

Book Reviews

Casanova, Pascale. *The World Republic of Letters*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Pr., 2004. 420p. alk. paper, \$35 (ISBN: 067401345X). LC: 2004-54359.

In geopolitical and economic matters, competition—and even antagonism—between nations is generally seen as an inevitable part of life. By contrast, the world of letters is often thought of as harmonious and equitable: a meritocracy that, by virtue of the universal and timeless qualities of great literature, transcends national borders. The awarding of the Nobel Prize for Literature to writers of diverse ethnic and national backgrounds in recent years (V. S. Naipaul, Gao Xingjian, and Kenzaburo Oe, to name a few) would seem to confirm this idea of the literary world as a genuinely international space in which writers of excellence receive the acclaim due to them. Pascale Casanova's *World Republic of Letters* (first published in French in 1999 as *Le république mondiale des lettres*) takes issue with this notion of a literary world without borders.

Casanova's view of literature is influenced by the mode of historical study known as "world systems analysis," which seeks to explain the emergence of the modern capitalist order since the sixteenth century by conceptualizing the world as a global unit composed of a core of powerful, wealthy nations and a periphery of weak, dominated nations, whose relationship to each other is predicated on exploitation and radical inequality. The literary world is divided into a "center" of nations with rich and prestigious literatures and a "periphery" of countries that for various reasons, among them, colonialism and other forms of political domination, have yet to emerge as players on the world stage. Due to its rich literary heritage, political progressivism, and hospitality to foreign writers, Paris is the center of the literary world par excellence (although Casanova

admits that London and New York have been growing in importance since the 1960s).

Casanova describes Paris as a magnet for writers seeking to make a literary reputation. It is the city in which writers whose genius is not immediately recognized in their own countries find an audience (Faulkner and Joyce in particular); a writer celebrated in Paris becomes part of the pantheon of universal writers. To be translated into French is to gain access to a world audience of educated readers. Paris has a unique power to legislate on literary matters and acts as a Greenwich Meridian of literary time in defining what is modern through the writings of its avant-garde.

The dominance of the centers of literary power imposes a set of choices on writers from spaces on the periphery. They are faced with either assimilation (and for Casanova, V. S. Naipaul, on account of his literary traditionalism and alignment with British conservative political values, is the arch-assimilationist) or aggressive differentiation, a strategy employed by writers from emerging literary spaces who insist on the distinctiveness of their branch of literature (e.g., Magical Realism in Latin America, which departs from the norms of Spanish literature in a radical manner). Writers whose first language is not one spoken at the center face the additional challenge of becoming "translated men" for whom linguistic compromise is a condition of reception in the wider world. Casanova's account of the mechanics of the process of literary translation is extremely detailed and illuminates aspects of the careers of writers such as Ibsen, Strindberg, and Nabokov that are often overlooked in traditional literary history.

The World Republic of Letters is undoubtedly a virtuoso work; Casanova



is fluent in discussion of literature on several continents and the range of her references is often astonishing. However, the work has some flaws, particularly from the perspective of an Anglophone reader who may be more accustomed to thinking of New York and London, and to a lesser extent Paris, as the centers of the literary world. Some English-language authors one would expect to figure in Casanova's account are barely mentioned (e.g., Joseph Conrad, who seems a paradigmatic figure of the artist from the margins of Europe struggling with choices as basic as whether to write in English or French). Another conspicuous absence from Casanova's work is any mention of the work of scholars engaged in projects similar to her own, such as Franco Moretti's *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez* (Verso 1996) and *Atlas of the European Novel* (Verso 1998).

There are also some issues with the premises and intellectual framework of Casanova's project. Her presupposition that the world of literature is a global unit would seem to be at odds with experience and reality, which would suggest a configuration more like a Venn diagram, in which the various literatures of the world overlap in places, with a central grouping of writers translated into virtually all languages, but with most belonging to semiautonomous regional and linguistic groups. The implication of Casanova's account is that the definition of success for a writer, from whatever part of the world, is acceptance by the Western literary establishment, when clearly there are forms of international success that do not involve the imprimatur of Paris (i.e., literary texts with wide distribution in non-Western languages that, for whatever reason, do not translate well or conform to the norms of Europe).

The World Republic of Letters has already received a considerable amount of attention in the form of reviews and was even the occasion for a book-length collection of essays edited by Christopher Prendergast and Benedict Anderson, *De-*

bating World Literature (Verso 2004). One expects that it is likely to become required reading for graduate students in literary studies now that it is available in English translation. Its interest for research and academic librarians probably would have been greater if, instead of thinking about the ways in which politics and economics can supply us with metaphors for thinking about rivalries in the world of letters, more attention had been devoted to the actual mechanics of book financing, printing, and distribution (e.g., the difficulties faced by writers from countries without a developed publishing industry in finding an overseas publisher) and their effect on literary production. — *David Mulrooney, Harvard University.*

Crowley, Bill. *Spanning the Theory-Practice Divide in Library & Information Science.* Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 2005. 239p. alk. paper, \$45 (ISBN 0810851652). LC 2004-14050.

Bill Crowley addresses a genuine and complex concern in the discipline and the profession. In describing how little of the theory developed and tested by teaching faculty is viewed as relevant or useful by practitioners, Crowley makes the important argument that "university faculty members and nonacademic professionals ... exist within divergent subcultures." Though they support similar professional principles and societal goals, these individuals participate in two relatively distinct organizational cultures with varying requirements. On the one hand, the author focuses on theory development and research done by teaching faculty and, on the other, on the downside of the higher education paradigm that fosters research and theory development, which lacks direct applicability to practice.

Expanding the discussion to include ways in which practitioners can be involved in theory development, practice-based research done by those working in information organizations, and the way in which faculty members, including those who serve as consultants, can foster the