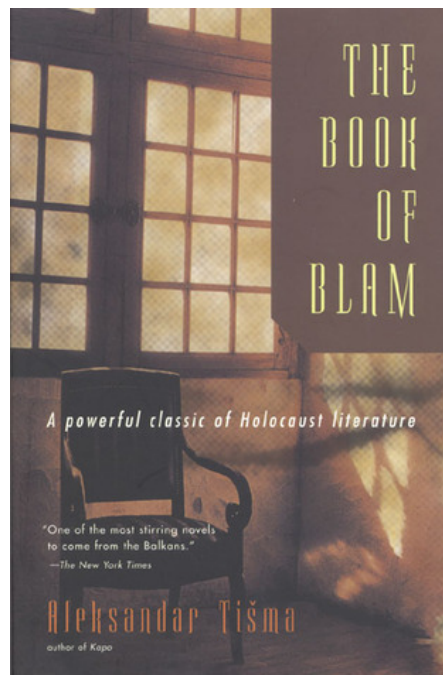




# The Book of Blam

*Aleksandar Tišma , Michael Henry Heim*

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## **The Book of Blam** Aleksandar Tišma , Michael Henry Heim

Miroslav Blam walks through the empty streets of Novi Sad, remembering. The war has ended, but for Blam the town is haunted with its presence, and memories of its dead: Aaron Grün, the hunchbacked watchmaker; Eduard Fiker, a lamp merchant; Jakob Mentele, a stove fitter; Arthur Spitzer, a grocer who played amateur soccer and had non-Jewish friends; and Sándor Vértés, a communist lawyer. They stand before him as ever, but they are only the ghosts in Blam's mind. Accompanying the others are Blam's family and his best friend, all of whom perished in the infamous Novi Sad raid in January 1942. Blam lives. He seeks no revenge, no retribution. His life is a spectator's-made all the more agonizing by the clarity with which he sees the events around him. The silhouettes of the dead pass before him, and he incorporates what would have been their daily lives into his own. And in telling the story of one man's life after the war, Ti

## **The Book of Blam Details**

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# From Reader Review The Book of Blam for online ebook

## Bill Magee says

4.5 rly

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## Gerbrand says

Mooi geconstrueerde roman uit 1972. We volgen Miroslav Blam jaren na de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Zijn ouders en zus en veel vrienden waren slachtoffer van de razzia's in 1942 in Novi-Sad. De Hongaren waren verantwoordelijk voor de zuiveringen onder Joden en Serviers. Tijdens de oorlog claimden de Hongaren dit gebied namelijk weer dat ze waren kwijt geraakt na het uiteenvallen van het Habsburgse Rijk.

De leegte van Miroslav is goed voelbaar in deze roman. Wat is nog de zin van het leven na zoveel verlies. Er zitten een aantal mooie scènes in dit boek waarbij de schrijver bijna filmisch te werk gaat.

Prachtig slot hoofdstuk waarin Miroslav een concert bijwoont in het inmiddels tot concertzaal omgebouwde synagoge (een geweldige symboliek):

“Hij is murw. Niets rest er nog van het verlangen om in opstand te komen, om te schreeuwen dat dood en leven onverenigbaar zijn. Ook het derde oog is er niet meer om hem te observeren en het beeld van zijn omgeving met zijn eisen te verenigen. Dat is nu weer een gewoon beeld: een grote zaal met Levantijnse religieuze decoraties, een podium waar op gemusiceerd wordt, rijen banken waarin mensen geconcentreerd de muziek beleven. Niets. Een leeggehaalde mooie plek, een leeg paleis met een nieuwe bestemming. De bloedvlekken van de vermoorden zijn weggeboend, alles is proper, fraai verlicht, er wordt muziek gespeeld. Maar het spookachtige blijft, en voor Blam komt dat niet langer voort uit het verleden maar uit het heden. Hij heeft hier niets meer te zoeken.”

De schrijver is zelf een zoon van een Servische vader en Joodse moeder.

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## Calzean says

During WWII Yugoslavia was carved up, partitioned, dissected and euthanised. In the Vojvodina province, Novi Sad was governed by the Hungarians and along with Jews many old scores were settled.

Miroslav Blam survives but now needs to live with his regrets, guilt and more difficultly with people who were once his enemies.

The book has a couple of depressing chapters that stood out from the other depressing chapters. One describes what happened to the individuals who resided in Jew Street. Another described the 1942 massacre of Jews and Serbs by following the conduct of a number of the Hungarian patrols. In between these depressive tales the book also covers the normality of life that also occurred and the revengeful atrocities that occurred at the end of WWII.

In a short book, Tisma gives a snapshot of the complexities of Serbia and the brutality of man to man.

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## Vladimir says

Prilično sam iznenađen ovim romanom. Imao sam nameru da pročitam par poznatijih Tišminih romana, više zbog lokalne povezanosti odnosno istorije Novog Sada, ali nisam imao baš neka velika očekivanja. Ovo je za mene jedan od najboljih, ako ne i najbolji domaći roman koji sam pročitao do sada.

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## Britta says

*The Book of Blam* gives us a powerful portrayal of the Holocaust in the Balkans, through the eyes of Blam, a man whose survival is arguably more curse than blessing. Tišma plops the reader down in Eastern Europe and unflinchingly guides them through a heavily based on fact fictionalized account of the January 1942 Novi Sad Massacre and the subsequent deportation of the Jewish population. I thought *The Book of Blam* was challenging to read at times--it's certainly not the most uplifting piece of fiction. Yet, we cannot shy away from the darker sides of history, and *The Book of Blam* is an invaluable work of fiction for that reason. Additionally, I thought Heim's translation was readable and did the book justice.

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## Lorri says

If you are looking for a light read, a joyful read, or a book that is filled with peaceful depictions, then 'The Book of Blam' is not for you.

The pages are filled with compelling flashbacks and interwoven memories of times past, infused in Blam's reflections within his current life. His daily life is played out minute by minute, without wasting one second, in reflection of his family, friends and those he knew of in Novi Sad.

The trauma of Holocaust events played into his life in every aspect, and the emotional and mental damage to him was extreme.

I found the word-imagery to be vivid and brilliant, and Tisma's depictions of events gripping. It was difficult to put down, even though it was a slow-moving read.

It was confusing to me at first, and took me a while to realize that he was living the lives of others no longer with him. His reflections included their routines and way of being, in the here and now, as though they were still living breathing individuals.

The story line, all told, is a sad one, and one that does not sweeten or sugar coat life during WWII, a period of extensive upheavals and slaughters in Novi Sad. In that respect I thought that 'The Book of Blam' was brilliantly written.

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## Linda says

In 1942 voerden Hongaarse militairen met de hulp van antisemitische Pijlkruisers (gekend uit de romans van György Konrad en berucht om hun wreedheid) moorddadige razzia's uit.

Mensen schuiven in lange rijen tot bij de Donau aan, waar aan de lopende band vermoord wordt. Zijn vriend Slobodan wordt doodgeschoten als hij een oude vrouw probeert te helpen. Voordien was zijn stille zusje Esther als verzetstrijdster uit de weg geruimd.

Later worden de ouders van Miroslav Blam voor hun huis doodgeschoten. Hij zelf ontsnapt, omdat hij met de christen Janja is getrouwd en het ouderlijke huis heeft verlaten. Hij is een jongeman met een scherpe blik, die het onheil zag aankomen, maar, naar eigen aanvoelen, de moed of het dierlijke instinct mist om in opstand te komen of te handelen.

Die daadkracht herkende hij als kind al in zijn vriend Cutura, die al gauw voor het verzet kiest en verdwijnt. Miroslav verbeeldt zich niet alleen zijn dood maar ook een tafereel waarbij Cutura hem aanzet om wraak te nemen op de abjecte huurder, een Pijlkruiser die zijn ouders heeft verraden. Wat hij nalaat, ook in deze droom.

### DONKERE VERTELLING MET LUCIDITEIT ALS TROOST

Schuldgevoel verlamt en deprimeert Miroslav Balam en geeft aan zijn intense eenzaamheid een bijna kosmisch karakter. Het boek eindigt in de joodse synagoge die na de oorlog tot een concertzaal is omgebouwd.

Hij ontmoet er de makelaar Funkenstein, een oude bekende van zijn ouders, die zeventien familieleden in Bergen-Belsen verloor en zelf ontsnapte omdat hij viool kon spelen toen gevangenen er naar de galg werden gevoerd.

De "mooie" muziek, nu ten gehore gebracht in dat "nutteloze" gebouw scherpt de wanhoop van Blam nog aan. Maar "Funkenstein", de muzikant van de vermoorden, blijft gefascineerd door muziek.

Die blindheid, die het leven mogelijk maakt, die hoop mist Miroslav Blam, al is hij op zoek naar "een leven zonder voorbedachte rade" en is hij "dorstig naar levenssappen, naar gebondenheid, naar een gedefinieerd leven".

"Het boek Blam" is een zeer knap gestructureerd verhaal vol afwisseling, met personages, episodes en situaties die een lezer niet gauw zal vergeten. Het is een donkere vertelling, persoonlijke tragedie én collectieve geschiedenis, waarin de pijnlijke luciditeit van het hoofdpersonage en de wijze waarop die wordt verwoord en verbeeld, de enige troost vormen. Maar wat een boek.

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## Guille says

Qué bien se queda uno tras leer un buen libro. Qué bien se queda uno cuando, además, el libro ha servido para conocer a un autor hasta ese momento desconocido. Qué bien se queda uno, además, al saber que el

libro forma parte de toda una pentalogía. Qué bien se queda uno.

El remordimiento y la vergüenza del superviviente es el tema que vertebra esta novela. Por supuesto, no faltan los episodios terribles del padecimiento del pueblo serbio judío a manos de los alemanes y de los húngaros y de la venganza o justicia posterior, pero excepto en el tramo final de la novela, la narración de los mismos evita todo dramatismo, limitándose a poco más que una enumeración somera de aquellos desmanes sin que ello evite que nos sigan impresionando por su crueldad. Hechos terribles que se nos dan a conocer en paralelo a la vida cotidiana de la ciudad de entonces -la escuela, los bailes de juventud, el amor- y a la vida cotidiana de la ciudad del ahora -el trabajo, el matrimonio, los antiguos amigos y conocidos, los muchos desaparecidos- desde el que se narra toda la historia.

Y es que la novela sigue un equilibrado desorden de espacios temporales que dan fe de la maraña emocional en la que vive el protagonista, Miroslav Blam, personaje indolente que se mueve entre la memoria de hechos y personas que están siendo barridos por el olvido de una sociedad que se sobrepone a la tragedia, y las fantasías sobre lo que no fue ni será, inútilmente compensadoras tanto del pasado que le obsesiona y por el que se culpa y avergüenza como del presente del que se siente excluido.

El lenguaje, sencillo y ágil, se acomoda perfectamente tanto a la minuciosidad obsesiva de algunas descripciones como a la concisión administrativa con la que son tratados otros episodios; tanto a las escenas de acción como a las reflexiones melancólicas; tanto al registro periodístico de hechos como a la carga sentimental de una cartas de amor y desesperación. El lirismo, que también tiene sus momentos de gloria, es siempre contenido y eficaz; el interés por el devenir de la historia no decae en ningún momento.

En resumidas cuentas, una buena novela de un muy interesante autor al que volveré pronto.

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## **Jonfaith says**

My first reading of this elegiac novel happned as I was housesitting of sorts for my friend Roger. This was during his brief period between marriages, houses and, apparently, outlooks on life. The issues are universal; in the Lager, survival was random, not a merit. It was a few years later that I bought my own copy at Square Books and read it again. Strange, I also bought Chabon's Final Solution while there.

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## **Marko Boskovic says**

Tužno, mu?no...

Kriv što je živ, što je pretekao, izbegao logore, streljanja, raciju. Tu krivicu pla?a stalnim preživljavanjem rata i okupacije, kažnjava sebe i mazohisti?ki se odri?e svake mogu?nosti sre?e. Nema snega ni sam u sebi da se suo?i i obra?una sa avetima prošlosti. I ?eka. ?eka neki slede?i rat kojem ne?e izma?i i koji ?e odneti i njega.

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Novosadska racija je za mene bila statistika - cifre, datumi, tela streljanih na ulicama, rupa u zale?enom Dunavu na Štrandu. Znao sam o Raciji na sli?an na?in kao što sam znao o nekim drugim strahotama, u

dalekim zemljama, dalekim vremenima. Sada su mi te cifre i podaci dobili lice. Vidim (kao da se dešava predamnom, bez potrebe za prevelikom maštom) žandarme kako u zoru idu zaleženim ulicama, pretresaju kuće i isteruju uplašene ljude, i to sve 50, 100, 500 metara od kuće u kojoj sam odrastao i u kojoj sad pišem ove redove (artiljerijska kasarna iz koje kreću je 3-4 kuće od mene, "trg" Vojvode Šupljikca je prva sledeća ulica).

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Neobično je bilo pitati roman koji se odigrava u Novom Sadu. Tišma me je prilično dezorijentisao - nazivi ulica često nisu oni na koje sam navikao, orijentiri su mi nepoznati (na primer kafana Borac, bioskop Avala, Interkontinental, itd). Uspeo sam da nađem plan grada iz 30-ih godina, i na njemu se zaista nalaze mnoge važnije ulice koje Tišma pominje (većinom se i danas tako zovu - Karađorđeva, Dositejeva, Jevrejska...), ali mnogih manjih ulica nema na mapi. Ok, razumem, umetnička sloboda, možda potreba za diskrecijom ili blagim odklonom od stvarnosti. Međutim, Tišma govori o strašnim stvarima koje su se desile tonom očevidca, a malo mi stvara nelagodnost to što ne znam gde je tu granica između činjenice i umetničke slobode. Možda je u pitanju pijetet prema žrtvama, izbegavanje da se direktno "prika" i da se romansiranežija nesreća.

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## Josh says

Tišma's "Book of Blam" is what I'd like to call a book that explains without having to explain.

Some of us are slain because of what we believe in.  
Some of us are slain because of who we associate with.  
Some of us are slain because we look like the enemy.

Miroslav Blam survives due to a *conversion* and without saying he feels guilt, he bleeds it all over the pages. As people around him die for someone's purpose (or their own), he wanders around wishing his life had meaning. He seems like a man that wants to die, but also needs to find a reason to enjoy life; survivor's guilt is almost as bad as death.

**"This is the end. Aca Krkljuš is now exactly what he would have been had he not returned from the Danube, and what Blam would have been had he remained with his family in that house in Vojvoda Šupljikac Square, had have not been so taken with Janja or perhaps with the salvation he sensed in her. Was it worth it? Inhaling the moist air redolent with freshly dug earth, drawing in deeply into his lungs, he feels it was: life is wonderful, sweet, fragrant, palpable, engrossing. He feels a thrilling, irresistible impetus in the cold contact of the raindrops on his neck, feels it in the sticky soil that cools the soles of his feet through the stiff soles of his shoes, feels it in his frozen hands that seek warmth in the pockets of his coat. Death is terrifying no matter where and when it comes, and life, though it brings us closer to death with every instant, is wonderful."**

Once we become de-sensitized from the atrocities of an era, history will repeat itself. You can guarantee that.

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## Tuck says

one of the six million stories of holocaust, set in novi sad, where waves of war, cruelty, and destruction washed back and forth over the area. blam survives and tells of his life as a survivor, in his neighborhood still, seeing his streets, his tormentors, his few friends. a classic of wwii and aftermaths.

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### **Nick Sweeney says**

Miroslav Blam is a non-religious Jew, brought up in the Serbian town of Novi Sad, and leads a relatively straightforward and unremarkable life there until the start of the Second World War. With the Hungarian occupation of the town, the policies, and the whims, of anti-Semitism impact on his life and on those of his friends and family. Blam is the only survivor of a network of family and friends. The Book of Blam details his reminiscences of what happened to the people he knew during that brutal and senseless time, and Aleksandar Tisma doesn't pull any punches in his telling of those stories. Not a pleasant read at all, but a different take on the Holocaust.

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### **Svetolik Taštinski says**

Ako ne ra?unam pedesetak stranica „Vera i zavera”, nepažljivo i nabrzinu pro?itanih, ovo mi je prvi susret s Aleksandrom Tišmom.

Kada bih vam okvirno predstavio temu romana, mislim da ne bih uspeo da vas zainteresujem. Zato što ja ne bih uspeo dovoljno dobro da se izrazim, a ne zato što roman nije prijem?iv za ?itanje. Pod utiskom sam nekih vrlo potresnih i neprijatnih slika. Jer je aspsurdnost rata takva da istovremeno i razbešnjuje i rastužuje. (Eto, poslednjom re?enicom nagovestio sam atmosferu u koju je roman smešten. Ali imam ose?aj da sam ga time i uprostio. Ne bih da odre?ujem temu ovog romana, niti da odre?ujem žanr. Ma, ne znam šta da kažem, a nešto želim, pa moram. Svakako ga pro?itajte jednom, vredi.)

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### **Khashayar Mohammadi says**

NYRB has been releasing the best of World Literature in the past few years. I for one have replaced my Penguin-classics Fetish with NYRB. I've said it many times: NYRB is the future.

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