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People / Gilles de La Rochefoucauld

Katina Strauch
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People

An Interview With Gilles de La Rochefoucauld, President and Owner, Aux Amateurs de Livres, Paris, France by Katina Strauch

I love Paris — even in the summer. The French go on vacation in July and August and the city isn't full of anyone but tourists. Still, Gilles de La Rochefoucauld, we all know about his ancestor, was there with several of his employees working away. Off and on, an employee would stop in to say goodbye on the way out for vacation.

ATG: How and when did you become involved with Aux Amateurs?

GLR: I bought Aux Amateurs four years ago when the owner wanted to become more involved in publishing. I myself was employed at a publishing company which specialized in social sciences, history, law and economics. Aux Amateurs has been in this location for 30 years. (This building was completed in 1960.) There was always a bookstore attached to the business (this is not uncommon). AAL specialized in antiquarian materials. We still search out of print and antiquarian materials, though our primary service is selling French books inside and outside of France.

ATG: What kind of market is there for French titles in the world?

GLR: French titles are still in demand all over the world though there is a tendency for scientific and medical titles to be published in English more than in the past. The American market is substantial though it has been static for the past three years. We have approval plans in many American libraries. American libraries prefer the original work in the original language. We sell very few translations. We are also seeing changes in the Canadian market. Since 1991, we have had more trouble selling in Germany because of the economic situation there.

ATG: Do the French buy more books than their American counterparts?

GLR: French libraries certainly buy fewer books than American libraries.

When I first visited America, I was struck by the French titles that were available in most libraries, and also by the quality of the premises. American library buildings are large and computerized compared to Europe, including Germany.

Many of our orders from Germany are typed rather than computer printed out. I read somewhere that one and half million people in America can speak French. American libraries and publishing companies are much more computerized. France is not very developed electronically and there are very few CDROMs in France. In America, most publishers have computerized invoicing techniques. This is not the case in France. Here at AAL, we are planning to have email in September or October. We are stressing electronic linkages.

ATG: But in France there is Minitel. That seems pretty advanced.

GLR: Yes, the Minitel is very well developed. It is a telephone-based fee service. People in their homes can connect to over 3000 databases in France, including bank accounts, train schedules, libraries, and French books in print. Grolier in the U.S. is a subsidiary of the

Aux Amateurs de Livres

Aux Amateurs de Livres was founded in the late thirties by **Marcel Blancheteau**.

Originally, the Company specialized in Antiquarian books, but Marcel Blancheteau decided to extend the business in selling current imprints as well. The records of the company show that Yale University and the New York Public Library were already customers for series in 1937!

Aux Amateurs de Livres has moved twice since it was created. Its current location is in central Paris very close to the Eiffel Tower and just ten minutes off the Publisher district.

The company supplies all material published in France or in French-speaking countries, including journals and CD-ROMs.

Nearly 60% of AAL's business is achieved in the USA and Canada.

Twelve people work at Aux Amateurs through its different departments — firm orders, approval plans, standing orders, subscriptions, and out of print searching. Since 1989, the company has been managed by Gilles and Sylvia de La Rochefoucauld.

In the past few years, Aux Amateurs has stressed automation and has developed its own software. Combined with an experienced staff, this new software is designed to provide the best information and reports to customers.

As of August 1, 1993, Aux Amateurs de Livres has opened an office in the United States. ☞

French company Hachette and has an encyclopedia on CDROM. Still, the sale of CDROM drives in France is very low compared to the U.S.

ATG: How many titles are published in France per year and how many copies are generally printed of a book?

GLR: The number of copies printed is difficult because this obviously depends on the publisher. In the social sciences and history, perhaps 3000 copies. With novels and well known authors, it is more like 50,000. In the sciences, fewer copies are printed, perhaps 2000. Perhaps 30000 titles are printed in France per year. This includes reprints, translations, pocket books.

ATG: Where did the name "Aux Amateurs de Livres" come from?

GLR: AAL was founded in 1930. The name has two meanings. It was begun by an "amateur" (Marcel Blancheteau) as opposed to a professional bookman. Also, "amateur" means an antiquarian specialist which was what AAL specialized in

at its beginning. Very early in its history AAL tried to sell to American universities. Yale was among the first in 1935. The growth of AAL took place after WWII. Most European vendors expanded after the war.

ATG: Where did you grow up?

GLR: I was born in Paris in 1952 near the Champs Elysee in the eighth arrondissement. I am the youngest of five brothers and sisters, part of the baby boom after WWII. My family has lived in Paris for many generations. I had Jesuit schooling in my younger years and went to the University of Paris and the Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Paris. After college, I went to work as a publisher after working in banking for several years.

ATG: Could you tell us about your family?

GLR: I have four children, three daughters and a son from the ages of 3 to 12. My wife, Sylvia, works with me in AAL. She is fluent in German and she

Some French vocabulary words —

épuisé — out of print

tirage — print run

editeur — publisher

rédacteur — editor

diffusion — sales

helps with marketing and commercial work.

ATG: What do you do for fun (besides AAL business, of course)?

GLR: I like to jog and ski. I also like the cinema. I love to travel. I go to the U.S. one month of every year and I don't consider this business. It is more pleasure. I love the museums in the U.S. and I am looking forward to taking the children to visit the great parks in the U.S. like Yosemite. I like to read and have

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Legally Speaking

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not generally the nature of our publisher and author associations. Still, there is an intriguing practicality to the idea of collective distribution. It may offend certain of our individualistic and capitalistic values, but could it be that some curtailment of those values would be in the best interests of society and scholarly communication?

One final note about Kopinor: Norwegian educational institutions are subject to Kopinor licensing procedures. Fair use, to whatever extent it exists in Norway, does not cover educational copying the way that it does in the U.S. Indeed, uncompensated use in the educational sector was the primary target of the "Extended Collective Agreement License" at the time of its passage into law.

The Norwegian model, while admit-

tedly not easily transferable to the U.S. system, provides some interesting alternatives to certain aspects of the U.S. approach to copyright. It grew out of a recognition on the part of Norwegian government officials, publishers, authors, *et al*, that too much uncompensated copying was being done, but that a system of purely individual rights and permissions would be cumbersome and inefficient. These are some of the very problems being faced in the U.S. today. Whether technology, the CCC, or other factors can come together to solve these problems without compromising our individualistic (market-based?) system to copyright remains to be seen. As we continue to assess the situation, we should not close our minds to some of the alternative approaches practiced elsewhere. Kopinor, through its use of statutory licenses and collective distribution, is a model worth studying. ☞

Gilles de La Rochefoucauld

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just finished Felicien Marceau's *La Terrace de Lucrezia*. It is fiction, an at times humorous story of a woman living in Italy as a concierge and the story is about all the people that live in the apartment building.

ATG: What does the future hold for AAL?

GLR: There is a very common proverb in France. It is "don't give up prey to chase a shadow." Our main market is the American market and we want to work hard to please that market. We believe that the dollar is undervalued compared to the European currencies. Obviously, we want to capture market share against our competitors. There is no question that it is easier to get French titles from a French bookseller. We have recently hired a representative in the United States. **Edna Laughrey** will represent AAL abroad. We are anxious to know what our customers think and we are always working to improve. ☞

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tion. Profs, CC: Mail, All-in-One, Vax-Mail, In-Box are some of the names you may have heard of. They are all different and some are easier to use than others. Be aware that whatever you are using may not be the only thing available at your institution or work place. Ask your systems people what the choices are and maybe you'll find one you like better. Where I work there are at least two different e-mail set-ups and some people prefer one over the other; some people despise both of them, and others don't even know the difference!

Meanwhile, the next piece of furniture that I suspect will leave my office will be my desk. That big, clunky piece of government-issued walnut-veneer has never been anything except a place to pile papers on anyway. If the sleek, functional computer table I requested ever gets ordered, the boxy old desk can go! ☞