

Alison Lurie

Truth and Consequences

New York and Toronto: Viking, 2005. Pp. 232. US \$24.95 Can. \$35.00

Reviewed by Nora Foster Stovel

American writer Alison Lurie has achieved every academic's dream: she is both a successful novelist *and* a Professor of English at Cornell University, where she teaches writing, folklore, and literature. Readers familiar with *The War between the Tates*, *The Truth about Lorin Jones* (winner of the Prix Femina Etranger), *Foreign Affairs* (winner of the Pulitzer Prize) and *The Last Resort* will recognize the familiar Lurie features in her latest novel *Truth and Consequences*. Situated in her customary setting of Corinth (a transposition of Ithaca, New York, site of Cornell University), *Truth and Consequences* combines academic and romantic affairs.

Alan Mackenzie is an architectural historian with prestigious publications, including a book on eighteenth-century American vernacular architecture. His most popular book is his study of Britain's architectural follies—imitation temples and artificial ruins. Indeed, he is currently transforming his chicken coop into a miniature Tintern Abbey. Building his folly and playing volleyball with students strains his back: "Building a ruin, he had himself become a ruin" (21).

Photographing churches for his history of American religious architecture, Alan steps on a lizard, stumbles, and drops his camera. During the sixteen months of agonizing back pain that follow he visualizes the lizard—"Old Clotie" (146), Scottish familiar name for the Devil—gnawing his spine, transforming him overnight into an overweight, petulant invalid. Consequently, "Jane Mackenzie saw her husband fifty feet away and did not recognize him" (1). Instead of seeing the handsome, athletic academic that colleagues call "The Mackenzie" (41), as if he were a Scottish clan-chieftain, she perceives a "pale, fat, weak, greedy, demanding person" (76). Alan's suffering inspires him to travel with a toilet seat ingeniously concealed in a briefcase to ease his back pain.

Jane, Alan's amanuensis and wife of sixteen years, is administrator of the Unger Humanities Centre. The new fellows arrive to discuss this year's theme, "Structures of Faith" (29): Charlie Amir, sociologist from India via Yale; an economist from Bosnia via Ohio; Selma Schmidt, a lesbian feminist in Comparative Literature; Jane's husband, Alan Mackenzie; and famous writer Delia Delaney, author of *Womenfaith*, *Dreamworks*, *Heart's Ease*, and *Moon Tales* (29).

Delia, a Botticelli beauty, called "the intellectual's Dolly Parton" (169) by some, has a catalytic effect on the Fellows: Selma Schmidt offers a lecture on "The Erotic Goddess: Deconstruction and Reconstruction in Delaney" (198), and Alan becomes an artist. Unlike Jane, skeptical about Alan's artificial ruins, Delia is delighted with his follies. She encourages his drawings of empty rooms—"the

ghosts of rooms. Memories of rooms" (194)—and introduces him to a New York dealer who exhibits Alan's drawings and suggests he build a folly for a Connecticut millionaire. Delia's husband, poet Henry Hull, whom Alan considers a "semi-employed Canadian, with an irritatingly ironic manner—a parasite on his beautiful, brilliant wife" (195), is another catalyst. "You touch pitch and are defiled" (211), the Reverend Bobby warns, as characters sink deeper into the Devil's "pit of lies ... one of the gateways to hell" (160). These catalytic characters inspire an entertaining narrative of academic and romantic highjinks.

Rawi Hage

De Niro's Game

Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2006. Pp. 282. \$29.95

Reviewed by Nouri Gana

Rawi Hage's debut novel, *De Niro's Game*, is a refreshing addition to the Canadian amalgam of multicultural literature and the stretching horizon of Anglophone Arab-Canadian fiction inaugurated by the visionary inventiveness of Saad Elkhadem and consolidated by the range and breadth of Marwan Hassan's writings. More accurately, it is an irascible but lyrical commentary on the enduring psychosocial and political legacies of the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990); and, given its particular but unconsenting Christian perspective, this is indeed a significant contribution to the now fecund literary interrogations of the war by Elias Khoury, Hoda Barakat, Rashid al-Daif, Etel Adnan, and Ghada Samman, to mention just a few.

Disturbingly confessional but intransigently antiredemptive, the novel chronicles the vagaries of social relations and, in particular, of friendship as Bassam, the first-person narrator of the story, and his childhood friend, George, attempt to acclimatize themselves to the fanaticisms of everyday violence and to the tribal consciousness that sundered Beirut into a Christian East and a Muslim West, even while Christians and Muslims still live side by side in East as well as in West Beirut.

Urged by his friend George to join the Christian militia (*Kataeb*) but reluctant to do so, Bassam settles on gambling, thieving, and killing as a means of survival, all the while dreaming about a promissory elsewhere he calls "Roma," and which seems to have found partial utterance in the pursuit of two amorous relationships with two girls whose names start with the letter "R": Rana, a local beauty, and Rhea, George's half-sister, whom Bassam meets when he is eventually smuggled into France. Only belatedly, when he comes to Paris and meets Rhea, does Bassam discover that George worked for the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence, and was a key player in the collaborations between the