



## Love and Obstacles

*Aleksandar Hemon*

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Aleksandar Hemon earned his reputation with his short stories, and he returns to the form with a powerful book of linked stories that stands with the award-winning novel *The Lazarus Project* as the best work of his career. Infused with the astonishingly creative prose and the haunting yet hilarious storytelling that makes Hemon's work so distinctive, the stories of *Love and Obstacles* are united by their narrator, a young man coming of age in communist-but-cosmopolitan Sarajevo who will leave for the United States just as his city is torn asunder. In Hemon's hands, seemingly mundane childhood experiences become daring, dramatic adventures, while unique and wrenching circumstances become common ground that involves us all. Hemon is not simply recounting an immigrant's autobiography. Each story spins out in fabulist, exhilarating directions, yet still builds to a dazzling and insightful, sometimes heartbreakingly conclusion; each story makes the world look new again. And as the stories grow together, *Love and Obstacles* shows itself to be as cohesive and impressive as any novel—and always charming, and inviting, and achingly human.

[www.aleksandarhemon.com](http://www.aleksandarhemon.com)

## **Love and Obstacles Details**

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Author : Aleksandar Hemon

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## From Reader Review Love and Obstacles for online ebook

### Milica Chotra says

This book came to me at a very strange time, when I was thinking a lot about my own writing, shortly after having read Calvino's "If on a Winter's Night a Traveler" that had started all this mess (in a positive way, if there can be such a thing, a "good mess"). Feels weird... I'm not sure what I read - a collection of short stories or fragments of a novel? Is this fiction or an autobiography? And where do we draw the line? Isn't there a bit of us in everything we produce, and a bit of "creative freedom" in every retelling of our memories?

Anyway, I like Hemon's writing and this was a nice book of recollections of a young Yugoslav emigrant, with whom I share more than just the country we were born in.

A few of these stories can be found in *The New Yorker*:

Stairway to Heaven (October 23, 2006)

Everything (as "Love and Obstacles", November 28, 2005)

Szmura's Room (June 14, 2004)

The Noble Truths of Suffering (September 22, 2008)

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### Loredana (Bookinista08) says

O carte sub?iric?, dar cu impact! În aceast? culegere de povestiri, Aleksandar Hemon împlete?te foarte frumos (?i extrem de subtil) realitatea cu fic?iunea din dorin?a sa de a prezenta periul prin via?? al unui tân?r bosniac (el însu?i), de la perioada socialist? de dinainte de r?zboi, când Sarajevo era o mic? bijuterie cosmopolit?, ?i pân? la perioada post 9/11, când nici în America traiul nu mai p?rea atât de promi??tor, Hemon sim?ind mizeria uman? cum îl strâng ?i-l sufoc? precum un cojoc de iarn? purtat în toiul verii. Mi-a pl?cut foarte mult fiecare povestire în parte, uneori nu atât pentru subiectul ales, cât pentru talentul magnific de povestitor al lui Hemon, îns? preferata mea de departe a fost „Albinele. Partea I”, în care scriitorul adun? mici buc??ele din istoria familiei sale, folosind activitatea de stup?rit a înainta?ilor s?i, pentru a crea un fir invizibil care s? lege trecutul de prezent, ?i prezentul de viitor. Foarte frumos, am apreciat enorm ce a f?cut el în aceast? proz? scurt?! M? repet, totu?i: nici celealte texte nu sunt de lep?dat. Recomand!

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### Robertha says

Who knew I could get so bored by a Hemon collection of short stories? I've heard him speak; I've loved the work he's presented on stage, yet I can't wait for this book to be over already.

The material isn't dull. I like the tales o exiles and immigrants and the gloriously observed bizarrie of the America that they are confronted with. It's just a bit cold, this book. Very intellectualized, somewhat choked emotionally.

Yawn. I already know enough men like that. Don't need them to be my narrators.

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## Allycks says

New Yorker: How much of your work is autobiographical Mr. Hemon?

AH: "Here's how it works: Last night, on my way to give a reading, I hurt a ligament in my right hand while putting my shoe on. As I was driving this morning and talking on the phone with my sister in London, I lost my grip and sideswept my neighbor's car. Being honest, I went to their house to tell them what I had done. When I rang the bell nobody answered. I knocked and went in anyway, thinking they might be in the backyard. The house was empty, and as I walked through I noticed a vase in the shape of a monkey head. The light angle made it somehow seem that the monkey was winking at me, so I picked the head up to examine it, but then, dropped it, what with the weak hand ligament, and it shattered in a thousand pieces. For a moment, I considered cleaning up or waiting for my neighbors to show up, but then decided to sneak out. Now I dread hearing the door bell.

I could go on and turn this into a story. I did hurt my hand last night and I did get into the car this morning, but I did not cause any damage, nor did I trespass. I did not talk to my sister yesterday, but she does live in London. And I've never seen a monkey head like that. So, how much of this putative story is autobiographical?"

I love this quote. It is the definitive answer to that hackneyed but irresistible question, forever, for all writers everywhere. Aleksandar Hemon is my freaking hero and while it's probably stupid to spout absolutes I've still got to spout that AH is the most talented young English-language writer in the world today.

Love and Obstacles isn't a perfect short story collection (name one that is, and whoever says fucking Dubliners gets to run extra laps after school) but it is a return to form after the somewhat overbaked The Lazarus Project. Love and Obstacles is a refracted, lighter, and more worldly companion to his masterpiece Nowhere Man. Each story can be read on its own and each has a killer clincher straight out of the O'Henry manual (though these involve unexpectedly engorged penises and eyeballs getting knocked out of their sockets) but like Nowhere Man the reader is gradually clued in to the prismatic shape of the narration towards the second half of the book. All is then sealed in final pages. The story is one, but it is not linear, it is multi-faceted and tangential. The narrator knows his own story but often others, outsiders, know it even better and are able to shine light into the far-off unlit corners. Yeah, a prism.

Love and Obstacles has Hemon shifting away from Nabokov (even if the influence is still there) and picking up a little from Bruno Shultz (in particular the character of the father) in making his own cynical but somehow very humane style more distinct. The surprise for me here is the twist on his "Plucky Immigrant Does Well in America" story: The sparkle fades and the immigrant discovers, to his own surprise, that American culture is just as bland, brutal, and superficial as the one he left behind.

Finally if you can only read one of these stories and want a distinct sample of what Aleksandar Hemon is all about, read either "The Conductor" or "The Noble Truths of Suffering."

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## Anna says

Do si?gni?cia po t?ksi??k? skusi? mnie kraj pochodzenia autora. Hemon jest Bo?niakiem, kt?ry opu?ci? swoj? ojczyzn? jeszcze przed wojn?. Jako stypendysta zamieszka? w Chicago i tam ju? pozosta?.

Love and Obstacles to zbiór o?miu opowiada?. W pierwszym z nich Hemon wspomina Conrada - emigranta, który pisa? po angielsku. To odwo?anie ?ci?le zwi?zane jest z autorem, tak?e on tworzy w tym j?zyku - na pozór zasymilowany z ameryka?skim spo?ecze?stwem, w swoich opowiadaniach ci?gle wraca do Bo?ni. Ka?de z nich wydaje si? by? zabarwione autobiograficznie, bohaterem jest m?ody ch?opak, kochaj?cy ksi?ki i marz?cy o karierze pisarza. Alter ego Hemona poznajemy na pocz?tku lat osiemdziesi?tych w Kongu. Jako szesnastolatek odwiedza wraz z rodzin? ojca, jugos?owia?skiego dyplomat?. W kolejnym opowiadaniu wys?any zostaj? na granic? s?owe?sk?, w celu zakupienia koniecznej dla rodziny zamra?arki. I te dwa pierwsze opowiadania najbardziej mi si? podoba?y. Wraz z kolejnym tekstem Hemon przenosi si? do Stanów Zjednoczonych, a Bo?nia obecna jest tylko w reminiscencjach oraz pod postaci? nie umiej?cych si? przystosowa? do kanadyjskiej rzeczywisto?ci rodziców.

Ci?g dalszy: <https://przeczytalamksiazke.blogspot....>

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### **Enes Erden says**

ben bu kitaptan çok umutluydum, çok tatlı? bir kapa?? vard?, tam plajda güne?lenirken bir günde bitirebilece?im yazl?k bir kitapt? kafamda. Ama tam tersi ç?kt?. Oku oku bitiremedim 200 sayfay?, okudu?umdan bir?ey de anlamad?m, belki bana hitap etmiyordur ama yinede tavsiye etmem aç?kças?.

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### **Julie says**

I loved this book for maybe the same reasons others did not. The protagonist is not always a likable or admirable character, yet he is unmistakably human and fallible in the best possible way. "How can you write a book - how can you write a single goddamn sentence - without getting angry? I wondered. How do you even wake up in the morning without getting angry? I get angry in my dreams and wake up furious..." How can you not identify with that passion? Making use of an extensive vocabulary that had me reaching for the dictionary, Mr. Hemon's beautiful descriptions became addicting to where I could not put the book down. It told of a colorful, painful and rich life from story-to-story, and it simply does not matter how much is autobiographical or fiction. Maybe because I've been an expat for several years, I can identify more easily with displacement felt both in the adopted country and upon return later to native soil. This review does the author no real justice, so I encourage you to read the book regardless.

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### **Lazarus P Badpenny Esq says**

There is something of *The Emperor's New Clothes* about the serendipitous juxtapositions of Hemon's itinerant prose: many of his metaphors have the unconvincing quality of non-sequiturs and these stories are doubly troublesome because the bulk of them seem like underworked fragments discarded from larger pieces rather than having the inexorable nature necessary for the best short stories.

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### **Jeruen says**

I did not like this. And the main reason for this dislike is the fact that I cannot wrap my head around it.

The thing is, I was very much confused as to the nature of this book. It was a collection of stories, and yet the stories were linked with each other, in fact, too linked to each other that I am not sure whether this is a novel or not. The whole collection of stories sounded like several chapters of a novel about this one person.

Now the other disturbing thing is that this book claims to be fiction, and yet it somehow sounds very autobiographical. Maybe it was intended that way, maybe not, but I just don't know.

Another thing that irks me is the fact that the chapters (or should I say, the stories) that compose this book are too microscopic. They focus on one explicit thing that makes the reader lost in its pages, in a bad way. One gets the hint that the stories are related to one another, and yet at the same time, the stories narrate something so intense and deep. All the stories are told in the first-person, and yet this first person has no name. It is implied that the stories share one first person, therefore, it's just a collection of chapters of a novel of this person.

Anyway, this first person has plenty of things in common. He is Bosnian, he has been living in the United States, he got stranded in the USA as a tourist when the war in Bosnia erupted, and he has plenty of connections. He lives in Chicago, he writes, and he has family in Bosnia. All of these seem to mirror the life of the author himself.

Anyway, reading this book has plunged me into this deep confusion, that I think I ended up being more dissatisfied than pleased. Unfortunately, the author has won a MacArthur Genius Grant and therefore suggests that plenty of people out there like his work. Unfortunately, I don't think I can consider myself to be one of them. 1 out of 5 stars.

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## **Adam says**

I couldn't put this one down. Hemon writes in a superbly plain language with an understated humor. He also has displays a nuanced masculinity: a tough, blunt, directness, with a degree of genuine self-deprecation. Part of the latter involves his own ambivalence about his identity as a writer. The last story in the collection is about a hilarious, near malicious attitude toward another writer celebrity. This story, like the others, is semi-autobiographical. Hemon in the New York Review of Books about writing the personal:

"The beauty of literature—also its limit—is that it is inescapably personal, even if you're writing science fiction. Even if your story takes place on a different planet, it comes out of your personality, your personal experience, your sensibilities, your interests, your passions, the whole of you. Even if you tried to extinguish your personality, what is left in the story will reflect it, perhaps by its negation. Our lives provide the bricks from which we build these cathedrals.

The hard part in 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...one denies the real substance of life: the ephemera, the nethermoments, much too small to be recorded (the train pulling into the station where there is nobody; a spider sliding down an invisible rope and landing on the floor just in time to be stepped on...). But you cannot simply list all the moments when the world tickles your senses, only to seep away between your fingers and eyelashes, leaving you alone to tell the story of your life to an audience interested only in the fireworks of universal experiences, the roller coaster rides of sympathy and judgment."

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### **Bob H says**

In this remarkable work, a series of linked, episodic short stories, the narrator tells a series of tales of his alienated youth, somewhat in the mode of *Catcher in the Rye*, though it jumps in time and locale in a way that evokes *Slaughterhouse Five*. He always seems to be out of place, and feeling it, whether in the Congo (his father is on a diplomatic mission), or in the Yugoslavia-that-was (his father sends him to Slovenia to buy a freezer), or in Chicago, where he is stranded in 1991 by the start of the siege in his home town, Sarajevo.

And in many of the stories, he links up with older, jaded, unforgettable guides, who are out of place and time as well. An American rogue (or rogue agent) in Congo, a demented Bosnian poet in Chicago, a gang of boys in his childhood who wage war over a barren playground in a metaphor for the war to come.

His prose is sparse but vivid, quirky, never dull. "When America settled into its mold of patriotic vulgarity," he writes in one of the later stories, "I began to despair, for everything reminded me of Bosnia in 1991. The War on Terror took me to the verge of writing poetry again, but I knew better."

These may be sketches for a much larger work as this author grows and expands his craft. Not many authors can write in English as a second language and achieve this much so quickly, but Mr. Hemon does. As Joseph Conrad once did. His future work will be something to see, and for now, this book will be a worthwhile trip along that road.

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### **Moeen says**

2015 was definitely the year of Aleksandar Hemon. I got obsessed with everything he wrote. Reading four books of him (including his memoir, *The Book of My Lives*) I could see how he narrates same stories/themes in different forms, with plain and somewhat Nabokovian language, unexpected humor, and how he (a Bosnian immigrant writer struggling to find his *me-here* in US and to move on from his *me-there* in Bosnia) is everywhere in his books, in every single characters.

*Love and Obstacles* is his second short story collection. His crafts are getting more American, more funny, less avant-garde, and less naive by every book. I could say I prefer his early years.

I've got to say this. Hemon is not the greatest author I've ever read, of course not, but I think he is my favorite one. He gives me this feeling that I am the only one who has discovered him, that he is writing for me alone, that I have found my best friend.

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### **Christine Zibas says**

As a young writer, Aleksander Hemon has already accumulated a lifetime of writer accolades: he's a MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant recipient, he's been a Guggenheim fellow, and both of his recent books ("The Lazarus Project" and "Nowhere Man") have been short-listed for the National Book Award. So expectations for "Love and Obstacles," a collection of short stories, was high. Aleksander Hemon did not disappoint.

It takes a little while to immerse yourself in the autobiographical world of Bosnian Hemon if you've never experienced his writing before. Somewhat jarring, too, in this volume is that the first story is set in Africa, where he tells his own "Heart of Darkness" tale about disaffected youth and a rogue CIA type. It's a good story, but once the book moves on to other, more typical Hemon fare--stories of Sarajevo, transplantation to North America, and stories of family life--it's easier to see what all the fuss is about.

Hemon writes with humor and pathos. He is able to poke fun at his own writerly ambitions, as well as those of his father (who writes the story of his life via a movie script that he then wants his son to act out), a Bosnian poet who haunts the cafes of Sarajevo (and mistakes the Hemon character for a conductor), and a visiting Pulitzer Prize winner whose life's trauma (Vietnam) mirrors that of Hemon's (the fall of Sarajevo). It's all fodder for the vagaries of life and the impossibility of living in an absurd world when you aspire to see its truth and beauty.

Two factors will leap out when readers attempt to decipher just what it is that makes this writing so potent. One is the way in which the writer is able to bring his characters to life. In each of the eight stories told in "Love and Obstacles," the characters are larger than life, strong in personality but vulnerable and frail, too, from the life experiences they have suffered through (yet are reluctant to reveal). The second strength Hemon brings to his writing is his unexpected use of language. The twists and turns, the play on songs and other cultural motifs, the odd phrasing that cuts to the quick--these are the heart and soul of "Love and Obstacles."

Finally, the key turn that brings most stories in "Love and Obstacles" to their climax is done with a poetic phrasing that's almost startling. Caught up in the humor of the situation, readers don't see the vulnerable punch line coming. It's magic when it arrives. And that is the reason Aleksander Hemon is worth reading.

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### **Bookmarks Magazine says**

"""Steeped ... in male ego [and] sexuality"" (*Houston Chronicle*), Hemon's wry, robust, and entertaining stories bring to light the immigrant's hunger for identity -- caught between two worlds but truly belonging to neither -- and the writer's hunger for validation. Poised between two worlds himself, Hemon's vantage point and marvelous flair for the English language yield deliciously sardonic cultural observations and ask insightful questions about the meaning of family and home. Critics were especially moved by his portrait of his eccentric father and the growing chasm between father and son. Though the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* considered Hemon's subject matter trite and uninspired, most critics, in spite of a few complaints -- including some awkward language, a sporadic anti-American undercurrent, and forced connections among stories -- were pleased by Hemon's return to familiar terrain."

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### **William Herschel says**

The guy's being compared to Nabokov, how could I not give his work a try? *Love And Obstacles* is short, containing eight short-stories with set similarities and recurring themes. Each protagonist is an immigrant to the United States from Bosnia, and there's always a poet/writer. Sounding rather familiar, Mr. Hemon; Mr. Nabokov?

Most of the stories also center around The Bosnian War and male adolescence. "In Hemon's hands, seemingly mundane childhood experiences become daring, dramatic adventures, while unique and

wrenching circumstances become common ground that involves us all." For once, an accurate description of a book on the inside flap!

Hemon is obviously a talented writer. But I have to wonder why he keeps using the same story premise over and over like a PTSD flashback. This doesn't make much sense taking in account only this book-- but quick, read the descriptions for his two novels. This isn't going to work forever. But with regards to this collection only, the common themes hold the collection together nicely (contrary to other short story volumes that are often all over the place in theme and quality).

When reading this you'll probably stop and wonder how much of this is autobiographical. I like how especially the last story (one of my favorites\*) plays on this, it's about a writer who meets a Pulitzer-prize winner and has lunch with him. The man never speaks to him again, but becomes obsessed with his work-- looking to see if his disastrous lunch is ever captured or remembered by the author in his later books.

\*American Commando is my favorite-favorite.

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