

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

Christian militia and Israel that masterminded the Sabra and Shatila massacre of 1982.

This revelation comes as the final blow to a friendship that had already been jeopardized by George's betrayals and schemes to kill Bassam through various ways, including a confessional round of Russian roulette, with three bullets in the five chambers of George's gun. Unlike Michael (Robert De Niro) in Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter*, Hage's De Niro does not survive the game that earned him the "De Niro" nickname. By withholding the details of George's death to the very end of the novel, Hage arguably contends that to survive the Lebanese civil war is indeed to survive a mindless, "three out of five" game of Russian roulette.

Regardless of whether the infamous game was a common practice among the young and furious, it provides Hage with an enduring trope to structure and deliver the lived experiences of the war, the meaning of survival, and the traumatically humanistic task of channeling narrative departures. Herein lies the importance of *De Niro's Game*, not so much in the fictionalization of its historical context as in the historicization of its fictional frame, content, and enormity. The novel subtly brings into intimate collision the competing layers of myth and stereotype, history and reality that simultaneously empty and saturate war-torn Beirut. Hage performs this feat in a prose at its finest, filmic, incisive, emotionally detached but piquant and breathtaking: "I climbed onto George's motorbike and sat behind him, and we drove down the main streets where bombs fell, where Saudi diplomats had once picked up French prostitutes, where ancient Greeks had danced, Romans had invaded, Persians had sharpened their swords, Mamlucks had stolen the villager's food, crusaders had eaten human flesh, and Turks had enslaved my grandmother."

The first two chapters of the novel read like a lyrical song punctuated by the hallucinating refrain of "ten thousand bombs ... kisses ... coffins ... Johnny Walkers" The repetition of the figure of "ten thousand" serves an important narrative and structural purpose. It hammers home two contradicting but coexisting visions of the war experience that the author himself had undergone for nine years in Lebanon: exhaustion and excess. Everything comes in battalions of "ten thousands," only to recede into an uncertainty principle about what is really happening, as if the narrator needed the tautological register to reassure himself that what is happening is *really* happening. After all, perhaps nothing can destroy Beirut, not even ten thousand bombs, and nothing can reconstruct it either, not even ten thousand hurried kisses. This is arguably the author's caution to the amnesiac urban redesigning and sociopolitical reconstruction of Beirut that is still underway.

The third and last chapter is set in Paris, and brings to the fore Hage's literary influences. His protagonist, Bassam, starts reading Camus's *The Stranger*, a novel about a French *pied-noir*, Mersault, who decidedly refuses to grieve the

death of his mother and remorselessly kills a native Arab. But, while the characterological affinities between Camus's protagonist and Hage's cannot be overstressed, it is clear that Bassam is a Mersault in reverse—an "undocumented" Arab with a gun strolling the streets of Paris and ready, if pushed a little, to kill a French man. This chapter is not only a response to Camus but also to the roots of the Arab and African diasporic revolt in France's *banlieux*. Throughout, Hage stages the warring psychic habits that continue to mark Bassam's journey in Paris—an ostensibly "mute" city compared to Beirut. Unconsciously, perhaps, Hage's Bassam reminds of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, or, at least, of his well-wrought adage: silence, exile, and cunning. *De Niro's Game* is a brilliantly crafted novel and Hage is a talented and versatile writer who will certainly raise the threshold of Anglophone Arab-Canadian fiction.

Şeyh Galip

*Beauty and Love*

Trans. and with an introduction and key by Victoria Rowe Holbrook

New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2005. Pp. 216. \$9.95

Reviewed by Dilek Direnç

An established scholar and valuable interpreter in the field of Islamic literature, Victoria Rowe Holbrook continues to contribute to the field with her recent translation into English from the Ottoman Turkish of Şeyh Galip's *Hüsn ü Aşk*, translated as *Beauty and Love*, an Ottoman Turkish romance widely accepted to be the greatest work of Ottoman literature. In an earlier book, *The Unreadable Shores of Love*, published in 1994 and acclaimed as a landmark in Ottoman and Turkish literary studies, Holbrook has already introduced her readers to the genre of the Ottoman mystic romance and analyzed its poetics. While she explored the genre in this earlier study, she paid considerable attention to Galip's *Beauty and Love*, a masterpiece written within this tradition and completed in 1783. Holbrook's deep interest in the genre in general and in Galip's philosophical allegory in particular culminates in Holbrook's brilliant translation of the work. While her impressive bilingual edition of *Hüsn ü Aşk* (also published in 2005 in the Texts and Translations series of MLA) appeals to an academic audience, this volume *Beauty and Love* is geared toward a wider and more general readership. Holbrook's precise and competent poetic translation lets readers discover and enjoy classical Turkish literature and Islamic mysticism.

In his celebrated work *Beauty and Love*, Şeyh Galip, a well-established late-eighteenth-century poet with strong ties to the Mevlevi dervish order, and later in his life the head of a Mevlevi establishment in Istanbul, both makes use and revises certain elements of the Islamic romance tradition. In this allegorical love story, the girl, Beauty, and the boy, Love, figure not only as two human beings deeply in love but also as representatives of God's qualities. All the characters and places in the story are allegories of the divine. In line with the traditions of