[Expositions 1.1 (2007) 089–104]
doi:10.1558/expo.v1i1.89
Expositions (print) ISSN 1747-5368
Expositions (online) ISSN 1747-5376

Book Reviews

An Award Heard Around the World? Ismail Kadare and the Inaugural Man Booker International Prize

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Books under review:

Casanova, Pascale. *The World Republic of Letters*. Trans. Malcolm DeBevoise. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, MA, 2005. 440 pp. $35.00 hc. ISBN 0-674-01345-X.

English, James F. *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, MA, 2004. 432 pp. $29.95 hc. ISBN 0-674-01884-2.

Kadare, Ismael. *Agamemnon's Daughter*: *A Novella and Stories*. Trans. David Bellos. Arcade Publishing. New York, 2006. 240 pp. $24.00 hc. ISBN 1-559-70788-7.

Kadare, Ismael. *Broken April*. Ivan R. Dee. Chicago, 1998. 248 pp. $12.95 pb. ISBN 1-561-31065-4.

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The new, London-based biennial Man Booker International Prize, like the Nobel Prize in Literature, is awarded to a living author—a stipulation that excluded betting favorite Saul Bellow—of any nationality, for the global impact of his or her entire body of work. The international

prize is an answer to criticism of the parent award, the annual Booker prize, which is awarded only to citizens of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. Judged by a rotating international jury of three, the prize is open to any fiction writer whose work appears either in English or in "generally available translation," a restriction that eliminated several possible candidates.

On June 2, 2005, the Albanian author Ismail Kadare won the inaugural prize. Kadare, the author of more than thirty books since the early sixties, has been translated into more than forty languages. Kadare himself does not speak English. He writes almost exclusively in Albanian, a structurally rich, independent branch of the Indo-European family spoken by approximately six million people. The vast majority of his audience reads him in translation, typically out of chronological sequence, and with a time lag of years and sometimes decades. Most English-language translators work with authorized French versions, not the Albanian originals.

Kadare's most recent U.S. publications include *Agamemnon's Daughter*: *A Novella and Stories* (2006) and *The Successor* (2005). *The Successor*, written in 2002, is a fictional rendering of the circumstances and aftermath of the murderous or suicidal shot that killed long-time Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha's chosen heir Mehmet Shehu in 1981. The preface to the novel alerts us that "any resemblance between the characters and circumstances of this tale and real people and events is inevitable." *The Successor* does not solve the mystery yet no rumor is left unspoken as Kadare deftly mixes the insider views of family members and coworkers with the contents of foreign espionage dossiers, ambassadors' reports and the mysterious musings of an Icelandic medium.

Albanian confusion about the Successor's death is intertwined with non-Albanian confusion about Albania, highlighting foreign interest in the country whose paranoid leadership progressively isolated it from every bloc and nation in the world. Who lives in Albania? What are Albanians like? Non-Albanians ponder these questions in *The Successor* and in other Kadare novels, often without much insight: "What was known about Albania was mostly obsolete and some of it was distinctly romanticized" (5). *The Successor* offers a smattering of tongue-in-cheek

beginner's introductions to Albania that read like Wikipedia entries. Self-conscious asides, such as "as we say here," pepper the novel, but the pedagogy is self-aware, often funny and strangely hospitable.

As the citizens of Albania read their morning papers, they ponder the ramifications of the Successor's death, wondering "which of the two alternatives—self-inflicted death, or death inflicted by the hand of another—would affect them less harshly" (3). A similar concern haunts the novella *Agamemnon's Daughter*, written ten years before *The Successor*, and smuggled piecemeal to France. The novella is situated in Tirhana at the time when the Successor is promoted, and it delves deep into the private ramifications of political events. It details the emotional plight of the Successor's daughter's first lover, as he realizes that her father's position and promotion will require her to break with him, and make a politically strategic marriage. Mehmet Shehu did not have a daughter, but Enver Hoxha did, and many speculate that Suzana is based on her. She appears in *The Successor* as well, as one of the rotating narrators who contemplate her father's death.

The narrators of *The Successor* patiently explain the details and context of the case. This is necessary in order for the novel to make sense to non-Albanian readers (and even some Albanian speakers living outside of Albania as well). Yet *The Successor's* ambiguous ending hints that this is an impossible enterprise for everyone involved, including those at the epicenter. In a nod to Albania's epic tradition, the dead Successor, speaking from an underworld of shades, is the novel's final narrator. He taunts readers by recalling a missed underworld opportunity to meet with Mao Tse-Tung's equally ill-fated one-time heir Lin Biao: "To him, a man of my own kind, I could have told the story of what happened to me; but no way can I tell you. For unlike the language that serves for us to talk to one another, a language allowing our kind to communicate with yours has not yet been invented on earth, and never will be" (197). Perhaps a bit out of character, the Successor cautions readers not to resuscitate future Successors. "Don't try to work out where we went wrong," he warns (206). By invoking Lin Biao, he suggests that his own story is neither unique nor geographically specific. The Successor is a member of a global clan of assassins; the harrowing

allegory of power is rooted in the Balkans but relevant to all readers.

In *The Successor*, the self-doubting architect who designed the Successor's house poses questions about internal and external evaluation of artistic integrity. The architect, who might die for his floor plans, is spurred to conduct a frank assessment of his own talent and the artistic constraints posed by the dictatorship.

> I was probably one of the few who asked themselves the fateful question: Do I or do I not possess any talent? Was it the age that had turned my hands into clay, or was I so clumsy that I would have vegetated no matter what period I lived in . . . Would I not have exclaimed and lamented in all and any age that I would have been a great artist but for Pharaoh Thutmose blocking my gifts, but for Caligula, but for McCarthy, but for Zhdanov. . . (189)

The architect directs his self-critique at the bad faith implicit in his excuses and lamentations. But can aesthetic evaluation dispense with a look into the circumstances that may have stifled or inhibited creative work? And how can the author's relationship to these circumstances be judged?

Two recent books published by Harvard University Press offer new angles and vocabulary with which to examine both Kadare's writing and the Man Booker International Prize and perhaps answer the architect's questions. Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* (2005) and James English's *The Economy of Prestige* (2005) complement each other and read well in tandem, in part because each sidesteps the overt subject matter of the other—international literary competition for Casanova, and cultural prizes for English. Although neither book mentions Kadare (the prize was awarded following the publication of both books, and both authors miss a great case study), their concerns are both mirrored and complicated in *The Successor* and in Kadare's larger corpus.

In *The Economy of Prestige*, James English notes the astonishing proliferation of prizes in the arts, doubting, with an implied sigh, that "any of the business of culture can be conducted without recourse to them, not even the business of resisting their putative effects" (106). If you tire of laments that Philip Roth has been passed over too many times,

take heart at English's claim that "the most ambitious prizes are more and more obliged to reach beyond national boundaries both for object of esteem and for (other) sources of legitimacy" (261). This is true of judging committees as well, who grant awards legitimacy by providing "symbolic support from extranational sources" (260). Building on Foucault and Bourdieu's conceptual vocabulary for aesthetic judgment, English demonstrates that symbolic capital has gone international but warns that this is not necessarily a gain for writers from smaller countries or literatures insofar as the awards typically favor exiled authors. The "international economy of prestige" is a mixed blessing (262). English reasons that exiled writers are often privileged in the prize game because they straddle worlds and are therefore more palatable to foreign judges who are often exiles themselves. Unlike Casanova, English bemoans the loss of attention to the "symbolic importance of the local," to writers who do not resemble critically acclaimed American or European writers and are included only to the extent that they can be "recontextualized for mainstream consumption" (291, 282). Like Casanova, English points out the strange temporality of consecration. Often, he notes, national recognition paradoxically follows international consecration and thereby implicitly diminishes the importance of "indigenous cultural prestige" (272). Overall, "the recent frenzy of prizes and awards" has led not just to "denationalization," but also to a "more radical *deterritorialization* of prestige, an uncoupling of cultural prizes . . . from particular cities, nations, even clearly defined regions." (282). These prizes reward "global" literature, "a literature whose fields of production and of reception could be mapped—and whose individual works could be valued—only on a world scale" (304). Prizes reach beyond national boundaries, but they are in search of "world literature," a category as much stylistic as geographic. The consecration of this category worsens the very situation the global prizes purport to correct. Although English does not address the important role of translation in the world of international literary prizes, his book is a valuable supplement to prize committee member Azar Nafisi's reflection that the prize itself is ultimately less important than "the debate and controversy it generates" (Nafisi 2005).

In *The World Republic of Letters*, Pascale Casanova calls for literary critics to do more than contextualize writing within national history or evaluate it with purely aesthetic criteria. Although these kinds of literary criticism have been unearthed and reburied for decades, Casanova proposes new reasons to torch the crops. She coins the term "literary temporality" to indicate the temporal history specific to literature and the term "world literary space" to indicate the geography specific to literature. Literature is an international experience for writers as well as readers, she argues, and this experience is more temporal then geographical or political, although it is necessarily influenced by both geography and politics (351). Literary scholars, critics and judges miss the point when they isolate texts from one another and ignore "the totality of texts and literary and aesthetic debates with which a particular work of literature enters into relation and resonance, and which forms the true basis for its singularity, its real originality" (3). The optic of "world literary space" and the temporality specific to it alone can illuminate individual texts and explode tired categories of influence and genius.

In Casanova's account, Paris is the "literary Greenwich meridian," the reference point for this literary temporality. *The World Republic of Letters* describes the way in which Paris has traditionally maintained political and economical autonomy in the literary sphere, with French publishing houses nobly funding foreign translations based on merit, not marketability. Yet Casanova is also attuned to the dangers in the center of consecration. Most relevant to the case of Kadare is her attention to the struggles of writers who work at the literary "periphery." Outsiders, she claims, are much more aware of what success in the center means, as well as the available strategies to obtain it. This power dynamic is often invisible to those who wield literary power even if—like the Parisian publishers—they model themselves as a disinterested court of appeals.

Casanova details how international literary space sprang out of sixteenth-century debates over the merits of Latin and vernacular French for contemporary literature and drama. French became the international vernacular language of conversation and literature, Casanova ar-

gues, for non-coercive reasons; rather, "the exceptional concentration of literary resources that occurred in Paris over the course of several centuries gradually led to its recognition as the center of the literary world" (68, 47). Paris reinforced its literary capital in the form of publications, translations and prizes. Other countries sought to establish rival centers of consecration but failed because their methods were nationalistic and coercive. Quick on the heels of the French, German-language writers, inspired by Johann Gottfried Herder's eighteenth-century writing, sought cultural legitimacy by revisiting (or creating) national folk traditions. In Casanova's account, this attempt to establish national literary independence led to anachronism and nationalistic stagnation, precisely because it favored nationalistic appropriation over a universal approach. The ends spoiled the means as German-language writers unwisely battled the invincible power of literary Paris, world republic of letters.

Like English, Casanova builds on Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of consecration and symbolic capital, proposing that we investigate the cases of peripheral writers in view of two questions: Where does the writer in question stand in relation to his native literary space? What is the place of this native literary space on the larger map of world literature? (41). She has questions for readers from the center as well. How do critics from the centers of the literary world—Paris, as well as other countries in which literature is relatively free from political restraints and economic woes—perceive writing from the periphery? Does the very criterion of universality that their central position presumably encourages critics to adopt, also blind them to the specificity of the work in question or, conversely, push them to identify and privilege perceived differences?

Born and raised in a small and isolated country, Kadare clearly stands in a difficult relationship to world literary space. When reading Kadare, it quickly becomes clear that he is acutely aware of the politics of literary recognition and threads this knowledge throughout his literary corpus. Kadare's 1997 novel *The File on H.* explicitly foregrounds the perils involved in identifying cultural authority and symbolic capital. In *The File on H.*, two Harvard-educated Irish-American scholars learn

Albanian to conduct research into the contemporary oral narratives that they believe will provide insight into Homeric composition. The novel is based on a real series of visits by Harvard classicist Milman Parry and his doctoral student, Albert Lord, to the Balkans to study the oral epic tradition. Parry and Lord recorded and analyzed oral epics in order to gain insight into the structure and delivery of the Homeric epics. In 1979, a fortuitous meeting occurred between Lord and Kadare in Ankara, Turkey. Kadare completed *The File on H.* the following year.

Arriving in Albania in the 1930s, the Homeric scholars ignore the present day country they encounter. The Albanians they meet fathom neither the foreigners' dogged search for illiteracy nor their antiquated notions about Albania; even the scholars' Albanian is hopelessly outdated. The local soap merchant marvels that the duo has journeyed, "all the way to the end of the world to stay in a pigsty of an inn and try to find out about a blind guy who lived a million years ago!" (33). When the scholars land in a remote town in search of traces of the bard, a gypsy readies himself to greet them with "an impressively long sequence of farts." The local provincial governor mistakes them for spies, thereby launching an elaborate investigation that studies the visitors as carefully as the visitors study Albania. The ministry of the interior hopes to gather enough damning evidence to blackmail the scholars into writing a biography of the king.

The scholars discover traces of Homer in modern Albania, but not in any foreseeable fashion. They neither see nor hear the obvious; one scholar literally follows Homer into blindness. Ultimately, it is the lonely governor's wife who best understands the mutual misperceptions and situational farce, and prepares herself to "suffer the changes that were needed to make her just as receptive to the reality of the Irishmen as she had been to her imagination of them" (22).

The practice of resuscitating folk traditions is modified and mocked in *The File on H.* as Albanians, eager to modernize, overlook the very Illyrian traditions that would interest those abroad. The push to discover national folk traditions and establish literary history and linguistic heritage comes from without, in the figure of foreign scholars. Yet

the contests over antiquity, initiated by foreigners interested in professional gain, overshadow the potential consequences of their research, including the recrudescence of ethnic strife. The scholars bank on the immunity of scholarship, yet find themselves caught inside a bloodier contest. A disturbing parallel appears in the story "The Blinding Order," from *Agamemnon's Daughter*. In that story an Austrian consul remarks, in a brutally callous identification of the proverbial silver lining, that the Ottoman practice of blinding has led Albanians to rediscover their *lahutas* and give birth to a "'flowering of oral poetry'" (198). In both cases, culture hunters ignore human costs.

On the boat that takes them away from Albania, the scholars read a poem about themselves in an Albanian newspaper. The oral epics thus demonstrate variations that include accounts of their own arrival and strange behavior, much like the "The Song of Milman Parry," allegedly penned by a Croat bard. These recitations indicate that the past is not static, that legends and rituals still have functional significance. It is precisely by means of such misunderstandings that Kadare subtly affirms the richness of the Albanian epic tradition, foregrounds its contested legacy and points out the widespread misunderstanding of its function, transmission and significance.

In the press release for the award, John Carey, chair of the judging committee for the Man Booker International Prize, described Kadare as "a universal writer in a tradition of storytelling that goes back to Homer" (Man Booker Prize 2005). Yet the epic and classical traditions that Kadare channels in his novels are often filtered through what Casanova calls "centers of consecration." The heart-broken journalist in the story "Agamemnon's Daughter," as the title suggests, likens his girlfriend's sacrifice to Agamemnon's murder of Iphigenia at the beginning of the Trojan War. Iphigenia's death, which the narrator has just been reading about in Robert Graves, fits the narrator's situation better than the Albanian folk legend that first comes to his mind. The reference to Robert Graves is as much an exposition of the complicated and non-linear nature of Kadare's relationship with classical literature as it is a commentary on censorship during the Hoxha years.

Set in the 1920s, *Broken April* (New Amsterdam Books 1990), de-

tails a bourgeois Tirhana couple's honeymoon to the mountains of the northern plateau (labeled "the accursed mountains") to holiday amongst highlanders who still observe the *Kanun*, the thousand year old set of laws once dominant in the entire region. The couple's cultural tourism in the "other Albania," the project of the unsuspecting journalist husband, turns sinister when the young wife locks eyes with Gjorj, a young highlander bearing the black ribbon that identifies the target in a blood feud. The honeymoon quickly evolves into a frenzied—yet unspoken—search for the ill-fated young man. The mutual fascination of bride and highlander ends in her madness and his death, leaving April "broken."

Broken April presents an Albania with its own center and mysterious and misunderstood periphery; the tensions between modernity and tradition are tensions within the country itself. Critics of Kadare who accuse non-Albanian Kadare fans of cultural tourism overlook Kadare's own commentary on the phenomenon. High in the hills of the northern plateau, the debt manager of the blood feuds keeps a library of books and articles about the *kanun* by outsiders. *The File on H.* and *Broken April* remind us that the people we stare at also look back, some with reverence and desire, some with knowledge and some with revulsion. Kadare himself has spent little time in the northern plateau—a couple of weeks as a student in the 1950s and a couple more as a journalist in the 1960s. His geographical and cultural sources are themselves partially literary, partially imagined. Kadare's Albania—"Kadaria" for enthusiasts—is colder than the actual Adriatic country and often shrouded in a geographically incorrect fog.

The tension between center and periphery resurfaces again in *Spring Flowers, Spring Frost* (2000). Set in the post-Communist era, the narrator watches a group of youngsters cruelly unearth a hibernating snake. Later the narrator watches the similarly unearthed *Kanun* devour his girlfriend's family and end their relationship as some families in the small town begin to settle age-old blood debts from the pre-Communist era. Alongside new curiosities like bank heists and shaved armpits, long-dead attachments fill the post-communist void. On one side beckons tradition, on the other, the ambiguous call of Europe.

Young Albanian men disappear at the vengeful hands of long-forgotten enemies just as they declare themselves dead to facilitate emigration. Ghosts generate ghosts.

Throughout *The World Republic of Letters*, Casanova both criticizes and affirms literary norms, occasionally using the term "anachronism" to designate writing that differs from the reigning style at the center of consecration. In *The World Republic of Letters* she belittles realism as a nationalistic practice, a quaint but conservative and retrograde technique to which "deprived writers" are particularly, but not exclusively, prone. She labels realist techniques "commonplace" and "ordinary," but tempers her criticism with an optimistic outlook: "The relative backwardness and poverty of such regions are not permanent conditions," she concedes; "not all writers on the periphery are inevitably 'condemned' to backwardness, any more than writers from the center are necessarily modern" (101).

Casanova attributes revolutionary potential to *The World Republic of Letters*, which she offers as a corrective to the inequities of literary recognition, a "critical weapon in the service of all deprived and dominated writers on the periphery of the literary world" (354–355). She identifies stylistic and thematic similarities between writers from different countries and different historical periods, arguing that the strategies of peripheral writers are both limited and shared. These impressively wide-ranging comparisons, so essential to her argument, are seductive but thin; due to the encyclopedic scope of her work, authorial statements and plot summaries are often substituted for close readings.

Despite her anti-elitist claims, Casanova frames success in terms of official acknowledgment, financial gain and sales. She cedes judgment of universal worth to prize-giving institutions, in particular the Nobel Prize Committee, whose yearly literature award she affirms as an undisputed confirmation of literary merit: "Today writers everywhere are agreed in recognizing it as the highest honor of the world of letters. Yet there is no better measure of the unification of the international literary field than the effectively universal respect commanded by this prize" (147). Casanova devotes less analysis to the function and meaning of prizes or the culture of awards that, English notes, make the obituaries

of notable writers resemble the sports page. English has done much to dispel the misperception that these large-scale awards are greeted without cynicism, even by the recipients themselves; "Historically, it is difficult to find anyone of any stature in the world of arts and letters who speaks with unalloyed respect for prizes" (187). It is precisely this "scandalous currency" that keeps the culture of prizes afloat; even if people don't think recipients are worthy of prizes, they believe they *should* be (196).

Casanova often complicates her compulsory nods to anti-nationalism. For instance, she suggests (perhaps tongue-in-cheek?) that both Faulkner and Hemingway should be included on the list of French Nobel laureates because of the early respect for their work in France. What would she make of English's claim in *The Economy of Prestige* that prizes act in the interest of prizes, not of artists? English explores the famous case of Tolstoy, who lost the Nobel Prize to the French poet René F.A. Sully-Prudhomme. He details how the Stockholm committee attempted to save face by making sure that they never awarded him one and argues that this apparent perversity served only to enhance the prize's prestige, by confirming the Nobel committee's status as a frustrating, yet autonomous and mysterious entity, "possessed of special power, special capacity to make distinctions where others cannot" (147).

Both English and Casanova discuss the case of the Nigerian Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka. The choice of the experimentalist, English-language writer Wole Soyinka for the 1986 Nobel Prize helps Casanova's theory about the boons of consecration from the center. Yet, English points out, the prize diminished his domestic legitimacy, particularly among other Nigerian writers: "To embrace the award, to view it as a great honor, was, in this view, a way of rejecting indigenous and vernacular culture in favor of global European hegemony" (299). Casanova contrasts Soyinka with fellow Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, whom she dubs a "national writer" and situates at a distance from literary mean time, in association with which the "great heroes of literature invariably emerge" (109). Because Achebe's work revisits national traditions, Casanova takes him, like many other national writers, to

task for a variety of breaches of literary conduct, including "essentializing differences, reproducing outmoded models, and nationalizing and commercializing literary life" (109).

A moment in literary history that could problematize Casanova's dichotomy between nationalist and universal writers is Conrad's favorable reception in interwar France—reception granted, to a large extent, due to the work of André Gide. The *Nouvelle Revue française* coterie who translated and reviewed Conrad's work often saw him as a French writer lurking beneath the English language. Insolvent and canny about cash, Conrad certainly benefited from the prestige and distinction that accompanied his formal introduction in France. But to what extent did he take aesthetic direction from Paris? Conrad was aggrieved that his earlier sea-oriented works won favor and not the later intrigues which he deemed superior. He loathed the designation of maritime writer as much as Kadare appears to loathe being called an "historical writer." Casanova does blame translators for the ethnocentrism that so often characterizes writing published in the center. But did Conrad write in English, rather than Polish (his mother tongue) or French (his second language) because of international pressure? Or, are we to take him at his own word and believe, as he claimed, that the genius of the English language made him write, that if he hadn't heard English (which he first heard as an adult), he would not have written a word? Casanova typically accepts writers' own assessment of their work and choices, but would she accept Conrad's claim of disinterested aesthetic inspiration and artistic autonomy?

Just months before awarding the inaugural Man Booker International Prize, the committee announced a related prize of £15,000 for the English-language translator of the award winner's choice. The prize indicates a watershed moment in the history of literary awards by recognizing the significance of traditionally invisible translators. The award was created after the judges became aware, during the preliminary stages of their work, of the crucial role of translation. At the award's ceremony, John Carey called for British publishers to support translation, opining that translators do more than politicians to ease the world's tensions.

Kadare chose Princeton professor David Bellos, who has translated seven of Kadare's novels from the French thus far. Kadare knows no English and Bellos just the rudiments of Albanian, yet both are optimistic about the enterprise of translation. Kadare has repeatedly expressed a preference for these double translations that bypass the frequently expurgated and mutilated Albanian originals in favor of the French editions revised and approved by Kadare himself. It seems quite plausible that Kadare is also thankful for Bellos' recognition that he is not, in Bellos' own words, "in any ordinary sense, a contemporary writer," or, as English puts it, "repackaged" (292). Bellos also honors the complex intertexuality of Kadare's prose, bringing out its rich allusions to Dante, Kafka and Shakespeare, among others.

Prizes are driven by politics and awarded for heroic personal behavior, sometimes even for marginality. The current Günter Grass controversy demonstrates the extent to which literary prizes are widely perceived as awards for comportment. Writers from the Balkans are particularly subject to scrutiny; writers from that region are expected to be more than writers. At times, consecration is not, in the final count, quite the kind of literary recognition a writer hopes for. Just as some of Kadare's novels hint that Albania and Albanians fascinate the outside world precisely because of their tragic past, the multifaceted nature of approbation is acknowledged even in his initial public response to winning the prize. In the response, quoted on the Man Booker website, Kadare expresses hope that that the prize will open the doors for other kinds of literary capital and "other kinds of achievement" ("Albanian Novelist Wins"). He voices a call for understanding: "My firm hope is that the European and world opinion may henceforth realize that this region, to which my country, Albania, belongs, can also give rise to other kinds of news and be the home of other kinds of achievement, in the field of the arts, literature and civilization."

The awarding of the Man Booker International Prize has entailed some criticism of Kadare's perceived complicity with the Hoxha regime. David Bellos has pointed out that Kadare was the only writer on the award's shortlist to be singled out for criticism from his own countrymen on the International Man Booker website. Yet Kadare's writ-

ings incorporate this eventuality as well and, in many ways, turn the spotlight back on his readers. The dream interpreters in Kadare's novel *The Palace of Dreams* (1998) recognize the self-reflectivity of interpretation. Set in nineteenth-century Constantinople, Mark-Alem Quprili, a young man of Albanian heritage, is selected to join a group who sorts and shifts through the dreams of dreamers from the far reaches of the Ottoman Empire, in order to detect conspiracy and dissent. The titular palace of dreams, the Tabir Sarrail, is an odd blend of an imaginary Ottoman institution and the Communist Central Committee building of Tirhana. It bears suspicious resemblance to the workings of a literary prize committee; one group registers the countless dreams, another group sifts out the important ones, yet another reads the important ones closely and a select few judges them. Selection is a mysterious and dangerous process; those who control the dreams also possess "the keys of the State" (124). A sinister process is at work that will make interpretation into an act of repression and violence for which the selected dreamer receives imprisonment and death, not £60,000.

Kadare's acceptance speech at the award's ceremony in Scotland affirms his citizenship in "another realm, the realm of literature." Like the architect in *The Successor*, he acknowledges the grim challenges of writing under a "ghastly regime," but he firmly situates himself as an inheritor of the "great writers," detailing his early fascination with Homer, Shakespeare, Dante and Kafka, all of whom "became his true masters." Towards the end of his speech he recalls the circuitous route his writing took to be read aloud by the jury.

> . . . one day, passing through the night of dictatorship, our prison bread ended up by accident on your table. In your free cities—Paris, London, New York, Madrid, Vienna, Rome. . .—you picked up the prison loaf and inspected it with curiosity. You took a bit and found it good, and reckoned it was just as edible by you who live in the free world.

Mixed in with this deep gratitude is an implicit injunction to his foreign readers not to condescend. Kadare came to read and write in a difficult and circuitous manner, but it seems unlikely that he would accept Casanova's thesis that each writer is situated "not spatially but

temporally," or her suggestion that we read according to this schema and concentrate on "inequality" (351). Kadare draws attention to the horrific circumstances under which he wrote in "the back end of a tiny country crushed under the heel of Communism." But the "miracle of Biblical proportions" that he notes is that the "prison loaf" does not taste like prison loaf. Let's take him at his word.

English and Casanova both note how "consecrating" nations assimilate foreign works to their own aesthetic preferences, political agendas and literary categories. Economic realities inform the literary temporality Casanova outlines, as well as the system of prestige explored by English. Literary awards clearly honor more than merit. Yet Kadare does not "yield," as Casanova suggests dominated writers must; his writing offers very specific insights into questions about the forms that "modernity" takes and their perceived status as a goal (156).

Kadare's win was not heard loudly in the United States, despite the colorful prize stickers that now adorn his books. The award will secure him neither fiscal gains nor media frenzy. But translations of his work will continue, and those of us bound to English are lucky for that. His consecration is our gain. And James English's observation that prizes breed prizes has been confirmed: The Man Booker Group has just introduced a yearly Man Asian Literary Prize.

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Man Booker International Prize

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