

publication

Gallimard, the Ever-alert French Publisher

by Virginie Jacobberger

Since its creation in 1911, the Gallimard publishing house, which is the glory of the French intellectual heritage, has set itself the task of discovering great writers, publishing best-selling authors and welcoming young talent.

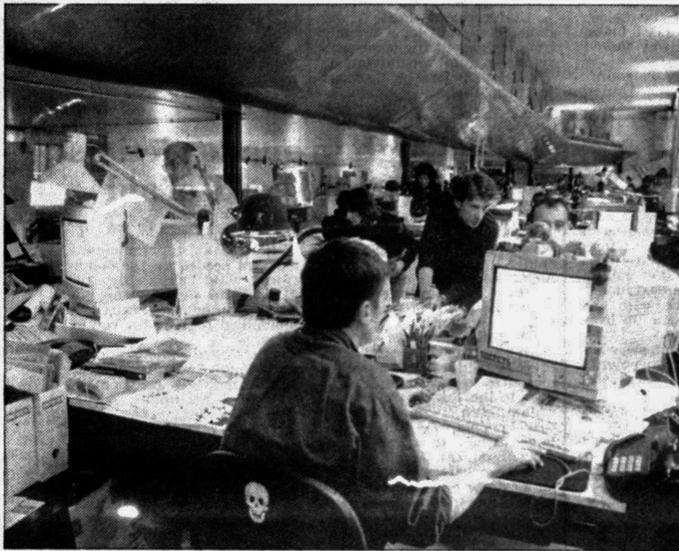
"AFTER forty years in the trade, there is only one thing I can tell you, and that is that one never knows about the destiny of a book," Gaston Gallimard, the founder of the famous French publishing house once confided to one of his competitors, Robert Laffont. From the mysteries of publication to the vicissitudes of distribution and including exposure to the media and the key role of literary awards, the fascinating world of publishing remains complex. In France, four hundred publishing houses live from this strange trade. Gallimard easily comes top of the independent enterprises in this sector, with an annual turnover of over 25 billion francs (5 billion dollars). Thus, after 85 years in existence, this prestigious publisher of the greatest French writers (Paul Claudel, Stephane Mallarme, Andre Malraux and Albert Camus, to mention but a few) once again held place of honour at the last Book Fair (an annual event in France for all writers and book-lovers) held in March 1995 in Paris.

This family firm, which is, today, headed by Antoine, the grandson of the founder Gaston Gallimard, has continued to expand since it started up in the 20s. The Gallimard publishing house began with three magic letters: NRF, the Editions, de la Nouvelle Revue Francaise, founded in 1911 and already located in the heart of Saint-Germain-des-Pres, the famous intellectual dis-

trict of Paris. At the time, it was a small partnership between two writers (Andre Gide and Jean Schlumberger) and the man who was shortly to be considered as the ever-alert French publisher, Gaston Gallimard. First of all, it published eighteen French works including "L'Otage" (the Hostage), a play by Paul Claudel, the novel "Isabelle" by Gide and "les Etudes" by Jacques Riviere.

As early as 1913, the NRF presented the first complete edition of Stephane Mallarme's poems, Roger Martin du Gard's "Jean Barois" and a foreign work which was to bring the publishing house to the notice of French intellectuals and professionals in the book trade, "L'Of-frande Lyrique" (Song Offerings) by Rabindranath Tagore, winner of the Nobel Prize for literature. Once again, Gaston Gallimard's firm grew. In 1919, in order not to involve the prestigious name of NRF in completely new publications, he decided to create a business under his own name. Above all, he wanted to discover new talents. It was a bold and delicate undertaking in which the slightest error could spell disaster. Hence, Gallimard refused Marcel Proust's first manuscript, which was finally published by his competitor Grasset. However, thanks to the good reputation of his company, Gaston Gallimard managed to win back the author and, in 1919, he brought out "A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs" (Within a Budding Grove), which was awarded the Goncourt literary prize.

Jean Paulhan, who was appointed company secretary in July 1920, attracted Surrealist authors (Breton, Aragon, Eluard) as well as many famous



writers such as Jules Romains and Paul Morand. On 1st January 1930, the publishing house opened its new head-office, a stone's throw from Saint-Germain-des-Pres and the National Assembly. Gallimard's success increased with the Prix Femina award for a work by Jacques de Lacretelle and a record for sales with Roger Martin du Gard's "Les Thibault", and new writers arrived including Andre Malraux, Dominique

Aury and Raymond Queneau.

In order to manage this growing concern better, Gaston Gallimard created a "reading committee" which met every week around a few of the publisher's "safe bets". The activity of this network of talented writers, able, at the same time, to judge new works and to control the workings of publishing, made it possible to establish a basic collection for the Gallimard publishers. It created

more than a hundred literary collections, monographs, historical portraits, complete works (in the "La Pleiade" collection) and young prose and, with dazzling speed, drew up a catalogue of more than eight thousand titles. Encouraged by its success with Tagore's work, the French firm also innovated by publishing foreign works. It thus offered translations of Conrad's tales by Gide, Russian works under the leaderships of Aragon and, then, in 1942, published works by the Danish writer Karen Blixen and, more recently, Borges, Joyce and Lawrence Durrell.

Although novels, essays, poetry and other literary works hold place of honour, the publishing house has successfully adapted to the times and created collections of documentary works or of figures of contemporary history. However, Antoine Gallimard, the founder's grandson and the present chairman and managing director of the firm, still considers that "the main problem of publishing is not to allow oneself to be dominated by the commercial logic of systems or by the industrial logic of manufacturers." Gallimard proudly asserts that the firm has remained "one for authors and not for books." In other words, first of all an author, capable of producing a work, is chosen. In short, it is a policy adopted throughout the length of a career. Thus, at Gallimard, the writers' muse is, more than ever, the judgement of the reading committees. Roger Grenier, who is an author of the prestigious publisher's and a member of the present reading committee (together with Milan Kundera, Jean-Marie Le Clezio and Philippe Sollers) points out

that "We receive about 6,000 manuscripts a year and each of them is read by at least one of the firm's readers."

Reading cards and comments by various readers are legion at Gallimard which brings out five hundred new works a year, including a dozen or so new authors. "In this publishing house, I am in the habit of saying that we seek a literary style," Roger Grenier asserts, before adding, "When Gallimard decides to publish an author, the firm gives itself the means of doing so for years while awaiting success." This was, indeed, the case with Hemingway, of whose work we only published 600 copies for ten years, before he became acknowledged and celebrated in France. Moreover, the author of "The Old Man and the Sea" is not an atypical case. Kafka, Faulkner and Jouhandeau experienced the same painful beginnings in French publishing.

With the dawning of the 21st century, even though they are described by advertising specialists as a "product with a high information, entertainment and cultural content," books remain a "supplement to the soul" for which there will always be a place thanks to publishing houses which, like Gallimard, have successfully maintained their prestige while adapting to their times. Of Gallimard, one can expect excellence. Every year, this ever-alert French publisher brings out five hundred new works, about a hundred re-editions of a first edition and over a thousand reprints of basic works.

— L'Actualite en France

fiction

Master and Servant

by Saeif Morshed

THIS would not have happened in Britain. No, it most definitely would not have occurred.

My relationship with the poor in Britain was to say the least beyond arms length. Yes, I felt some sort of pity for their impoverished lives full of misery and woe. The way they had to live a bitter existence under skies of impending darkness and gloom, huddled underneath blankets of engrained dirt and filth.

These forgotten people would have one arm stretched out with polystyrene foam cup in hand, pleading for any sort of coinage to grace its coffee-stained interiors.

I would choose to ignore them using the two most overused excuses of all time: that they were all professional beggars and the money would only be used to inebriate their souls with a small bottle of whiskey and pollute their lungs with a twenty-pack of Benson and Hedges.

Unfortunately when I arrived in Bangladesh with wife and daughter in

to, the latter excuse could not be imprinted in my mind as a Muslim country frowned upon drunkenness.

Nevertheless, the former was still allowed as a reason to forbid one of my hands ever reaching down to a pocket to reveal some form of currency.

In fact it was such a good excuse that the only way a beggar could be deemed to be genuine was if one of his arms or legs had been amputated or if some hideous mutilation had arisen over his face.

My relationship with the poor however, was set to increase in Bangladesh.

To my surprise it was accepted for a young child to be introduced to one person's abode in order to carry out the daily chores and mediocre tasks that one took upon oneself in Britain.

Through word of mouth and various recommendations an orphan boy graced our footsteps. To my eyes he was the Bengali version of Oliver Twist; with slight frame and an innocent, tender face.

What really won you over though was his illuminating, winning smile which could light up a thousand city streets with one charge.

The orphan boy soon became a hit

within our social circle and was constantly awarded special treats such as a new set of clothes to slip into.

My daughter, Sadeea would always give him sweets to consume which he devoured salaciously giving a radiant smile to signify immense satisfaction had been attained.

Gradually his debonair charms were wearing thin on me as surges of vitriolic jealousy were being injected into my veins.

To my eyes the winning smile had mutated into an obnoxious and cheeky grin that kept on mocking me. I was no longer seeing a sweet little orphan but a street rascal who was getting away from performing the daily chores he was initially assigned to do.

My levels of tolerance had reached their optimum output and my diatribe reign of terror of stalinque proportions was about to commence.

Initially the modes of terror were not physical but psychological and thus more rewarding in terms of giving morose pleasure.

Where once the boy was allowed to watch television with the rest of the family, I now made sure his face was

turned against it by continuously demanding my feet to be massaged. Thus he was only able to hear the television's audio output without sampling its visual delights.

Where once he was allowed to play computer games with Sadeea, I now made sure he could only watch. This was the ultimate torture for a child yearning to guide sonic the Hedgehog through a maze of scary monsters and fearsome adversaries.

With hindsight, I should have been contented with these slight measures of pain I was giving him. His beaming smile was starting to lessen becoming a meek smirk.

However, jealousy was once again rearing its ugly head as Sadeea seemed to be pitying him even more now he a shadow of his former self.

I still yearned to install more fear into my subservient disciple to rid the plague of hatred that was raging through my soul. My modes of torture had now taken a more sinister bent.

Making breakfast and lunch for me were added to his list of tasks. To my amazement his culinary skills were exceptional for a street urchin. The eggs

were fried to crispy perfection: sunnyside up without any leakages of streaky yellow across the unblemished white.

The t-bone steaks flowed with succulent juices and were perfumed with the grace of aromatic spices that gave spasms of delight to ones palate.

Nevertheless, I still managed to find chinks in his armour. Once I found the morning toast to be too densely spread with margarine, while the coffee was dampened in taste by too many liberal splashes of milk being added to it.

With the lessening of taste satisfaction my hand was immediately raised and for the first time its wrath was unleashed on my unsuspecting victim. Utter bewilderment was imprinted on the young child's face to why such punishment had been given out.

The culprit's hand started to tremble laden with extreme guilt. But did this incident bestow on me any sort of feelings for compassion and forgiveness? No, it did not as beatings of this puerile nature continued on a regular basis. Every time I looked at his eyes, I could see a burning desire of sullenness growing within him, ready to implode out of its hollow shell.

I knew I was pushing my luck and that my servant's level of patience would eventually overload with sheer vitriolic spleen. I was not however expecting the day of reckoning to occur so soon.

The following morning I berated him over his lackluster effort in cleaning my black leather shoes that I wore for work. To my surprise he just gave a smile, the same sort of winning smile that gave him such adoration in the first place.

Once again I raised my hand to unleash certain pain. But instead of reaching its target, the intended recipient grabbed hold of it with one clenched fist and with the other punched its instigator to the floor.

I felt my head bang hard on the marble surface while a dark shadow began to loom over me. The orphan was standing above me. To my eyes he was now no longer a small child but a towering man with the realms of power firmly within his grasp.

The roles of power had been reversed. I was no longer the master but the servant, a subservient one at that with a growing fear in his heart.

poems

Mujib

by Muhammad Samad

Mujib is the courage of my dream
Mujib is my father
Mujib in my blood and vigour
A code of values, a charter.

A love in every drop of blood
Mujib runs through my veins
As gold like a green sun
In my love Mujib reigns.

For the immortal epic of my freedom
Mujib is the poet
On the canvas of my heart
Evergreen is his portrait

Mujib is my philosopher's stone
Innocent and sacred
All over my Bangladesh
Mujib is a rose red.

The Pride of a Poet

The poet gives you courage
He weaves a dream
And allows a moment for your love.

The light in your eyes he lits
A hope he springs in your breast

The words on your lips he puts.

The poet gives you courage,
A dream
And a moment for love.

The spells for a movement he casts
The land of birth he gives birth to
And beats a time for going ahead.
The courage
A dream
And a moment for love
The poet gives you.

The respect with a bow
An affection with a touch
The poet gives you,
Overflowing his breast he weeps in your grief
While filling his sorrows into his heart
He hides it in a cage of gold.

The poet gives you courage
A dream
And a moment for love

Winter Vegetables: Infant Daughters

Thinking of my daughter, thinking
All the day-long I got lost

In a profound pleasure and pain
These days I have been lying in a stupor
All alone, silent
Like a mummy of Egypt.

This winter morning
On the weary head of vendors
Vegetables atop wicker-trays
Jump up dancing in gold sunrays
Cabbage, coriander leaves, puni, palong herbs etcetera.
With a sharp crystal look they stare at
Like my fourteen month-old daughter
In a boldness without bounds.

Are the winter green stuff
All infant daughters —
The cheerful child of mine
Who calls up, smiles and
Suddenly raising her golden fingers
Like a streak of lightning in a dark-blue sky
Speaks out, Papa, look, there is crow, a crow.
(The dream of the poet, the father, fritters away)
O lovely winter vegetables
My cheerful daughter looks
Exactly like you bright and fresh —
She is not at home now.
(Translated by Nazim Mahmood)

A Labored Mind Tool

by Shuvashish Priya Barua
Deep murmurs, grunts.

and short chuckles to fill up the space of silence.
Sitting heavily
upon wooden boards.
Tangled hay, stuck to the skin of resting children.
In the lap
the instrument feels heavy,
the restless chords in line,
wanting to be among the green grass and dance,
start to get plucked,
one by one,
until they are all vibrating in turn.
And shaped by calming fingers.
(these old men hate silence.)
They want to pass time,
but with something that keeps with their pace.)

Nature's Puddle Duckling in our Sewer

Long to feel you ...
your full... soft skin.
Deep slender roundness
delicate and protruding
as you move in your blue high-heels.
Don't have to look,
don't have to talk,
just have to walk...
on this marble floor.
Beautiful...cold...
Poor puddle duckling.