

**Matthias Dickert**

The Muslim quest between integration and provocation in contemporary Canadian writing. A close analysis of Rawi Hage's "Cockroach"

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THE MUSLIM QUEST  
BETWEEN INTEGRATION  
AND PROVOCATION IN  
CONTEMPORARY  
CANADIAN WRITING -

A CLOSE ANALYSIS OF  
RAWI HAGE'S  
*COCKROACH* (2008)

Matthias Dickert

For Angela whose laughter and smile  
bring joy into this world

On cockroaches "They (the human being and its mixture of idealism and concupiscence) were not to be seriously any more than a cockroach deserves consideration".

Salman Rushdie. *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* (2015)



## Abstract

This critical essay is about Rawi Hage's novel *Cockroach* (2008) which at first sight is according to the *Daily Telegraph* 'A tale of murder, intrigue and sex from the exuberantly talented Hage'. *Cockroach* yet embodies more than this (negative) one-sided approach.<sup>1</sup> It is also a novel of migration, exile, diaspora and being unwanted because of being a foreigner of migrant background and Hage -like Rushdie-explores the hinterland between fantasy, trauma and realism.

The unnamed narrator of the novel takes the reader by the hand and exposes this immigrant life in a chilly surrounding. Chilly because people are cold and chilly because the climate is cold, too. The fact that Hage as a Lebanese born person uses a Canadian setting as the place of action already hints at two conditions of contemporary Muslim writing in general. The talk is about the autobiographical basis which many novels have and the use of the city as the background of the narration, two presuppositions of Muslim writing since Rushdie and Kureishi.

Like most other Muslim writers Hage depicts his characters as Muslims in a Western world thus throwing light on the literary decision of many contemporary Muslim novelists who closely link their characters with their habitat.

Disposing of a Muslim background Hage and his works can be ranked into the German category of 'Ethische Minderheitenliteratur' a genre which is so common in contemporary Canadian literature.

Thus *Cockroach* can already be considered to be a milestone of contemporary Canadian Muslim writing a fairly new genre in this manifold field of Muslim writing mentioned above.

Rawi Hage was born in Beirut in 1964 and grew up in Lebanon and Cyprus. In 1984 he moved to New York and later to Montreal (1991). His first novel *De Niro's Game* (2006) marked his literary breakthrough and won him the international Impact Dublin Literary Award, an award for the best English-language book published anywhere in the world. This award was later added by the Hugh MacLennan Prize and the McAuslan First Book Prize. Hage himself is trilingual and equally home in Arabic, French and English and his multivocality is present in his fiction along his love for Arabic prose and poetry. The literary categories he moves in belong to immigrant literature,

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<sup>1</sup> In the following *Cockroach* will be used in the short form C.