

tics don't intrude, but the climate of the outside world does," he says. "That can make a writer more significant than he otherwise would be. Our political beliefs or prejudices may function somewhere at the subconscious level in determining our choice. But most writers are morally committed people. Certainly it would be difficult for a raw fascist, regardless of talent, to get the prize." Having said that, he does admit that it is extremely unlikely that the prize will ever go to a writer from the same country twice running. So for reasons like that, which have little to do with literary skill, it is virtually certain that Czech-born novelist Milan Kundera will not get the 1985 prize since Seifert won last year.

Toothpaste: Gyllenstein defends the choice of "difficult" minority-interest writers on the ground that "all too often authors are sold like toothpaste in the international supermarkets of literature." Gerard Bonnier, 68, a leading Swedish publisher, believes that the Academy "does quite well." "I feel positive about the choices," he says. "It's good to give the prize to complicated writers occasionally—it makes people aware of them."

Few people in the literary world share this view. "I often feel that the Academy members are always trying to impress each other, that there's a competition among them to find the most obscure writer," says Hans-Willem Kuyl, managing director of Stockholm's huge bookstore, the BokAkademien. Whether or not that is true today, it certainly wasn't always so. In its early period, the Academy's choices were staunchly conservative—writers who may have been famous but who rarely if ever broke new ground in their works. Only from 1923 onward did the Academy start awarding the prize to "pioneers"—Yeats of Ireland, T.S. Eliot of Britain and William Faulkner of the United States. There were, of course, some notable omissions. But Prof. Kjell Espmark, who is writing a book about the history of the Nobel Prize, contends that there are valid reasons for that. Most of the works of Kafka and Constantine Cavafy of Greece were published posthumously, he says,



Joyce, Kafka and Greene: An award that has become infamous for its omissions



Chekhov, Tolstoy and Proust: Worldwide acclaim can be a drawback

while Proust and Spain's Federico Garcia Lorca died "too early to be nominated."

The Academy's choices may be controversial, but they are not hastily made. The initial roster of nominees usually stands at around 400 names, from which a five-person committee of the Academy selects a short list of five. The culling-out of unwanted authors and the lobbying for favorites begins around 4 p.m. each Thursday, when Academy members gather to browse through the week's new arrivals of books. Then during a formal meeting and a dinner they argue their respective cases.

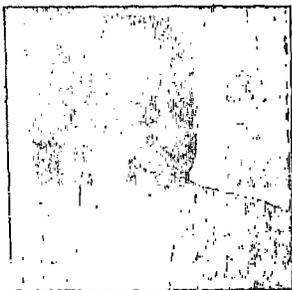
Favorites: They have more on their mind than the current candidates; they often use these meetings to lobby for their favorites for

future awards. Osten Sjostrand, an Academy member and the editor of the Swedish cultural magazine *Artes*, "discovered" Jaroslav Seifert about 10 years ago and began to support him as a worthy laureate. One new member of the Academy, Goren Malmqvist, is a China specialist, and insiders predict that there may be some Chinese candidates in the future. As Bjorkssen says, "Every member tends to push for candidates within his or her field."

As the fateful Thursday in October neared, speculation over this year's laureate intensified. Some insiders believe the prize might go, for the first time, to an African writer—and reported that both Nigeria's Wole Soyinka and Senegal's retired President (and noted poet) Léopold Sédar Senghor have been on the Academy's short list for years. Neither, however, has produced an outstanding work of late.

The other informed speculation is that the prize might go to one of several South African writers. The leading contender is Nadine Gordimer, already short-listed in the past, with André Brink and J.M. Coetzee as outsiders. Other contenders, also on short lists in past years, are Mexico's Carlos Fuentes and Peru's Mario Vargas Llosa. But then, there is always the presence of Artur Lundkvist. The prize could go to Claude Simon, but he is not living. The safe bet is that it won't be Graham Greene.

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Lundkvist (left), Gyllenstein: Politics play a part in Academy lobbying

