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Ismail Kadare , David Bellos (Translator)

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*From behind the closed door, the man shouts, 'Be on your way - you have no business here!'
'Open up, I am the messenger of Death'.*

As spring arrives in the Albanian mountain town of B, some strange things are emerging in the thaw. Bank robbers strike the National Bank. Old terrors are dredged up from the shipwreck of history. And ultra-explosive state secrets are threatening to flood the entire nation. Mark, an artist, finds the peaceful rhythms of his life turned upside down by ancient love and modern barbarism and by the particular brutality of a country surprised and divided by its new freedom.

Spring Flowers, Spring Frost Details

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From Reader Review Spring Flowers, Spring Frost for online ebook

Lori says

I read an English translation. I am sure that this is a good book... but I think there is a lot lost in translation which kind of ruins it.

Karen says

3.5 stars really. This is the third book I have read by Kadare, and although this isn't my favorite by him, I did enjoy it.

Communism has left Albania and the Albanians are trying to figure out how to live their lives. Old state secrets, Albanian legends and a clandestine love affair are all apart of this novel. I especially enjoyed the legends, and kind of wished that the book had centered around legends.

Kes says

This is a book about a passive character (Mark) in a society torn by present reality and past traditions. It feels extremely atmospheric - the character is the lens through which we see Tirana. And what we see is an endless circle of repercussions and suspicions (represented by the discussion of the *kanun* coming back and the *Book of the Blood* possibly being found again), and a society full of tension because of that.

I also liked how truth is seemingly mutable:

In the early days of the new era, people no longer gave a penny for official opinion, as they became free, from one day to the next, to adopt the opposite point of view. But to their great surprise, no significant change occurred. As in the past, once they got home from work, they would hear about events in such a mangled way that the stories were often completely distorted. Gradually, it became clear that, as for many other things, such distortions of the truth had nothing to do with politics. Apparently, for reasons still not understood, rumor, vivified over the weekend by the smells of good food and Grandmas burps, had a hard time when it encountered the atmosphere of the office, the clacking of typewriters, the secretaries' lipstick, and, last but not least, the stern gaze of the boss.

Even if you could never say that the office had won out completely (as soon people got home, they had to negotiate the mule-like persistence of grandmas, often reinforced by children just back from school), even if, in this constant ebb and flow of home and office, office and home, rumor was never quite exempt from further shaping before it settled down into its definitive form, the first major impact on it, what might be called "the Monday spin," was always the principal determining factor.

And so the mutability of truth swims throughout this novel. The counterchapters take a story about a bride marrying a snake; from that story, it posits several possible truths. Mark ostensibly leads leads a life as an

artist, however, he has hallucinatory dreams of being a policeman.

At the same time, I have to say Kadare's obsession with sex gets quite off-putting. Perhaps there's a deeper meaning to that, but I don't care to explore it.

Alta says

Mythical and folktale motives make the skeleton around which *Spring Flowers, Spring Frost*, written between 1998 and 2000 in Tirana and Paris, is constructed. With a formal structure similar to that of *Chronicle in Stone*, this post-Communist novel alternates a regular chapter whose events take place nowadays with a "counter-chapter" narrating a fairytale or a myth. Thus, the snake found by a group of people in the first chapter reappears in "counter chapter one" in the tale of a girl married to a snake that turns out to be a man under a spell (in the Romanian version of the story the snake is a pig). The animal slips out of his skin at night and puts it back on the morning. Wanting to keep her husband in his human form, one night the girl throws his skin in the fire, and her husband disappears.

The contemporary story and the folktale are variations on the same theme, and at times they intersect. The result is a contemporary setting and characters anchored in both a mythical, ahistorical past, and a present full of references to the history of the Balkans. This double anchoring is probably what gives Kadare's stories their enduring power because it infuses them with a truth that transcends the present, while illuminating it.

The main theme of *Spring Flowers* is that of the Code of Laws and of the Secret Archives. In fact, we are dealing here with two aspects of a single theme, one referring to the old Albanian Code of Laws or the *Kanun*, and the other, to the Communist Secret Archives, but they constantly intersect, to the point that the truth about the one seems to hide (or to reveal) the truth about the other. The *Kanun* or the *Book of the Blood* is a book where the "debts" of each family are inscribed, according to the ancient *lex talionis* or "an eye for an eye:" "who redeemed the blood, and who still has to do some redeeming, who still has a blood debt and who hasn't" (76). The ambiguity between the ancient code based on the law of the blood and the modern secret archives is deliberate, as if the crimes and the blood staining the pages of the Communist archives were but a new version of the same primitive institution of the blood debt.

Lavinia says

So, first of all I'm happy to report that Romanians have a very good translation of the book, thanks to Marius Dobrescu. I understand the situation is not so good for the English version, which is translated from French, which is translated from Albanian. huh!

People say that in order to like this book you need a bit of patience. Actually I was hooked. Not from the first chapter, that's true, but from the second, which is actually a story that combines magical realism with folklore. The book was likable but it ended too soon, I had the feeling I.K. could have gone into depth with the story, the characters, the *kanun*.

I was absolutely fascinated (and started googling right away) about *kanun*, the customary set of laws Albanians had for hundred of years and which was revived after the fall of the communist regime. As I read, Kadare often discusses this subject in his books, so I'm tempted to try something else really soon.

For those interested, here's a link to the Romanian translator's postface, which also explains a bit *the kanun* and *gjakmarrja* (blood feud): <http://atelier.liternet.ro/articol.ph...>

Jose Carlos says

Frías flores de marzo es un texto difícil, al lector le cuesta ir entrando en él. Algunos críticos lo han relacionado, tal vez por su complejidad, con ciertas fases de Spiritus, pero esta novela se aleja en algunos aspectos de aquello, y aporta otros recursos no exentos de riesgo y, en algunos casos, quizás un riesgo que no ha resultado. De ahí, que sea una de las obras que menos me transmite de su autor, y que resulta difícil desentrañarla, con una lectura como atascada en la que Kadaré no termina de fluir como es habitual en otras novelas.

Dentro de un texto que en muchas ocasiones parece descentrado y con problemas de manantío, sin embargo, se plantean algunas cuestiones que, aunque apuntadas en las anteriores obras de su autor, no se habían abordado de una forma tan directa como para resultar el meollo de una novela: el comunismo ha caído y una nueva Albania se presenta al mundo. Esta quiebra del régimen de Hoxha permite la ocasión de modernizarse, pero con la libertad reaparecen anteriores tradiciones, acogotadas por el comunismo, que son todo lo contrario al sinónimo de la modernidad.

Y si algo ha estado sojuzgado por el régimen, eso ha sido el derecho albanés secular, su código de sangre conocido como kanun. La deuda y la venganza de sangre son instituciones retrogradadas pero, prohibidas durante decenas de años, aparecen tras la quiebra comunista como un signo de modernización, de liberación. Lo viejo, así, momentáneamente se hace nuevo, en una paradoja histórica, y el país anteriormente oprimido y ahora libre, entra en conflicto, sin llegar a entender que señales proporcionan la modernidad y cuales significan el gran atraso.

De esa manera, en Frías flores de marzo se refieren diferentes comportamientos que arrastran de la mano la idea de modernidad para el albanés desencadenado. Una de ellas, que se repite asiduamente e impregna el texto con reflexiones recurrentes, es el atraco a un banco, un suceso impensable de haber sido cometido durante todo el periodo comunista, pero un hecho común y a diario en el mundo occidental, en el mundo libre. En Albania ya se atracan los bancos... al estilo de las películas; Albania ha entrado con los atracos (y con la inseguridad ciudadana) en la modernidad de Occidente y del capitalismo.

La inseguridad ciudadana, o el deseo de mayor seguridad, es otro síntoma bien curioso. La supuesta inviolabilidad de domicilio, desde luego, no estaba muy garantizada durante el reinado de la Sigurimi. Sin embargo, el temor a que irrumpieran los servicios policiales en la casa y en mitad de la noche para efectuar una detención era el miedo tipo del albanés. Ahora, con la caída del sistema y la desaparición tutelar del Estado, las viviendas están seguras ante la patada en la puerta de la represión policial y política, pero expuestas a los robos y a los criminales comunes.

El protagonista de la novela, el pintor Mark Gurabardhi, pronto instala nuevas cerraduras y puertas anti-atraco en su estudio. Abraza, así, un pedacito de occidentalización que viene de la mano del pánico, de la angustia para salvaguardar la propiedad privada, de la toma de conciencia de poseer pertenencias potencialmente arrebatables por delincuentes comunes y no en nombre del socialismo, del Estado o del bien común.

Una occidentalización que también llega a las costumbres sexuales. En ese sentido será la amante de Mark quién entienda de diferentes formas de modernizar los comportamientos en la cama (el pubis depilado, determinadas prácticas europeizantes). Son tiempos modernos, que entran en tensión con las costumbres

desarrolladas por el anterior régimen comunista y colisionan con la recuperación de las tradiciones milenarias y arraigadas que resurgen con fuerza.

En mitad de este batido de modernidad, Kadaré elige una estructura y un texto que también parece presentar idénticas tensiones entre clasicismo e innovación. A los capítulos corrientes se les oponen lo que denomina contracapítulos, que vienen a ser fabulaciones o reflexiones míticas ancladas en historias clásicas, y que sacan al lector de la narración de la historia principal, que es el devenir de Mark Gurabardhi.

Estos contracapítulos son interludios oníricos que recurren a la mitología griega y latina, una tradición que resulta un elemento siempre tan significativo en la novelística de Kadaré, presentando así un contrapunto a la perspectiva que de la historia y de Albania, y de los momentos actuales en los que se desarrolla la acción, posee Mark.

De esta forma, el primer contracapítulo, amalgama varias cuestiones en diferentes planos literarios. Por un lado hay cierto eco del Kafka de *La transformación* y de *El proceso*, por otro late una corriente que recuerda a *Las metamorfosis* de Ovidio, y por último convoca a los mitos y las leyendas fantásticas del romanticismo alemán, como la *Ondina de Fouqué*, por ejemplo. El contracapítulo primero narra la boda y la noche de bodas de una mujer que, castigada sin saber muy bien qué delito ha cometido (al estilo de Josef K.) y con la permisividad de la familia, se enlaza con una serpiente.

El contracapítulo segundo se centra en el denominado “funcionario de la muerte” y en la historia de Tántalo, que ha robado la inmortalidad y, también, sobre Prometeo y el hurto del fuego... interpretado como una enorme conjura política en donde Zeus aparece como el Gran Tirano –algo que Kadaré ya había manifestado en su ensayo sobre *Esquilo-*, recurriendo el autor al motivo denominado como Gran Estratagema, pilar fundamental de sus novelas “políticas”.

El resto de los contracapítulos continúan con su función onírica, casi surrealista, de ofrecer un contrapunto a la historia narrada. La toma de declaración al iceberg que hundió el Titanic como si fuera un criminal político, el descenso a unos infiernos circulares (Dante siempre presente en la novelística de Kadaré) a la búsqueda de unos expedientes secretos que llevan, incluso, a los dirigentes socialistas y al sucesor del Gran Líder a adentrarse en cavernas en pos de un misterioso archivo secreto que contiene documentos comprometedores...

Estos capítulos a contrapelo de la narración van iluminando la trama, a medida que el lector se va haciendo con un texto incómodo, en una lucha que Kadaré plantea, en este libro, con sus receptores que son, quizás, descifradores de todos esos mensajes ocultos que se concatenan mediante la imagería habitual kadariana, tal vez retorcida o algo más desquiciada que de costumbre, hasta acariciar unas gotas de surrealismo.

En ese sentido, Kadaré apunta sin llegar a cristalizar, una innovación bien moderna en *Frías flores de marzo*, y es la de articular la novela en diferentes planos paralelos, con realidades diferentes que cohabitan, acercándose a lo que se conoce como novela cuántica. El protagonista, Mark, arrastra la culpa de haber decepcionado a su padre, que siempre quiso que fuera oficial de policía en lugar de pintor.

De esa manera, en varias ocasiones la trama se desvía a un plano en el que Mark es policía y se fija en sus actuaciones, para después retomar la “otra” línea narrativa de la presunta “realidad” del pintor. Se nos presentan dos mundos en los que suceden acciones distintas, salpicadas por interludios oníricos que albergan saltos en el tiempo, quiebras y aceleraciones, como si la novela se hubiera desintegrado en partículas, y los trocitos los hubiera vuelto a montar el autor, desdeñando la linealidad, la coherencia temporal y la pura lógica narrativa.

La tensión entre lo antiguo y lo moderno, con la estructura narrativa elegida por Kadaré, también refleja esa tensión que vehiculiza la novela y, como ocurre en el texto, queda sin resolver, principal cuestión que

presenta Frías flores de marzo, la del avance dificultoso hacia la nada, hacia la irresolución, hacia el complejo edípico y de culpa que lo obstaculiza todo.

El crimen de Estado, la degradación moral que ha impuesto durante décadas el régimen comunista de Hoxha, horadó tan hondo la conciencia de las gentes que obstaculiza cualquier avance. El pánico ante la nueva situación se resuelve con un salto al pasado, al momento anterior a Hoxha, con la recuperación de las tradiciones míticas, bárbaras, que proporcionan seguridad.

Así, se realiza un descubrimiento; Mark Gurabardhi, el pintor, realiza ese descubrimiento, casi tan epifánico como devastador: las tradiciones bárbaras siempre han permanecido, el régimen de Hoxha era un régimen medieval y sanguinario, y los nuevos aires de la Europa occidental y su sociedad de libre consumo, no dejan de ser lo mismo.

El avance, el progreso, la modernización, no es más que una mentira. Un imposible. Y Mark no puede más que sentir deseos de romper a llorar al término de la novela.

Becky says

I really enjoyed Spring Flowers, Spring Frost, until the final chapter. Until then it was a great combination of a day to day love story, ancient mythology, and a brand new society trying to find it's way after the end of an oppressive regime. The action takes place in a small town in Albania, unnamed in the old initialled style. Communism has departed, and the town must decide whether to globalise or revert to old traditions, which include the rather binding practice of blood feuds.

Until the last chapter everything remains quirky, despite the fact there's some quite dark feuding going on. There's a couple of small twists and it's a really great read. And then it all goes a bit philosophical in the last round and leaves a very unsatisfying ending. Still worth a go though.

Gumble's Yard says

Story by the (at the time) surprise winner of the first International Booker prize.

Kadare is an Albanian – whose books were semi-tolerated by the Hoxha regime (as they were born in the same city) but who eventually went into exile in Paris (although after the Berlin wall fell and not long before the Albanian regime fell).

This book is translated from what is itself a French translation.

The book is a mix of narrative about Mark – an artist, interleaved with “Counter Chapters” – stories and legends Mark thinks about (although with strange dream sequences in the main narrative as well).

The book is set post the fall of the Hoxha regime and Mark is a confused observer of the scene as Albania struggles into the free world – bank robbers raid the national bank, there are rumours about what is contained in secret national archives and the medieval Albanian tradition of tribal blood vendettas seems to be coming back.

The book is easy to read but can prove a difficult narrative to follow – with little sense. I found the story

unsatisfying.

At times Kundera-esque (both in imagery and in older artist who attracts a younger woman), but without Kundera's more accessible themes.

Emma says

Sunt foarte multe aspecte interesante în "Florile înghețate din martie" și, chiar dacă lectura nu a fost una perfectă, având și momente în care a mai lăncezit, observ acum că ceea ce rămâne întotdeauna după o carte de Kadare este o anumită esență, idei pe care le rumeg în continuare, elemente care mă entuziasmează mai mult o vreme, și nu pot decât să-l apreciez și mai mult pe autor datorită acestui efect neprevăzut al scrierilor sale.

Povestea din "Florile înghețate din martie" se desfășoară la scurtă vreme după căderea regimului totalitar din Albania, când kanun-ul și semne de reînviere, după ce oamenii îl îngropaseră treptat în uitare timp de o jumătate de secol. Deși el nu mai are aceeași forță și autoritate ca odinioară, kanun-ul se aseamănă cu un monstru mitologic privit cu teamă și curiozitate de țările vestice, o relictă a trecutului ce își găsește drum într-o lume modernă, aducând cu el legi și precepte incongruente cu secolul XX.

Lipsește totuși un element de bază al kanun-ului, Cartea sângelui, care a dispărut fără urmă după ce a fost confiscată de către comuniști. Această carte este un adevărat cadastru al morții în care sunt trecute toate datoriile de sânge ale albanezilor, și anume cine are sânge de dat și cine are de luat. Căutarea ei s-a transformat într-o adevărată obsesie, devenind una cu căutarea arhivei statului, unde se crede că ar fi fost păstrată în tot acest timp. Pe vremea lui Enver Hodja, arhiva se afla într-o peșteră din apropierea orașului B., însă, după moartea dictatorului, a fost mutat într-o locație necunoscută.

Mi-a plăcut foarte mult alternarea poveștii de bază cu câteva contra-capitole în care Kadare a inserat legende. Șarpele înghețat de la începutul cărții se însinuează în istoria fetei care, pentru a scăpa de un păcat grav al familiei, este silită să ia de bărbat un șarpe. Foarte interesantă este și povestea despre primul furt din istoria omenirii, care nu ar fi cel al focului de către Prometeu, ci cel al nemuririi, de către Tantal.

Dacă aveți chef de citit mai mult decât atât, varianta lungă se află pe blog:
<http://lecturile-emei.blogspot.ro/201...>

Georgiana says

"...toate aceste ciudătenii îi aminteau de povestea fetei maritate cu un șarpe. Chipurile acestea, care azi îți se infățisează sub o mască, iar mâine sub o altă, ca și când ar fi actori pe scenă, nu prevestesc nimic bun"...

Tarah Luke says

#1001books #691left

Albania is probably one of those countries that I will never get to visit in my life, but the descriptions of its scenery and people almost make me feel like I went. There were some very interesting parts to this book, but also some really boring parts, and there were things that were brought up that weren't fully explained. An example might be the girl and her snake husband, which was a story that I thought had many parallels in other cultures' folklore, such as in the Greek and Roman myth of Cupid and Psyche, or the Scandinavian story of the Polar Bear King. I thought that Kadare had a bigger point to make with this story, but it never emerged that I saw. Another thing I wanted resolved was the artist's friend Zef, whose name could have alluded to Zephyr, or a wind that blows things away. Where he went, what happened to him-- this was never explained either. Still, I did enjoy the writing, even if parts of it remained unanswered for me.

Ian says

So I went looking for novels from countries I'd not read literature from before, and came up with this one. Kadare has won several international prizes, and been mooted as a Nobel laureate a number of times. Spring Flowers, Spring Frost is his eleventh book, and his entire oeuvre – of novels, at least – appears to have been translated into English. Mark Gurabardhi is an artist in the provincial town of B— and, well, things happen. Beginning with a bank robbery. People also tell each other stories, and each chapter is followed by a counter-chapter which expands on that story, as if it were the plot of the novel (but the counter-chapters are not a single narrative). Some sections of the novel deal with the old Albanian mountain code of Kanun, blood vendettas that go back generations, so far no one remembers what they were actually about, and how they're in danger of kicking off again now that Hoxha's communist regime has collapsed. Much as I enjoyed Spring Flowers, Spring Frost, it didn't blow me away. I'm glad I read it, but I doubt I'll read anything else by Kadare. But at least I can cross Albania off the list.

Megan Baxter says

This may be the first book I've read by an Albanian writer. In some ways, it reminds me of Milan Kundera, but I like it more than I do Kundera's books. There isn't that pervasive detachment, the insistence that people cannot make connections under a fascist state. The setting, although not the specific country, is familiar, a state where surveillance could be anywhere, and people can disappear without warning.

Note: The rest of this review has been withdrawn due to the changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision [here](#).

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at [Smorgasbook](#)

Kitty with Curls says

Not my favorite Kadare; this struck me as less Kafkaesque than simply confusing & a little bit tired. But Kadare as a whole is so fascinating, & even my least favorite of his books was definitely worth reading. I'm always stunned by the way he can be so complex & so *readable* at the same time. It's like Marion Zimmer Bradley had a one-night stand with Kafka & then gave the baby to Calasso to raise.

Vit Babenco says

Spring Flowers, Spring Frost is a flat story and it is written badly... It is a series of non sequiturs becoming in the end a heap of trash.

The fact that the huge ship Titanic, with its deck lights and searchlights, with its roaring boilers and its cabin fires, with its freight of smiles, music, and champagne, with its women's unshaven love nests, should have smashed into the guardian of the glacial realm now seemed to Mark to be the most natural thing in the world.

Those are the thoughts of the main character suffering from a fever but I've got an impression that **Ismail Kadare** was the one being febrile when he was writing this book. And the idea that every tyrant is a criminal isn't a revelation.
