to be done" with events that are not narrativized, alluding to the multitude of experience that history has excluded. I view Hemon's use of Schulz's philosophy as a prelude or a starting point, from which he is able to progressively alert his readers to the selective, and thus reductive, construction of narrative.

Hemon emphasizes Schulz's philosophy by inserting it directly into the narration of *Nowhere Man* in Chapter Two. The unnamed narrator reiterates Schulz's ideals amidst his account of Pronek's young life. The narrator states:

The hard part of writing a narrative of someone's life is choosing from the abundance of details and microevents, all of them equally significant, or equally insignificant. If one elects to include only the important events: the births, the deaths, the loves, the humiliations, the uprisings, the ends and the beginnings, one denies the real substance of life. (41)

Hemon gives emphasis to the main points of Schulz's argument as his narrator restates them. In the same manner as Schulz, the narrator reiterates the "choosing" that occurs with narrativization as well as the equal (in)significance of each piece of information. He specifically notes the precarious role of arbiter that a narrator takes on as s/he selects pieces of experience to include or exclude. Hemon highlights the selective and exclusive qualities of history and narrative, which Beverley would contrast to that of testimony, which seeks to depict real life and real experience.

An author must recognize the "abundance" of details that s/he might include or exclude. Certainly, there are too many details to choose from; yet, leaving them out

completely results in a dull and lifeless story that lacks “real substance.” Like Schulz, this narrator alludes to the completeness of personal experience that is lost in narrativization. I argue that Hemon begins *Nowhere Man* with this philosophy and warning to give it a position of primacy, and then repeats it to deny his reader the usual suspension of disbelief. He stresses the politicizing act of picking and choosing events or details to include in a story, emphasizing the effect of the author’s intention on a portrayal of ‘what happened.’ While Trouillot argues that history is “both ‘what happened’ and ‘that which is said to have happened,’” Hemon emphasizes the loss of truth in depicting it through narrativization (2).

In *Nowhere Man*, one way that Hemon continually draws his reader’s attention to the selective process of narrativization is through the names of his chapters. Each title includes the defined setting of the chapter, designating dates and geographic locations. For example, the first chapter is called: “Passover: Chicago, April 18, 1994” (*Nowhere Man* 1). A reader will generally assume that *Nowhere Man*’s first chapter title implies that the event being historicized, i.e. chosen for the narrative, is the observation of the Passover holiday in Chicago. A reader attuned to the events of the Bosnian war might also note that the date marks the day the UN forced Serbs troops out of Goražde, which is also mentioned in the chapter. Hemon’s positioning of this date in the title of his first chapter marks its significance. Already the reader feels a tension between their expectations of the text as a narrative (wherein the title would suggest the importance of Passover and Chicago) and their personal experience of that moment in history (wherein the title connects the text to their memories of newscasts and global events).

The reader therefore has two conflicting settings and narratives in his mind going in to the first chapter, that of Passover in Chicago and that of conflict in Bosnia. Surprisingly, the chapter actually focuses on the narrator's search for employment at a language school and his sighting of the protagonist, Jozef Pronek, for the first time in many years. These conflicting narratives, which could all technically connect to the title of the chapter, demonstrate the multitude of experiences that occur versus the author's designation of which events become a part of the narrative. His juxtaposition of these experiences with so-called historical dates and events suggests their worth and validates their inclusion. As Beverley suggests, Hemon is able to highlight the value of personal experiences as conveyers of truth alongside those details which history selected.

As Hemon introduces and reiterates Schulz's commentary on the selectivity involved in narrative building, it follows that he consciously draws attention to his role as narrative arbiter. I argue that he does so to draw attention to the political process of his authoring; Hemon accentuates the process of selection and exclusion regarding history by drawing attention to his role as arbiter of plot. In other chapters as well, the reader notices the possible alternate narratives suggested by the title and becomes more aware of that which Hemon excludes from his recitation of events. Chapter three is entitled, "Fatherland: Kiev, August 1990," but focuses more on Victor's unrequited love for Pronek than Ukrainian heritage or Ukraine's declaration of independence (73). Chapter four, "Translated by Jozef Pronek: Sarajevo, December 1995," presents a letter from Pronek's best friend in Sarajevo but does not discuss the finalizations of peace agreements that ended the war at that time (135). Through play with chapter titles,

Hemon emphasizes the selective nature of history that Schulz discusses. He is also able to demonstrate what Stevan Weine calls the “synchronicity of experience” experienced by many Sarajevans (179). Hemon highlights the myriad of experiences connected to the dates and locations of his chapters as well as the difference between personal and historical understandings of them. As I explore in my next chapter, Hemon seeks to personalize the war and testify to the effects of exile that history’s narrativization neglects.

Hemon is not mandated to allude to historical events or set his testimony alongside them, yet he explores the construction of history by presenting and manipulating a philosophy of history as a formulation of selected details. As Linda Hutcheon observes, this use of historiographic metafiction addresses the question of “how we come to know the past today” (*Politics* 44). Upon establishing this model of narrativization, Hemon demonstrates its flaws by exposing its exclusivity. I argue that he creates what Hutcheon would call a “hybridizing mix” of history and fiction in his texts, which exacerbates the problem of defining reality and understanding the past by denying the reader a “totalization” of what happened (35). That is, his rendering of emplotment as selective and exclusive develops in the reader an awareness against any narrativization, especially so-called non-fiction, which seeks to simplify or ‘make sense’ of events. Hemon requires his reader to question the intentionality of the author and to understand the politicizing effect of narrativization.

Representations of American News Media

As I have argued in the previous section, Hemon attunes his readers to the process of narrativization to demonstrate its intentionality and unreliable portrayals of truth. I would now like to address Hemon's more direct deconstruction of the media narratives surrounding the Bosnian War. According to John Beverley, testimonial literature "represents an affirmation of the individual subject, but in connection with a group or class situation marked by marginalization, oppression, and struggle" (41). Hemon's attention to the media's depictions of the war and of the siege of Sarajevo accentuates his role as a testimonial author and situates his texts alongside those of the siege's literary response. As Hutcheon notes, "historiographic metafiction represents not just a world of fiction... but also a world of public experience" (*Politics* 34). In this section, I will examine Hemon's use of references and scenes that relate to American media to demonstrate how he represents the public experience of the Bosnian War that he witnessed as a displaced person.

Hemon references exact dates or moments marked as historical, as in his chapter titles, in order to elicit the reader's understanding of that event. Hemon creates a tension that complicates dual aspects of the reader's interaction with his texts, which adds to their discomfort and distrust of narrativization. This conflation of experience can be "doubly upsetting" for readers since it challenges their previous understanding of the news as well as their present conception of the text's significance (Hutcheon, *Politics* 34). For example, as I discuss in my introduction, viewers would be familiar with the narratives of extreme nationalism and ancient ethnic hatreds that politicians and the

media depicted to simplify and justify the war. Serb President Milošević's vehement, ultranationalist assertions fueled the conflict, which was covered by the news globally. According to BBC News, Milošević "vowed to defend Serbs from what he called 'Croatian genocide' and 'Islamic fundamentalism'" ("Milosevic's Yugoslavia"). I will discuss the politically reductive tendency of news coverage and the ways that Hemon depicts the media and its viewers. I contend that Hemon resists the oversimplification of the war's emplotment and the apathy of its viewers by complicating and even rejecting the rhetoric used by politicians and the media. To paraphrase Beverley, testimony requires that the stability of the reader's worldview be brought into question and complicated by a new, non-mainstream voice (41).

First, I would like to briefly introduce some of the existing conversation surrounding literary interpretations of the news media. According to the introduction to *Framing Terrorism*, media "rely upon [the] familiar... to convey dominant meanings, make sense of the facts, focus the headlines, and structure the story line" for their audience (Kern, Just, and Norris 4). Kern, Just, and Norris explain that an audience can more quickly infer from a convention that they already know how to decode. As discussed in my preceding section, such emplotment would be constructed via the use of narrative tools (linear plot, conflict, and so on) implemented in a conventional manner. By depicting the Bosnian-Serbs as antagonists and the Bosnian-Muslims as protagonists, for example, media employs the simple 'man vs. man' conflict formula, which audiences quickly recognize and process. Kern, Just, and Norris note that the most effective narrative frames are "evaluative, by naming perpetrators, identifying

victims, and, attributing blame,” since they assist the audience in identifying the ‘good’ and ‘evil’ sides of the conflict (15). A contemporary example would be the media’s recent emplotment of the revolution in Egypt, wherein “thousands began taking to the streets to protest poverty, rampant unemployment, government corruption and autocratic governance of President Hosni Mubarak” (“Egypt Revolution”). This summative statement from the Huffington Post’s webpage dedicated to the revolution defines the conflict (the abusive government versus its oppressed peoples), and it is “evaluative” in its allotment of blame to Mubarak and through its sympathetic language toward his victimized peoples.

Framing Terrorism draws the reader’s attention to the “patterns of selection, emphasis, and exclusion that furnish a coherent interpretation and evaluation of events” (4). Kern, Just, and Norris argue that emplotment requires selectivity and judgment calls, just as Hutcheon notes the disparity between brute events and meaning-granted fact. I have argued that Hemon shares this view and foregrounds the process of narrativization as problematically politicized. However, in the same vein as Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s observation on the construction of history, Kern, Just, and Norris explain, it is via emplotment that “apparently scattered and diverse events are understood within regular patterns” (11). The audience is able to identify the ‘good’ and ‘evil’ sides of the conflict, which shapes their interpretations of otherwise complicated events. Many viewers expect non-fiction narratives such as those on the news to be as objective as possible. According to Kern, Just, and Norris, however, the media purposefully manipulates, emphasizes, and excludes information in a manner that

informs the viewer's judgment. Kern, Just, and Norris declare, "Conventional news frames never provide a comprehensive explanation" of conflicts (11). The narrative of Egypt's revolution, for example, summarizes decades of strife without specific information or counterpoints. Hemon's representations resist the media's oversimplification of the Bosnian war by demonstrating the lack of knowledge the media conveys and by complicating the identities of his characters.

Hemon comments on American media through scenes in which American characters engage (or refuse to engage) with the news. In *Nowhere Man*, when the unnamed narrator sees the pile of newspapers in the lobby of the language school, he notes "the front page facing me: DEFENSES COLLAPSE IN GORAZDE" (13). This headline seems to be in prime location for viewing, on the top of the pile and facing people as they walk into the school, yet none of the American characters mention the breaking news when the subject of the war arises. I believe that Hemon draws attention to the accessibility of information about the war to emphasize the apathy of his more ignorant American characters. The staff at the language school have not only not read the latest front page article, they also demonstrate their ignorance of the war altogether. For example, both Marcus and Robin, who are interviewing the narrator when another student interrupts, mislabel the narrator. Robin explains that the other student is from Czechoslovakia and then asks the narrator, "You're from Czechoslovakia too, right?" (16). This geographical mix-up occurs despite the narrator having told Robin that he is from Sarajevo, Bosnia. Robin has not merely overlooked the latest news from *Goražde*; she has ignored enough of the media coverage of the war to even know where Bosnia is,

or at least that it is not synonymous with Czechoslovakia. Marcus does not do much better. He explains to Robin that the narrator is from Yugoslavia, “a war torn country” (16). In fact, the state of Yugoslavia had dissolved when regions started declaring independence a few years before this scene takes place⁶. His generalization, both of the region and of the conflict, demonstrates Hemon’s representation of Americans who are largely apathetic and ignorant when it comes to global news.

In her book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag notes: “For all the voyeuristic lure [of media]... it seems normal for people to fend off thinking about the ordeals of others” (99). For example, though the riot fires were visually striking, many Americans did not actively watch the coverage of the Egyptian revolution. Hemon demonstrates this phenomenon by accentuating the availability of news stories alongside the lack of concentration or effort that Americans seem willing to spend to better understand the conflict. Another example would be in “Blind Jozef Pronek and the Dead Souls,” when Pronek can barely watch the news due to his roommates’ conflicting priorities. In one scene, his roommate Carwin has the television set to *The Dukes of Hazzard* rather than to CNN, and Pronek has to wait until he leaves to change the channel (*The Question of Bruno* 167). The reader might expect that world news, especially if it pertains to the warring homeland of one’s roommate, would take precedence over a sitcom. Yet, it seems that given the choice, Carwin would rather watch reruns than updates of the war. In a similar scene a few days later, Hemon writes: “Occasionally, in between virtual football games and porn flicks, Pronek got to watch

⁶ 1991 marks the beginning of the split; this scene takes place in 1994.

Headline News and learn that paramilitary (“Pornomilitary” punned Chad) units were entering Bosnia from Serbia” (170). Chad and Carwin value participating in personal interests (watching pornography and playing video games) over engaging in news about the Bosnian War. Again the reader would expect sensitivity toward Pronek’s situation, but Chad is so flippant that he mocks the events of the war with a vulgar pun. While Hemon does not represent all Americans in these apathetic characters, he depicts their interaction with media to demonstrate one type of American response that denies personalization of the war.

For those Americans who would concern themselves with the war, however, the media only provides reductive narratives. As I will argue, Hemon portrays newspapers and television programs as delivering quick, simple stories. For example, when Pronek is able to watch the news, all he catches is “a quick shot” or two regarding the destruction of Sarajevo before the weather comes on (167). A similar scene occurs in *Nowhere Man* when the unnamed narrator observes a woman reading an article on the military efforts in Gorazde: “The woman flipped the page, a few nutshells pitter-pattered on it. SUNNY SKIES WARM MOST OF NATION” (8). In these scenes, Hemon represents news stories presented to Americans as fleeting. He highlights the manner in which newspapers and television programs present a broad range of stories but do not require that the reader/viewer actually pay in depth attention to any of them. As Kern, Just, and Norris suggest, the delivery of the news does not require the readers to think critically; they are encouraged to consume and move on. Though the reader might expect emphasis on news stories that relate directly to the author’s and

protagonist's homeland, I argue that Hemon accentuates the quickness with which the topic changes. When the unnamed narrator walks into the language school, he peruses "a pile of newspapers on the table," (13). Though the newspaper does not force the reader to switch stories (as the television program switched to the weather), it still presents snapshot-like stories that change with a glance to the next headline or by the turn of the page. I argue that Hemon's juxtaposition of leading stories out of Bosnia with national weather reports and other unrelated coverage marks each as having equal value (and therefore no value) to the American media. As he waits in the lobby, the narrator tells the reader, "Sunny skies warmed most of the nation. The Bulls bowed but did not look back. Chicago Jews celebrated Passover" (*Nowhere Man* 14). The narrator's flighty attention and ability to jump from one headline to another represents the ease with which one can gloss over a story and draws attention to the media's broad yet non-comprehensive coverage.

As a Sarajevan writer, Hemon decries the reductive employment of the war by news media; though the coverage he depicts might be plentiful, it maintains a superficial understanding of the war. Several characters that do choose to stay informed (as opposed to Chad and Carwin) still only have a loose grasp on the war's politics and proceedings. For example, Pronek's girlfriend Rachel reflects, "You watch it on TV and feel nothing but numb helplessness. It just makes me angry" (173). This helplessness reflects the media's repetitive and overly simplified assertions of the Bosnian war narrative. Rachel cannot fathom why the war goes on and is angered that nothing has been done to stop it; yet, she has no sense of what should be done or how. Other

characters make similarly disparaging quips, declaring that the images they see on television are upsetting. They sum up their conception of the conflict with terse generalizations such as, “Bosnia? It’s hell there” (178). This blanket response, made by one of Pronek’s customers, demonstrates understatement and lack of understanding of the war beyond the superficial level of war narrative. Marcus projects a similar generalization upon hearing that the unnamed narrator is from Sarajevo:

“You know a lot about hardship, don’t you?” he said.

“I do not know,” I said uncomfortably. “Which hardship?”

“You look like someone who knows a lot.” (17)

Marcus assumes that the narrator has suffered and experienced unfathomable hardship due to the war. Though Marcus attempts to empathize, he lacks actual personalized information regarding the war. In my next chapter, I will discuss Hemon’s own efforts to testify to the human experience of the war, which, he makes explicit in this scene, the media disregards. In this brief conversation between the narrator and Marcus, I argue that Hemon alludes to the media’s emplotted version of the war, which humanizes Bosnians only as protagonists, or generalized victims of the war. At this point in the conversation, Marcus knows nothing about the narrator except that his is from Bosnia; yet, he presumes to know that the narrator’s life has been difficult in his “wartorn country.” Hemon demonstrates the consequences of selective narrativization, particularly the generalizations that can result from lack of information.

Pronek also meets Americans who lack in-depth information on the war and present their assumptions based on what they see on the news. In “Jozef Pronek and the

Dead Souls,” he dines with his girlfriend’s parents who briefly inquire about the war. Her father states, “I read about it, I tried to understand it, but I simply can’t... Thousands of years of hatred, I guess” (*The Question of Bruno* 174). He references print media that he read to gain an understanding of the conflict, yet he continues to be baffled. He represents an American who sought knowledge about the Bosnian War but could not find information that delved deeper than the political narrative that ethnic groups were fighting over “ancient hatreds.” His reluctant, “I guess,” and his claim that the war remains, “mind-boggling” to him, suggest he is suspicious of the simple employment of the war (174). Pronek, however, does not explain the war to her father. Hemon does not seek to expose the actual causes of the war; instead, Pronek and other Sarajevo characters often express their equal distrust of the media’s narratives, which I argue complicates rather than solves the riddle of the war. In my next chapter, I will discuss Hemon’s focus on representing the experiences or effects of the war rather than the war itself.

In *Nowhere Man*, even after the end of the war, Pronek cannot explain its causes to one of the residents he visits for Greenpeace. When the old man asks, “So what was it all about?” Pronek responds: “I don’t know. Many things” (*Nowhere Man* 178). His answer stresses unknowing as well as complexity. The man presses Pronek, asking about the religious groups that supposedly fought on opposing sides during the siege. He sums up the war as Muslims versus Christians, but Pronek simply replies: “I don’t know. I don’t think so” (178). I suggest that this example demonstrates how Hemon once again resists the reductive employment of the war regarding ancient hatreds

between ethnic groups. He emphasizes not knowing the causes of the war or who opposed whom and, through Pronek, he expresses a profound lack of understanding of why the war was fought. This implies a fundamental unknowability of the conflict. In other words, the conflict is multifaceted and complex thus not easily, if ever, knowable, making all narratives of the war faulty or at least in some part fabricated. I view Pronek's responses, as he refuses to and is incapable of simplifying the conflict in his homeland, as further resistance to its employment by the media and other so-called non-fiction sources.

As I have mentioned, much of the media's narrativization of the war depends on set ethnic categories: Serb, Croat, Muslim/Bosnian. I argue that Hemon's characters resist conforming to categorization imposed upon them by others; they refuse to identify with markers which encourage reductive simple ethnic groupings. A common motif in Hemon's work is the inquiry: "What are you?" directed toward Sarajevan characters. When Owen asks Pronek this very question in *Nowhere Man*, Pronek replies, "I am complicated" (146). Hemon echoes this sentiment in *The Lazarus Project* when Brik explains: "No I am not Jewish... Nor am I Muslim, Serb, or Croat. I am complicated" (15). Pronek's and Brik's responses deny their listeners a quick answer and refute the simplification of identity pushed by the media and politicians. Neither Sarajevan easily or willingly conceives of fulfilling any of those labels though they may be the only identity markers American media has provided.

Not only do Pronek and Brik deny belonging to any such ethnicity, they also reject the notion of clear-cut animosities existing at all. Hemon stresses that they are

“complicated,” to testify to the existence of alternative, mixed ethnic identities and to further resist the reductive classifications created by politicians. Through the dialogue of his characters, Hemon is able to deny the evaluative labels that, Kern, Just, and Norris stress, are used in “identifying victims, attributing blame” (15). I argue that Owen and other American characters want to know “what” Pronek is so that he can decide which side of the conflict he belongs to or which role he fulfills, protagonist or antagonist. Hemon rejects the narrativization of the war and even denies his audience certain knowledge of the protagonist. Like Owen, the reader cannot place Pronek on either side of the conflict according to the public’s notions of the war. This move allows Hemon to reject the exclusive nature of the American media’s emplotment and man vs. man conflict frame. He denies the dehumanized portrayal of the participants in the war, which encourages the reader to recall that a multitude of personal experiences occur alongside selected events that the media, politicians, or history choose to narrativize for their version of the war. He is therefore able to elicit reader curiosity for the missing, personal details, which perhaps only testimony, as an alternative source of truth, provides.

In addition to portraying American viewers, Hemon also depicts the effects of propaganda on persons from former Yugoslavia. For example, when Pronek meets Brdjanin, a Serb living in Chicago, Hemon presents in Brdjanin a man who has bought into Milošević’s ultranationalist rhetoric to demonstrate the dangerous importance of identity during the war. When Brdjanin demands to know Pronek’s background, Pronek claims to be from Ukraine. Brdjanin rejoices: “*Pravoslavni* brothers help Serbs in war

against crazy people” (*Nowhere Man* 153). Brdjanin immediately judges Pronek as an ally due to his Ukrainian heritage and proceeds to complain about the “crazy people,” presumably Croats and Muslims. He explains to Pronek: “I trust only *pravoslav* people now” and indicates that “other people” deserve to die with a thumb across his throat (154). Though Brdjanin seems fanatical, he represents a not-so-rare Serb who believes that ethnic identity determines a person’s worth and right to live. As stated in my introduction, nationalism spread quickly as regions of former Yugoslavia separated and declared independence. Brdjanin’s sentiments reflect very real beliefs that Milošević encouraged to gain support for his war. This scene demonstrates how the reductive ‘good’ vs. ‘bad’ framing not only plagues the disconnected American viewer. Even persons directly affected by the conflict can succumb to that myopic framing. Hemon uses this scene, I believe, to demonstrate and reject propaganda’s disturbing power to override truths and sensibilities.

Sontag argues that there is no question that propaganda was a problematic tool during the wars of former Yugoslavia. She documents: “During the fighting between Serbs and Croats at the beginning of the recent Balkan wars, the same photographs of children killed in the shelling of village were passed around at both Serb and Croat propaganda briefings” (10). Falsification of photographs was used to incite untranationalism and its corresponding hatreds. Sontag explains, “Images of dead civilians and smashed houses may serve to quicken hatred of the foe” (10). Hemon comments on the problematic power of propaganda by exposing Brdjanin’s fanatic ignorance and willingness to participate in its rhetoric. While asserting that Muslims are

to blame for the war, Brdjanin brings up the Market Massacre in Sarajevo. He declares, “Muslims throw bomb on market. Propaganda! Then they put dolls for television, it look bad, like many people killed” (*Nowhere Man* 155). He staunchly denies photographic evidence that the Serbs committed the massacre. Sontag explains, “To photographic corroboration of the atrocities committed by one’s own side, the standard response is that the pictures are a fabrication, that no such atrocity ever took place” (11). Brdjanin’s conviction that Serbs, the side he identifies with, were in the right does not allow him to accept that they were capable of murdering innocent, defenseless people. Like many Serbs, Brdjanin can more readily believe that Muslims murdered their own people or created an intricate massacre scene “to create some exceptionally gruesome sights for the foreign journalists’ cameras and rally more international support for the Bosnian side” (Sontag 11). He refuses to believe the photographic evidence in front of him since belonging to the ‘right/good side’ takes priority over knowing the truth. Milošević convinced millions that what they see and hear about the war is untrue unless it comes from his camp, and Brdjanin represents those were ready to believe the hype.

When Brdjanin rejects Pronek’s testimony, Hemon draws attention to the power of propaganda and the frightening ease with which non-witnesses brush off presumably irrefutable evidence that goes against one’s side. His nonchalance in reversing the photographic evidence in the newspapers demonstrates the ease with which one can falsely narrativized events. Hemon presents the dangers of selective ignorance, perhaps to combat the American apathy noted previously. Brdjanin brings up the widely

publicized massacre then refuses to believe Pronek's confirmation that it actually took place. Since "Pronek's mother had barely missed the shell," Pronek tries to attest to Brdjanin that the devastation captured in the photographs was real (*Nowhere Man* 156). Brdjanin refutes Pronek's claims without either photographic evidence or witnesses to support his denial. He ignores existing evidence and available information (such as the newspaper in his house) and blindly follows the racist declarations of Milošević. He makes evaluative judgments of the war based on Milošević's plotment wherein Serbs are protagonists against evildoers. Hemon portrays Brdjanin's assertions about the war as ignorant and fanatical, especially when he declares, "He is Muslim. He lie," regarding Pronek's feeble assertion of an eyewitness account (156). His ignorance of the area and the siege is also made clear when, despite Pronek's objections, he insists, "He is from Sarajevo, he is Muslim" (156). Brdjanin lacks firsthand knowledge of Sarajevo and its peoples, and similar to the American characters, he accepts reductive narratives of the war.

However, unlike the Americans, Brdjanin refuses to admit his lack of expertise compared to the media, Pronek, or anyone else. Unlike Brik's recognition of Rora's authority as a witness, and unlike the reader's trust in Hemon as a person with experience, Brdjanin's logic rejects humility. He stubbornly refuses to listen to claims that might contradict or complicate his understanding of the war. As Michael Ignatieff observes, people can become so self-absorbed and encircled in self-righteous nationalism that they cannot open themselves up to understanding others. He refers to this state as a kind of autism that prevents any knowledge from getting in (60). Perhaps

this helps to explain “how neighbors once ignorant of the very idea that they belong to opposed civilizations begin to think – and hate – in these [nationalistic] terms” (36). Here, Brdjanin could represent the ignorance and gullibility of some Serbs who, lacking knowledge of Bosnia’s cosmopolitan areas, were the most easily manipulated by the political rhetoric of the war. Pronek notes that Brdjanin’s name means “mountain man,” which Hemon might use to suggest that Brdjanin is from an area that has no concept of Sarajevo’s multi-ethnic communities. Regardless of Brdjanin’s possible representative roles, I suggest that Hemon uses this scene to demonstrate the lack of awareness, and more importantly the stubborn refusal to see the perspectives of others, that may have lead millions to follow violent nationalist prose.

I find Brdjanin’s scene especially intriguing in that Brdjanin can more easily accept the existence of falsified evidence than that of real evidence. As I mentioned, he does not entrust Pronek with the same authority that Brik granted Rora or that the reader grants Hemon. Brdjanin has no reason to doubt Pronek; as far as he knows they are “*pravoslavni* brother[s]” and Pronek’s friend witnessed the massacre. However, as mentioned in my introduction, national identity is a powerful construct. Hemon testifies not only to reductive nature of identity labels but also to their violent consequences during the war. Ignatieff observes that the most dangerous aspect of a newly constructed national identity is that it “denies that multiple belonging is possible,” that is, it puts itself in a position of primacy (46). The reader would expect a fanatic like Brdjanin to automatically side with Pronek and perhaps even accept information from him as a trusted comrade. Yet, even as Pronek asserts, “They saw it,” Brdjanin continues his rant

(*Nowhere Man* 156). Brdjanin's dedication to believing what his 'side' tells him is the most disturbing aspect of his interaction with Pronek. He attempts to use the so-called fabricated photographs as evidence of what did *not* happen, that is, that the Muslims "put dolls on television" to mislead the international audience. Hemon expects his reader to trust in Pronek as the protagonist but also as an indirect witness. Pronek, and his mother for that matter, have never been portrayed as untrustworthy or unreliable for any reason. Meanwhile, Brdjanin is depicted as a criminal and abuser who carries a loaded weapon for no apparent reason. Hemon connects social deviance and violent behavior to ignorance and fanaticism. He seems to highlight Brdjanin's cruelty (his threats to "other people," the bruise on the woman's face, and so on) to decry the inherent violence of ultranationalism.

I find that Hemon demonstrates Pronek's relative weakness in comparison to Brdjanin to emphasize the frightening power and strength of nationalistic intolerance. When Brdjanin first opens the door, "Pronek stared at him paralyzed, his throat clogged" (151). As they talk, Pronek notices a gun tucked into Brdjanin's pants, and a battered woman looks on. I argue that Brdjanin's possession of a weapon, combined with the woman's "swollen face and a faint bruise on her cheek," mark him as a violent and powerful man (153). Hemon seems to personify the conviction and anger of the war's rhetoric in an overpowering, dangerous man. I argue that Brdjanin embodies the hatefulness of Milošević's ultranationalism (rather than an ethnic group), and that Hemon depicts Pronek as helpless against it. Brdjanin frightens Pronek; Pronek

“nodded automatically, helpless” during Brdjanin’s rant and imagines fleeing on several occasions (154).

Though Pronek cannot combat Brdjanin, his character still resists nationalist thinking. Hemon writes that, even as Brdjanin roars about the ethnic hatreds fueling the war, “[Pronek] wanted to say that Croats are just like everyone else: good people and bad people, or some reasonable platitude like that” (154). Pronek’s meager interior monologue represents the quiet voice of reason hidden by the louder, more frightening cry of war. His perspective of the war allows for individuals rather than broad categories. However, Pronek’s nonchalance and even disinterest regarding his heritage, which I will discuss in the next chapter, cannot stand up to Brdjanin’s nationalist rage. Pronek realizes, “in this room whatever it was he used to think an hour ago seemed ludicrous now” (154). His Sarajevan ideals of acceptance and a multiethnic way of life are under the pressure of an extreme segregating force. It is not that these ideals are no longer worth believing, but that Brdjanin’s violent convictions represent those of millions back home who will not listen to notions that conflict with the political rhetoric they follow. Pronek is forced to confront his own naive belief that an integral aspect of his life and understanding of his homeland would remain unmoved, that reason would simply counter Milosevic’s nationalist claims. In this scene, as he cowers in front of Brdjanin, Pronek comes to understand the strength of the unmitigated hate reared by nationalist rhetoric in his homeland. Hemon represents the power of politicized narratives to blind its audiences to the truth, or human experience, behind the war.

Hemon's four pieces of fiction challenge the narrativization of the Bosnian War through their form and representations. As Linda Hutcheon points out, emplotment requires the granting of meaning to otherwise "brute facts." As I have shown in this chapter, Hemon creates tensions in his metafictional works to attune the reader to the politicized selectivity (and thus exclusivity) of narrativization. Though Beverley asserts that testimony cannot be fiction, that the reader must "experience both the speaker and the situations and events recounted as real," Hemon challenges the very notion of non-fiction and the real (33). Hemon's works reject emplotment and insist on delivering an alternate form of truth. As I will discuss in my next chapter, he utilizes the tools of postmodern fiction to personalize the war and represent the effects of exile. As Beverley observes, testimony is an art directed toward the memorialization of the past as well as "forms of community, solidarity, and affinity that extend beyond or between nation-states" (24). Hemon's work ultimately is in conversation with siege literature through its focus on complicating misconceptions about the siege of Sarajevo. Hemon directly deconstructs news media's emplotment of the war, in particular, the understanding of the war as a conflict between mutually exclusive and divided factions. By complicating the identities of Bosnians, he resists the political narrativization of the war and refutes the evaluative frame provided by the media. I argue that it is Hemon's intentionality, to testify to the problems of the war and its narrativization, which marks him as a testimonial writer.

Chapter II: Personalizing the War – Representing the Effects of Exile

Aleksandar Hemon holds the unique position of being the only Bosnian *American* writer who addresses the Bosnian war. As my first chapter demonstrates, though stranded in the United States during the siege of Sarajevo, Hemon joins in the literary conversation surrounding the conflict. His concerns about the employment of the war mirror the issues addressed by other Sarajevoan writers. I argued that his works of fiction deconstruct narrativization, specifically that of the American media, to resist misconceptions of the Bosnian War. In this chapter, I would like to shift focus to Hemon's actions as a testimonial writer of exile. Edward Said defines exile as "the unbearable rift forced between a human being and a native place" (137). As I mention in my introduction, one of Hemon's greatest challenges is representing the complexity and disjointedness of the life of a displaced person. According to Said, depicting such a trauma is impossible; he claims that this rift is "neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible" (138). However, I would argue that Hemon's testimony addresses the effects of trauma rather than the trauma itself. As I note in my introduction, Cathy Caruth observes that representations of the *effects* of trauma can succeed as depictions of "experiences not yet completely grasped" (*Unclaimed* 56). I will show that Hemon works his own experiences into his works while utilizing tools of fiction to represent the effects of his trauma, noting that he never portrays the war or exile event directly. As John Marx observes, the importance of failed-state fiction lies in its role to personalize a crisis, that is, "giving [it] a human face" (598). In this chapter, I will explore the human

experience of exile that Hemon portrays as well as his techniques for overcoming the barriers of representation.

John Beverley claims, “What is important about testimonio is that it produces, if not the real, then certainly the sensation of experiencing the real” (40). Hemon employs several postmodern techniques to dislodge the reader from familiar narrative conventions. As I discussed in my first chapter, Linda Hutcheon examines the political intention behind the “doubled use-and-abuse of conventional expectation” by postmodern writers (*Political* 82). According to Hutcheon, postmodernism often seeks the “decentering” of the individual to question or complicate the notion of subjectivity (13). She explains that the manipulation of conventions can be used to represent subjectivity as “something in process;” it is not “autonomous” nor “outside history” (37). I argue that Hemon uses postmodern technique to deliver the “sensation of experiencing the real” to his reader. Said explains: “Exile is never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure... it is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew (148). Hemon represents these qualities of exile through his manipulation of form and creation of moments of reader discomfort. For example, most of Hemon’s narrators and protagonists so closely resemble one another that their life experiences and personalities overlap greatly. Though disconcerting to the reader, doppelgangers “complicate subjectivity” and inform Hemon’s testimony of the effects of exile.

The lives of Pronek (in “Blind Jozef Pronek & the Dead Souls” and *Nowhere Man*), Brik, and numerous unnamed narrators throughout Hemon’s works often mirror

the implied author. All are Sarajevans who were visiting the United States when the siege began and then became writers in Chicago. They discuss their Ukrainian heritage, have trouble holding down the same odd jobs, and struggle with the assimilation process forced upon them. In this respect, Hemon's multiple representations of his (almost) self signify their fictitious nature as well as their foundation in reality. For example, Brik, from *The Lazarus Project*, and the unnamed narrator of *Nowhere Man* both teach English at a language school, which Pronek attends (in *Nowhere Man*). This overlap gives the reader a sense of uncanny similarities spanning discontinuity. In an interview for the *LA Times*, Hemon stated:

It's not like I'm writing the same book all the time, but there is a continuity of my interests... I cannot really describe all the points of continuity from my previous books to this one -- I could, but I don't care to -- it's just one big flow of language for me, and then you parse it and publish it. ("Writer Aleksandar")

In his response, Hemon notes the "continuity" of his ideas that weave together his works though he does not specifically identify this technique as intertextuality.^d His use of doppelgangers demonstrates the "continuity of [his] interests" by depicting the same motifs through multiple perspectives. That is, Hemon's intertextual allusions effectively provide multiple representations of Sarajevans coping with exile during the war. The aesthetic effect mirrors his sense of "flow" in that his characters' identities blend into one another across the boundaries of the books' compositions. Pronek, for example, exists not only as a protagonist but also as a double for several other characters. I find

^d Interconnection of ideas [across texts] where previously none existed (Orr 24)

that the reader's experience with these doppelgangers rests somewhere between comfort and unease. The familiarity of the characters might comfort the reader as characters in a series might, yet the uncanny nature of the characters' similarities may be unsettling. Anne Cubilié notes that testimony tends to "stress the collectivity of experience and fragmentary nature of identity" simultaneously (193). Hemon reinforces the intention of his work as testimony by eliciting multiple voices, which correspond to the community beyond his personal experiences though each character suffers the same splintering effects of exile.

As Beverley observes, testimony "evokes an absent polyphony of other voices, other possible lives and experiences" (34). Hemon's intertextuality, evolving around multiple characters leading Hemon-esque lives, complicates the representation of his struggles and alludes to other possible voices. Brian Richardson asserts that the author "provides a more thorough picture of the multiple... through an assemblage of disparate voices" (136). Hemon emphasizes the non-singularity of his story and alludes to the possibility of countless unheard voices by developing multiple representatives of his experiences. For example, that Pronek, Brik, and the unnamed narrator of *Nowhere Man* all share experience in a language school, Hemon suggests that any number of students could share similar strife. Yet, even as they suggest a community of exiles, Hemon's doppelgangers are distinct enough to deny oversimplification of the Sarajevan exile experience. Their personal relationships, for example, add personalizing touches to their stories. Hemon eludes the danger of reducing representations to a single experience; Cubilié observes: "Universalism, however, is consistently destabilized within texts as

the narrators embrace ways in which identity is discontinuous and fragmented rather than cohesive” (194). He maintains a destabilizing distance between them via disjointed narratives and subtle differentiations in their experiences. For example, Pronek and his Bosnian narrators never interact directly; the unnamed narrator only sees Pronek across the room and the ghost narrator of a later chapter can only attempt to soothe Pronek. I suggest that Hemon’s testimonial fictions are therefore able to portray a voice “constituted through a diversity of affiliations and experiences” that remain fragmented (Cubilié 202). In other words, the narratives presented to the reader display fragmentation; yet, combined they provide a complex picture of the trauma and hardship surrounding exile. This effectively gives voice to the “previously ‘voiceless’” sufferers of the siege and emphasizes Hemon’s work as political (Beverley 36).

In *Nowhere Man* specifically, Hemon handles the immense challenge of representing a state of trauma that is most likely inconceivable to his readers. Though it appears unnatural at first, the narrative form of *Nowhere Man* is actually part of Hemon’s testimony, that is, his production of “the real.” As I mention in my first chapter, Beverley notes that testimony can resist being literature; he argues that testimony represents the “struggle for survival, implicated in the act of narration itself” (32). Testimonial literature is therefore inherently political in its rejection of mainstream narratives and their conventions. As discussed previously, *Nowhere Man* consists of several disjointed chapters, told in nonlinear fashion, by a variety of narrators. Hemon develops this style to resist the construct of a cohesive narrative and accentuate the discontinuity and decentering of exile. Said extrapolates: “Much of the exile’s life is

taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule... The exile's new world, logically enough, is unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction" (144). Hemon recreates the character's world in a manner that reflects how a person in exile might try to reorganize the jumbled pieces of his own world; the non-traditional organization of *Nowhere Man* testifies to the discontinuity and ongoing effects of the protagonist, Pronek's, state of being.

Cubilié writes that the form of testimony "is by necessity fragmentary and incomplete... as it refutes the possibility of building complete narratives and solid truths" (205). She argues that an author cannot truly represent trauma with narratives that are whole or complete, as they would detract from trauma's very nature. In the same vein, Said observes, exile is a "condition of terminal loss" (137). If *Nowhere Man* ended with a resolution as neat as that of *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, it would give the reader a sense of false completeness that diminishes the trauma of exile. As I discuss in the previous chapter, Linda Hutcheon explains: "Familiar narrative form of beginning, middle, and end implies a structuring process that imparts meaning as well as order" (*Politics* 59). In the context of Cubilié's argument, linear plot progression would counter the necessarily "fragmented and incomplete" testimony of an exile. Cubilié's notes that testimony cannot reveal a resolution since "the event is not 'over'" (194). It follows that Hemon, therefore, must represent the discontinuity of exile via a disjointed narrative. *Nowhere Man*, therefore, lacks typical information that a reader would look for in an account of the Bosnian war and exile, such as an explanation of the war or Pronek's family situation. Cubilié observes that information the author does *not*

include is “integral to the experience of testimony” (191). If Hemon were to discuss events of the war, he would automatically create meaning-granted facts and emplot (or give order to) the war. This would contradict Hemon’s resistance of narrativization and his intent as a testimonial writer. Instead, Hemon is able to portray the continuity of an exile’s trauma by excluding narrativized events to allude to what Cubilié calls “the necessity of silences and what happens outside of the frame” (191).

As noted in my first chapter, *Nowhere Man*, with its nonconventional form and refusal to follow common narrative progressions, frustrates the reader. As Kern, Just, and Norris noted in regards to news framing, the reader can more easily digest familiar conventions. According to Hutcheon, endings provide a sense of closure for the readers. Yet, I argue that readers can decipher *Nowhere Man* and follow its progression. In the previous chapter, I discussed the ways in which Hemon alerts his readers to the unreliability of narration, even so-called non-fiction. I also briefly mentioned that he encourages readers to seek out alternate truths, which Beverley believes testimony provides. I believe that in *Nowhere Man*, Hemon presents the “sensation of experiencing the real” rather than a narrative of events to provide an alternate truth. Richardson asserts that readers can still find meaning in “texts that remain insistently fragmentary, open-ended, contradictory, or defiantly ‘plot-less’” (167). He argues for alternative progressions that develop depending on the purpose of the piece. Richardson emphasizes the importance of rhetorical sequencing (rather than plot) and its ability to “bring the mind of the readers into closer conformity with the beliefs of the author” (169). Hemon develops a representation of the effects of exile to lead the reader toward

an understanding of Pronek's situation. Richardson suggests that, in texts such as *Nowhere Man*, "the plot of the narrative and the poignancy of the events turn on the revelation of the narrator's identity, as the text's play of conventions and its reception is disclosed" (12). *Nowhere Man* sets up a progressive argument about Pronek's character and situation by revealing layers to Pronek's experience as the narrative unfolds. In the latter part of this section, I will examine Hemon's use of multiple narrators to develop a multi-layered revelation of Pronek's situation and character. First, however, I would like to address the theory of narrative progression behind my reading of *Nowhere Man* in more depth.

James Phelan explores textual progressions and their rhetoric in many of his works. He observes that the "fundamental elements of narrativity on the textual side [are] character, event, and change, and on the readerly side [are] judgment, affect, and ethics" (*Experiencing* 152). Narrative's primary goal is to tell a story about how a character changes, and the reader makes ethical judgments about the story told as well as how it is told. He explains, "Narrative requires audiences to judge its characters" and draw ethical conclusions about their journeys (*Narrative* 27). For example, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen presents the conflict, demonstrates how the Bennett sisters resolve those conflicts, and leads the reader toward making ethical judgments of each character. She portrays their faults and requires that they pay the consequences; that is, 'good' characters have minor flaws that they overcome before living happily ever after while 'bad' characters refuse to see their wicked ways and become societal disgraces.

The narrative structure of the novel encourages and depends on character choice, change, and judgment.

Conversely, Phelan explains that the rhetoric of lyric focuses on “thought, attitude, belief, or emotion” textually and “participation” from the reader (*Experiencing* 152). Characters do not change, the narrative is of the present, and the audience does not have to make judgments. He argues that, rather than plotting a character’s course of action, the lyric specializes in conveying “a situation, an emotion, a perception” of the present (*Living* 162). In other words, lyric directs the audience to sympathize with the character and observe their plight even as no major events occur. He notes, “The text focuses on revealing the dimensions of the character narrator’s current situation” and resists ethical conclusions (158). For example, in “The Raven,” Edgar Allen Poe depicts the protagonist’s madness through a series of paranoid incidents. The reader develops a clear understanding of (and empathizes with) the protagonist’s plight; however, no major events occur nor does the protagonist make any ethical decisions. In a lyric piece, Phelan argues, the reader is in a participatory position rather than in the position of a critic; while narrative rhetoric invites the reader to judge, lyric rhetoric presents characters and their situations without eliciting evaluation.

According to Phelan, portraiture is the result of the blending of narrative and lyric. It often takes aspects of both to create “a rhetorical design inviting the authorial audience to apprehend the revelation of character” (*Experiencing* 153). He argues that portraiture utilizes narrative conventions to tell a character’s story while maintaining a

sense of the present in the same vein as lyric. Character takes primacy over the events and change of narrative or the emotions of lyric. Phelan explains:

In portraiture, events typically are present, but not because they are essential to the progression of a story of change but because they are an effective means to reveal character. Change is not present, because portraiture is focused on depicting a character at a particular moment or a particular phase of life we understand as ongoing. (153)

Phelan argues that an author creates portraiture to highlight a character's present state rather than the events that lead to that character's situation. Therefore, as Richardson suggests, the rhetoric (or progression) of portraiture must revolve around character revelation. Approaching *Nowhere Man* as portraiture helps the reader follow its progression and find meaning in its representation of "experiencing the real" despite its nonconventional narrative style. I view *Nowhere Man* as Hemon's representation of the effects of exile through a character study of Pronek. As Hemon investigates and reveals levels of Pronek's character, he allows the reader to participate and empathize without requiring ethical judgments. Though the text lacks common narrative form and a linear plotline, it still develops a progression that educates the reader. For example, Pronek's final outburst (which I will examine more closely in the following pages), serves as a climax to the text in that it is the most significant event of the text and Pronek's most emotive moment. However, the text denies narrative norms since the next chapter jumps settings and leaves Pronek as he was. Neither Pronek nor his situation changes, and the storyline fails to provide the resolution that the reader expects.

Though the outburst scene may not technically align itself with a narrative climax, however, it provides the reader with a startling assertion of identity straight from Pronek. In a lyrical fashion, this scene focuses on the emotional state of Pronek rather than his decisions; it depicts an outburst concerning his struggles presumably carry on. Viewing *Nowhere Man* as portraiture allows the reader to interpret such scenes for their value of testifying to and illuminating the state of exile. *Nowhere Man* examines Pronek from several angles, exploring his experiences at different stages of his life before, during, and after the war. Hemon uses aspects of both narrative and lyric with the intention to depict Pronek in a disjointed yet developed portrait that accents his role as a representative character in crisis. Though *Nowhere Man* does not evolve via as a typical narrative might, nor explicitly delve into emotions as a lyric would, Hemon is able blend to the two genres to develop an effective testimony through the use of portraiture.

Another postmodern tool that Hemon implements to develop his depiction of Pronek's exile is the use of multiple narrators. As previously discussed, exile cannot be represented directly due to its incomprehensible nature; however, one can represent its effects, such as decentering and displacement of the individual. Hemon fractures the focalization of the text by splintering the narrative into disparate pieces presented by various narrators. He fragments the reader's understanding of Pronek through his use of multiple narrators. In *Nowhere Man*, Pronek spends time living in Bosnia, Ukraine, and the United States; for each location, Hemon provides a different narrator with a different perspective of Pronek and his situation. For example, the unnamed narrator of

chapters one, two, and seven explains to the reader: “I am forced to describe the significant events occurring after Pronek’s first love disaster” (*Nowhere Man* 42). He acknowledges his role in narrating Pronek’s young life, and informs the reader accordingly. He also recognizes the limits of his perspective and that other narrators will have to complete the Pronek portrait. He notes: “But that is a different story, and I have never been to Ukraine—someone else will have to talk about that part of his life,” before the next narrator, Victor, takes over the narrative and describes Pronek’s time in Ukraine (69).

Richardson calls narrators that work together to juxtapose different viewpoints and voices “centrifugal” in that they split focalization (71). Hemon’s form represents the “contrapuntal” quality that Said discusses as well as the decentering of subjectivity that Hutcheon notes. This is perhaps most evident in the final chapter, in which the narrator shifts to speaking about his own situation rather than Pronek’s. The change in his focus startles the reader and further removes them from their subject of study. Conversely, in chapter four, wherein Pronek translates a letter from Mirza, the reader may be surprised at their sudden proximity to Pronek. Though his best friend originally writes the letter, Pronek’s voice comes through in his somewhat jumbled translation, such as when he relays, “I am little sad” (*Nowhere Man* 131). Hemon disorients the reader by varying distance between the reader and Pronek and through his prism-like collection of narrators. According to Richardson, multiple narrators add dimension and depth to characterization via their “compelling, dynamic picture” of the character (64). The narrators know Pronek from their perspective and no other, adding to the reader’s

knowledge of Pronek while remaining ignorant of the pieces of the puzzle that their counterparts present.

Though the audience never interacts with Pronek directly, they receive multiple perspectives and are thus presumably well informed. As I have noted, Beverley claims, “It is the intentionality of the narrator that is paramount” to testimony’s effectiveness (32). Though the narrators’ biases and the liberties they take make them unreliable, there is no reason to doubt that they are relaying their actual perspective of Pronek’s life. For example, the unnamed narrator discusses Pronek’s life in Sarajevo and his beginnings in the United States. When he sees Pronek at the language school, he describes him as “familiar, with the grimaces of someone from former Yugoslavia” (*Nowhere Man* 21). The unnamed narrator focuses on Pronek’s background as Sarajevan and his commonality with others from the region. His chapters ooze with nostalgia as he narrates Pronek’s young life and high hopes for his future. The second chapter especially captures the potential and ambition of Pronek, in pre-war Sarajevo, as a young lover and singer in a band. The narrator recalls, “Sarajevo in the eighties was a beautiful place to be young—I know because I was young then” (49). Though this narrator may be projecting his own nostalgia into the narrative, the reader still gains some insight into Pronek’s romantic years. The narrator recounts Pronek’s forming of a band and explains, “The plans were put on hold when Pronek unexpectedly fell in love” (53).

The remaining narrators add layers to the reader’s vision of Pronek. Victor, Pronek’s roommate, is in love with Pronek but also honest with his reader about his

abject devotion to him. His narrative follows Pronek's supposed journey to discover his roots. He notes, "Pronek had no interest in his heritage," but he wanted some time away from Sarajevo (69). Victor focuses more on Pronek's body and social interactions than his background, and describes Pronek as an individual rather than a typical Sarajevan youth. The final narrator to include Pronek in his narrative is a ghost who observes him in Chicago. He watches as Pronek struggles with assimilating to American culture and becomes increasingly frustrated with his exile. The narrator's pseudo interaction with Pronek accentuates the dismantling of Pronek's life and adds to the surreal feeling of exile. He assures Pronek (though he cannot be heard), "let us just sort through this destruction" (221). As with preceding narrators, the reader cannot fully trust in his account, but the reader must remember that Hemon's goal is not to present a reliable, complete narrative.

Hemon's decentered, fragmented portraiture reflects the effects of Pronek's exile and is thus the most effective means of conveying an otherwise incomprehensible trauma. Said describes an exile's "need to reassemble an identity out of the refractions and discontinuities of exile" (142). This implies that the displaced person loses their identity and that they must include new aspects of their lives to recreate it. *Nowhere Man*, as portraiture, resembles or pieces together Pronek's identity. According to Richardson, multiple narrator texts "help a writer reproduce more accurately the jagged fissures within a single subjectivity" (67). Hemon splinters the focalization of his text to represent the "nomadic, decentered, [and] contrapuntal" state of exile (Said 148). According to Richardson, this allows Hemon to open up space for a "greater degree of

dialogism” and can “give a more full and original expression to previously unnaratable thoughts and perspectives,” such as exile (Richardson 68). Hemon’s technique of fracturing the narrative into different, isolated perspectives contributes to his representation of exile as a discontinuous state of being thus strengthening the effectiveness of the testimony. Richardson also explains that the use of multiple narrators develops “a compelling image of the fragmented nature of the self,” which, I have argued, can best be understood when viewed as portraiture (136). Hemon utilizes multiple narrators to develop a text that progresses as it represents multiple dimensions in Pronek’s life as an exile. Each layer adds meaning to his experiences and the effects of his trauma.

As I continue my examination of Hemon’s representation of the effects of exile in specific scenes rather than overall form, I would like to stress that I see the two as ultimately intertwined. As a work of testimony, *Nowhere Man* explores the discontinuous and decentered nature of experience and identity that comes displacement. Pronek often confronts feelings of dislocation and fragmentation as he travels and attempts to adapt to life away from home. Though he is far from the war and the siege of Sarajevo, its rhetoric and destruction still manage to affect him. The chapters discussing his time in the United States emphasize the destruction of his Sarajevan identity and his inability to situate himself properly in an American culture that does not understand the situation abroad. Before coming to the United States, Pronek’s world revolved around Bosnia. Even during his time in Ukraine, he identified sternly as Bosnian; the narrator states “Pronek had no interest in his heritage, as he had

suffered through his father's histories, but he thought that leaving Sarajevo and the war in Croatia for a month would help his mental health" (*Nowhere Man* 69). Pronek maintains that the city of Sarajevo is his real home even as he seeks employment and residence in the United States.

Said observes, "Habits of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment" (148). Hemon demonstrates this in some of Pronek's reflections of his homeland. For example, on a rainy day, Pronek tells Rachel, "I think that everywhere there is the home, you have the puddle where you see when it rains... I had one in Sarajevo, in front of my home" (177). I view this scene as a demonstration of Pronek's centering of self in Sarajevo despite the siege and his displacement. His memory of his house, though it may no longer be an actuality, is untarnished by the shelling or destruction of the city's buildings that occurred during the siege. However, once Pronek is stranded in the United States, he is forced to see the world through an American lens. Hemon depicts this decentering in *Nowhere Man* starting with his attention to physical location. In the language school, the teacher of a lower level class stands with "a map of the world on the wall behind her—North America was at its center" (18). That she stands at the center of a map depicting the United States at its center doubly emphasizes the students' new physical location. It also stresses the figurative re-centering of their lives to an Americentric atmosphere and worldview.

Hemon presents Pronek's encounters with people who, I suggest, remind him of his foreignness and emphasize his dislocation from his homeland. Pronek boss, Owen,

has neither a concept of Pronek's home nor an interest in understanding why he is in the United States. He simply categorizes Pronek as an immigrant and assumes Pronek came to the United States seeking a better life. Owen tells Pronek: "I admire people like you, that's what this country is all about: the wretched refuse coming and becoming American" (144). Though Pronek's homeland is at war, he did not purposefully leave his country with the intent to relocate permanently. I see no evidence of Pronek's life in Sarajevo as "wretched." The unnamed narrator expresses that "Sarajevo in the eighties was a beautiful place to be young" and describes Pronek's aspirations to lead a band and woo women (49). Regardless, other characters jump to the same dark conclusions upon meeting Pronek. As noted in my first chapter, a customer tells Pronek, "It's hell there," when Pronek tells him that he is from Bosnia (178). Even Pronek's girlfriend, Rachel, accentuates his foreignness and holds a generalized conception of his homeland. She asks him if "all you Balkan boys" talk in the same manner that he does (170). As I discuss in the previous chapter, her only conception of Pronek's homeland is as a piece of a region discussed vaguely on the news. Hemon accentuates the American lens as American characters remind Pronek that the United States is his new center. Owen sees Pronek as coming from *over there* in *that part of the world*. He cannot find Pronek's homeland on a map and he has no interest in dignifying Pronek's language as particular or even human. Owen asks Pronek to speak to Brdjanin in his "monkey language" that they must share (150). I claim that the Othering Hemon represents further demonstrates his role as a testimonial writer. Beverley notes that the voice of testimony "comes to us from a place of an other, an other that is repressed or occluded

by our own norms of cultural and class authority and identity” (2). Though Hemon writes in the United States and in English, he draws attention to a group that his American audience marginalizes.

At times, Pronek manipulates American ignorance or misinformation for his amusement. While on his rounds for Greenpeace, he introduces himself as Bosnian, Ukrainian, Estonian, Luxembourger, and even “from Snitzlland (home of the *snitzl*)” (*Nowhere Man* 180). Hemon represents these varying identities as being equally plausible (as justification for Pronek’s accent and Otherness) to the Americans Pronek encounters. He depicts the Americans as simply needing to satisfy their curiosity and categorize Pronek regardless of the unfamiliar, or even fictional, background he claims. This connects to my earlier claim that Americans generally lack a clear, comprehensive understanding of the war. The “snitzl” joke lightheartedly mocks Americans for their apathy; yet, it signifies Pronek’s degraded position as a mere foreigner on whom any label may be placed with equal weight and meaning(lessness). As Pronek offers untrue and fabricated identities, all of which are readily accepted, he accentuates the arbitrary nature of such labels. Their arbitrary nature, however, does not make them less powerful. They are enough to Other him and, as I discussed in my previous chapter, are capable of inciting violence.

Another approach to examining the decentering of Pronek’s sense of home and identity is to juxtapose it to Brik’s experience. Though Pronek never makes it home, his doppelganger in *The Lazarus Project* decides to return to Sarajevo. Upon Brik’s return, he is relieved to walk the city’s streets and bump into acquaintances and old friends. He

is amazed by the ease with which he fits in, by how his foreignness evaporates. He notes: “Nobody asked me where I was from nor expressed their admiration for my exotic accent and alien culture” (*The Lazarus Project* 283). Brik reconnects and recognizes his deepest wishes to forget his distorted life in the United States. He reflects on his relationship with his wife and realizes he lacks all desire to return to her. He asserts his inability to leave when he states, “it occurred to me that I would in fact never be there for her, that I would always be here, where my heart was” (*The Lazarus Project* 283). He (re)centers his self and world around Sarajevo. This scene contrasts those wherein Hemon’s Sarajevan characters feel displaced.

As I discussed in my previous section, the doppelgangers portray different aspects of their shared experience as exiles. However, that Brik’s return to Sarajevo does not mark a return to a fixed or complete sense of home. While Pronek reminisces about his puddle, Brik faces harsh realities of the war’s consequences. Brik’s parents sold his literal home, and he realizes that his physical place of belonging is gone forever. He admits, “I no longer had a home in Sarajevo” (282). He loses more than his residence; the entire city has changed in his absence, and it no longer matches his conceptions of his hometown. He expresses to Rora the uncanny experience of seeing the people and places he used to know so differently and his fears of what might happen if he lets himself see the actual, present-day Sarajevo:

When I looked into the faces of people, I saw what they used to look like – I saw their old faces, not their new faces...I couldn’t see the now, only the before.

And I had the feeling that if I could see what [Sarajevo] really looked like now, I would forget what it was like before. (208)

In this scene, Brik confronts the disparity between his nostalgia and the actuality of the city's current existence, which further displaces him. He has been dislodged from his homeland, his acquired home, and now his memory of home. His exile creates a permanent fissure between the home of his memory and its physical existence. As Said notes, "Exile is never the state of being satisfied, placid, or secure...but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew" (148). Hemon includes Brik's reflections to demonstrate that no one can amend the brokenness of exile. Brik's back and forth between the old and new in this passage emphasizes the rift between the two and demonstrates that Brik's (and Pronek's and Hemon's) displacement cannot be rectified. Hemon's attention to the characters' ties to a newly destroyed Sarajevo puts him in conversation with other siege writers as he attempts to convey the "fantastic reality" of witnessing the destruction of an entire city that he once called home (Weine 176).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, allusions to the media play an important role in Hemon's work. In *Nowhere Man*, viewing the news contributes to the decentering of Pronek's mindset and sense of identity as a displaced person. According to Cubilié, references to media in testimony signify a "double remove" of the exile from the conflict (208). She argues that the exile is neither in nor out of the war. As a citizen of Sarajevo who cannot return to his homeland, Pronek is emotionally rooted in the war. As a viewer of newspapers and television reports, he is a distant bystander of its events.

Therefore, according to Cubilié's logic, Pronek cannot commit and connect fully to either role. As he reads the headline, "THOUSANDS KILLED IN SREBRENICA," for example, he recognizes his homeland as well as his position outside of it (*Nowhere Man* 145). As I mentioned in my first chapter, the play between personal and public experience highlights what Stevan Weine calls the "synchronicity of experience." For American viewers, exposure to the personal details that media emplotment glosses over means witnessing a personalized understanding of the conflict. In Pronek's case, he is living the personalized experience and witnessing a reductive perspective from the narrative on television. Where the American's new form of witnessing brings them closer to experiencing the conflict, Pronek's distances him further. Cubilié observes that media "enhances [a] sense of spectatorship and distance" for the exile that is unsettling (208). In other words, this duality further splits his identity and decenters Pronek's sense of belonging. Pronek is distanced from his homeland physically and by his lack of direct experience of the siege; the result is a doubled sense of being an outsider or Other in addition to that which he feels as a foreigner in the United States.

Hemon also uses the newscasts to draw attention to Pronek's ongoing trauma and to testify to the effects media coverage can have on a displaced person. According to Cathy Caruth, a person is traumatized when they are "possessed by an image or event" (*Explorations* 5). In "Blind Jozef Pronek and the Dead Souls," Pronek watches the news, transfixed, and the images haunt him as he worries for his friends and family from afar. Hemon writes, "[Pronek] kept coming in and out of listless dreams about Sarajevo" (*The Question of Bruno* 168). Pronek's obsessive replaying of the news in his

mind reflects the recurring impact it has on him as a member of the community under attack. After Pronek sees the siege on television, he replays the “footage” in his mind to try to make sense of what is happening and to “recognize the people” involved (185). Caruth elaborates, “The flashback or traumatic reenactment conveys [both] *the truth of the event, and the truth of its incomprehensibility*” (153). In the following scene, Pronek relives the news in his nightmares:

He stopped turning the light off after he had seen footage of Sarajevo at night, in complete, endless darkness, with bullets and rockets incising and illuminating the sky. His sleep would be well short of restful, marred by nightmares and an anxious bladder. (*The Question of Bruno* 185)

Here Hemon depicts an inability to grasp the true significance of events happening in Bosnia. Hemon marks Pronek’s trauma as ongoing and incomprehensible: his sleep is “marred by nightmares” as he imagines “endless darkness.” The trauma does erupt from time to time, as when Pronek becomes irate with a customer. The narrator explains, “Pronek got fired the day he saw a picture, framed with the red edges of the *Time* magazine front page, a man in a Serbian concentration camp” (185). Hemon introduces the event, not as a moment in the plot but as a moment in Pronek’s state of ongoing exile. The narrator then explains that Pronek, distracted by the horrific images, cannot do his work well and lashes out at a customer whose only concern is getting the correct type of lettuce.

In this scene, Hemon alludes to the language barrier difficulties that he addresses more fully in *Nowhere Man*. As Pronek attempts to comprehend the

importance the customer places on the lettuce, “he could not think of any English words that would convey the magnitude of the absurdity” of the argument he and the customer were having (187). The juxtaposition of the customer’s frustration regarding the lettuce, and Pronek’s concern about Bosnians in concentration camps highlights the vast distance between the American viewing public and the events the media conveys. This scene serves as an example of Hemon’s demonstration of the discrepancy between the conflict as it is depicted through the media’s narrative frame and the conflict as a personalized actuality.

In scenes representing Pronek’s trauma, Hemon portrays the difference in the American and Sarajevan reception of the news to emphasize the ways that it fails to capture the humanity and depth of the war. Hemon contrasts the fleeting impact of the news on American characters with the lasting effects it has on Sarajevans. The narrator explains, “Sarajevo was besieged, there was a severe lack of food, there were rumors of Serbian concentration camps, but [Pronek] only watched the images to recognize the people in them” (185). Pronek sees more than compelling evidence of war; he connects the images to his hometown and fellow Sarajevans. As I discussed in my first chapter, Hemon depicts American viewers who watch with detached horror or, in Chad and Carwin’s case, ignore the conflict altogether. Pronek, on the other hand, watches intently and witnesses his friends and neighbors suffering. When he watches, he sees “friends shot by snipers or killed by shrapnel” rather than nameless victims across the globe (199). He sees blurred, quick images and constructs the rest of the neighborhood in his mind. Hemon further fulfills Marx’s expectations of fail-state fiction, that is, it

personalizes the conflict, or “give[s] it a human face,” by demonstrating the human response to the war. The media Hemon depicts utilizes reductive narrative frames; yet, the media experience of Pronek is marked by his trauma as a complex individual. Hemon emphasizes Pronek’s pain to draw the reader’s attention to the missing element of the news, that is, the humanity that in the narrativization of traumatic events neglects or fails to represent. He demands that his reader reconsider their initial understandings of newscasts that they have witnessed. This allows the reader to participate in the scene, or empathize with Pronek, and contributes to the overall effect Hemon’s complex portraiture and “the sensation of experiencing the real.”

Pronek, however, cannot always convey his emotions; part of Hemon’s work as a testimonial writer in exile is portraying the effects of the language barrier. His depictions of Pronek demonstrate his awareness of the limitations of working with a second language. In *The Question of Bruno*, he writes: “Presently, we will give [Pronek] his voice back and let him talk for himself. Ideally, of course, he would speak in his native language, but, unfortunately, that is not possible. Here are, then, his authentic, fresh, and realistic experiences” (201). Hemon, who writes in English, celebrates the English language while simultaneously addressing the hindrance of expressing oneself in a non-native language. The narrator claims to give Pronek a voice while reminding the reader that he cannot properly do so. He alludes to the problems of representing trauma and mocks those who might claim to give voice to the Other utilizing the mainstream language. Cubilié observes Croat writer Elma Softić making a similar,

though less sardonic move in her testimony^e. She states, “[Softić’s] text embraces the paradox of the inadequacy of language to convey such trauma while recognizing it as the only vehicle for doing so” (204). Hemon uses language, specifically English, to convey the experiences of Pronek as an exile though he has drawn attention to its limitations. He tells his reader that Pronek’s following words will nonetheless “authentic” and “realistic” to accentuate the absurdity of assigning those terms to his representation without acknowledging obstacles such as the language barrier. As Said notes, most people “take home and language for granted... exiles cross borders, break barriers” (147). He argues that few people consider the border their language creates on a daily basis. The exile’s ability to exist in two worlds, however, does not necessarily facilitate living in either. This liminal position, which requires constant translation, exacerbates the exile’s distress. Hemon’s represents the language barrier as further straining his characters’ decentered senses of self and the discontinuity of their experiences.

In *Nowhere Man*, both Pronek and the unnamed narrator struggle with learning English as they attempt to create new lives away from home. I view the first chapter as a sampling from the various stages of learning English. The narrator emphasizes his reliance on the dictionary though he intends to become a teacher in an English language school, explaining that he looked up the word “eviction” among others (*Nowhere Man* 5). In my first chapter, I argued Hemon alludes to the enormity of time and effort required to learn English well enough to seek this position. In his interview with Marcus

^e *Sarajevo Days, Sarajevo Nights*

and Robin, the unnamed narrator explains that he lacks teaching experience but has “huge learning experience” (15). Hemon illuminates the painful, even embarrassing experience of learning English when Marcus uses an extended vocabulary and the unnamed narrator becomes “uncomfortable” and is forced to admit, “I do not understand everything that you say” (16). The anxiety of learning English troubles Pronek as well. When he begins working for Greenpeace, Pronek “imagined good Americans opening their doors, hating him for his foreign stupidity, for his silly accent, for his childish grammar errors” (167).

Hemon presents multiple representatives of English language learners to support his portrayal of its arduous process. He provides representatives from several levels of English mastery to demonstrate and emphasize the cumbersome stages of the learning process. Marcus, for example, represents someone with full mastery over the language, while the narrator has just recently become fluent. As they visit two classrooms, each at different levels, Marcus notes the “trials and tribulations of language acquisition” and “the people in the class tightened” (18). Marcus’s observation that acquiring a second language is a difficult process is supported by students’ reaction to his use of complex terms. However, the chapter ultimately demonstrates mastery over the English language. Though the unnamed narrator recounts his inability to understand Marcus’s more complicated phrases during his visit, his narrative reflects that he has since developed an equally sophisticated vocabulary. For example, he describes Pronek’s “generous facial movements and oscillating eyebrows” (21). By presenting these stages

of learning English language, both in the classroom and via his reflections, the narrator implicates the laborious (yet accomplishable) task of learning a second language.

Hemon complicates his representation of English learning by drawing attention to the limitations of translation. He demonstrates the discontinuity that inherently accompanies translating to deepen his representation of the discontinuities of exile. At times, translation marks reduction. In one scene, one night at dinner, Pronek impresses Rachel, his girlfriend, and her loved ones when he sings a Bosnian song at dinner. He assures them afterward, “I don’t know how to translate,” but they insist that he tries (211). His translation delivers a convoluted message and strips the song of its lyrical qualities. Specifically, his translation removes the rhythm (in syllable count) and end rhymes. Like narrativization, which simplifies complicated human experiences, translation neglects the beauty and feeling expressed in a language. Hemon demonstrates the degradation that occurs when one must translate one’s traditions or expressions to fit a new language, perhaps alluding to the reductive employment of the complicated conflict in his homeland. Translation represents a crossing of borders, as Said mentions, and therefore marks a liminal space. Pronek’s occupation of this space then signifies his dislocation from his homeland as well as his inability to fully belong to his new country of residence.

Pronek becomes increasingly frustrated by English, because he knows that he cannot use it to express fully ideas that he could convey in his own language. Straddling the language barrier takes its toll on Pronek. He begins to understand his self as divided. In the following scene, Pronek considers his split identity:

He imagined himself imagining himself in this room, dimly lit, waiting for a woman who could only know what he told her in his sloppy English and distorting accent. He saw clearly that who he thought he was and who she thought he was were two different persons. (200)

Pronek knows that he can only express certain aspects of his self to Rachel due to the limitations of his English and inherent deficiencies of translation. He feels that the language barrier distorts everything he tries to convey; therefore, who he is when he is with her is a distorted or decentered version of his true self. He fears that Rachel's perception of him is divorced from his true personality due to his inability to speak in a language she understands. His contemplation that she, "could only know" part of him implies that any attempt to dissolve this barrier would be futile, even in the future. As long as language limits him, he cannot correct her assumptions or complicate his identity in her eyes. This scene testifies to the rupture of an exile's sense of self that occurs due to the language barrier. Pronek is doubly removed (physically and linguistically) from his former identity and he feels that he has become "two different persons." Hemon depicts a psychological fragmentation of Pronek's life, which contributes to the splitting of his identity.

Hemon builds on the narrator's and Pronek's anxieties to lead the reader toward a breaking point. In addition to the discontinuities of translation, Rachel and other well-intentioned characters interrupt Pronek's dialogue to correct his usage and grammar. In the following scene, his coworkers (Rachel included) focus on his language and ignore

the content of what he is saying. Speaking of his friend Mirza's letter from Sarajevo, Pronek says:

"I will show you the letter that he wrote me. It is very sad."

"The letter he wrote you," Rachel said.

"Right," Pronek said.

"Not his letter that he wrote you."

"Okay."

"I noticed," Dallas said, "that you use a lot of the's." (188)

Hemon accentuates the disruptions that come with speaking a new language, demonstrating the hindrance it places on one's ability to express important information. Rachel and Dallas interrupt Pronek's story concerning the war and its effects to correct his word usage; they completely neglect Pronek's intention to share his personal, painful experiences of the war. This scene reveals Pronek's inability to explain his perspective of the war as his American coworkers refuse his attempts to personalize it. It demonstrates the importance of Hemon's testimony in that it exposes the tendency that some people have to focus on the language of a text rather than its far more interesting and significant content. The American characters are not actually hearing Pronek's story; their interruptions frustrate him because they deny his testimony. He attempts to share the "very sad" letter from his friend who is suffering in Sarajevo, and they disrupt both his and Mirza's stories.

As I mention earlier in this chapter, Hemon adds layers to his portraiture of exile to develop a rhetorical progression in *Nowhere Man*. The language barrier in particular

reveals mounting tensions concerning the plight of the exile. In Pronek's final scene in *Nowhere Man*, he outwardly expresses his internal frustrations in a cathartic outburst. As he and Rachel battle a mouse that has crept into their apartment, she continually revises his English despite rising emotions. Angered by her incessant correcting, he demands to know: "Why you have to correct me all the time?" She insists on his use of "do" and he shouts, "Stop it!" (219) He becomes enraged and begins to demolish the apartment. As he does so, he screams, "Correct this!" (219) Rachel's continual interruptions and stress on language continues to fracture Pronek's sense of self, and the effects of exile on his identity become unbearable. Hemon writes, "[Pronek] felt a release inside—the fury deluge broke the dam in his stomach and flooded his body as the bucket smashed into the wall" (219). Pronek inflicts upon material objects the destruction and rupturing of his identity. As he turns over furniture and throws books, he breaks them individually and destroys their cohesiveness as pieces of the apartment. While his annihilation of the objects' order and purpose cannot truly represent the irreparable damage done to his psyche, his actions become visual and physical manifestations of his inner strife. Pronek's catharsis continues as he asserts his sense of self regardless of his liminal state. At the climax of his outburst, he strips naked and asks, "You want to see me? You want to see the real me?" (221) His focus on his "real" self harks back to his concerns that he can only convey a distorted version through English. Since he cannot express himself through language, he demonstrates his presence physically and vocally in this scene. He affirms his existence by standing in front of Rachel, yelling, "Here! Here!" (221) He demands to be granted a full identity

“here” and now rather than fragmented or in relation to another location. His body and mind, though not articulated verbally, are present in front of her in their entirety. This scene serves as a sort of climax to Hemon’s progressive exploration of the effects of exile on Pronek’s psyche. The constant distorting and translating of Pronek’s identity has frustrated him to breaking point. He violently asserts his existence as a whole person while outwardly depicting the destruction he feels overwhelming him on the inside.

In this chapter, I have discussed how Hemon overcomes the obstacles of depicting trauma by primarily addressing the *effects* of exile. He personalizes the Bosnian War by providing a complicated portrait that encourages his readers to “participate” rather than “judge.” To paraphrase Phelan, readers analyze characters on three levels: mimetic (as a person), thematic (as an idea), and synthetic (as a construct) (*Narrative as Rhetoric* 29). For example, the reader evaluates Elizabeth Bennett as someone s/he can or cannot relate to, as a representative of a type of person, and as the creation of Jane Austen. Hemon resists mimetic evaluation though he fully expects the reader to understand Pronek and his doppelgangers thematically. As he presents similar-yet-different characters and narratives that resemble his own experiences, he testifies to the hardships he faced as a Sarajevan and an exile. *Nowhere Man* especially serves as a testimonial work of portraiture that progresses with the growing frustrations of Pronek’s exile and with the layering of narrative provided by multiple narrators. The text demonstrates the decentering and splintering of the exile’s sense of self, which leads Pronek to eventually wonder, “But who am I?” (*Nowhere Man* 198)

Conclusion

I began this project with the goal of ‘figuring out’ Hemon’s work. I had some background knowledge on the Bosnian War, but of course, media emplotment limited my understanding of the conflict. Hemon’s manipulations of narrative convention jumbled my expectations as a reader, but I recognized his intention and devotion to challenging the simplification process that often comes with narrativization. As I read works on testimony, historiographic metafiction, and portraiture, I viewed them as gateways into Hemon’s texts. Primarily, I sought to illuminate some of Hemon’s stylistic moves and formal play, to make sense of it all. Yet, as I have argued, much of Hemon’s work directly *resists* exactly that kind of meaning and order. Hemon challenges conventional narrativization and media emplotment and testifies to the effects of exile through his alternative text formulation.

John Beverley narrowly defines testimony as narrative “told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events” (31). Without adhering to that narrow definition, Hemon’s works maintain clear purpose and intent as testimony. His testimony does not conflate the narrator and author, is not told by a single narrator, is and not written in traditional narrative in form; however, Beverley asserts that testimony should be classified depending upon the intentionality of the author and the resulting reader experience. Hemon deconstructs the reductive narrativization of the war and gives voice to “forms of community, solidarity, and affinity that extend beyond or between nation-states (Beverley 24). Hemon’s fictions

develop complex and purposefully fragmented representations that require the reader to be wary of totalizing narratives and to seek alternative truths. He situates his texts within the tradition of siege literature and its attempts to depict the fantastic reality of Sarajevo's destruction. At the same time that he successfully personalizes the conflict as he represents the trauma and other psychological effects of his exile. The result is that "the personal is political" (Beverley 32).

I would like to note a few elements in Hemon's work that I was not able to address within these pages. First, there is his extensive use of intertextual details and connections, which pull all of his pieces together while simultaneously complicating each. The final chapter of *Nowhere Man*, in particular, demonstrates an impressive level of mastery and begs dissection. Second are his depictions of American and Bosnian cultures, which I find are meticulously crafted and remarkably poignant. Third, there is the entire other half of *The Lazarus Project*, on which one could say a great many things about narrative and history. For the purposes of this paper, I focused primarily on Pronek and his doppelgangers, but there is much to be said about Lazarus and how his story informs Brik's and vice versa. Fourth, there is everything else: the Beatles, the women characters and their roles, stories from the old neighborhood, the cats and mice and cockroaches, and the beauty of his lines. These are merely fractions of the possibilities of exploration within his works. I hope that academia explores each of Hemon's works more closely than I was able to in these pages; I have only begun the work of studying his rhetorical progressions and postmodern modes.

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