

How many years of solitude?

If you know the power of literature to speak clearly, directly, truthfully, of real people and real events, then consider this: There are entire worlds of current literature still beyond your reach.

Lively, compelling novels and stories of contemporary Nicaragua, Beirut, Prague, Soweto, and Beijing. The authentic voices of gifted writers outside the developed West whose words tell us more than any news report, feature story, or official pronouncement.

How important are they? Consider some of their predecessors: *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *The Trial*. Have they not proved our best means of seeing honestly, seeing with other eyes, people and cultures distant from our own?

There is a new generation of such books. Some are in English. But the sad, simple fact is that we Americans, with all our means, have chosen our own literary isolation. At last count, the Library of Congress found that translations of works from outside Western Europe made up less than 1% of the contemporary literature published annually in the United States.

It even took a subsidy to translate *One Hundred Years of Solitude* into English.

So far, a mix of cultural provincialism and commercial imperatives has kept us out of touch. But a new venture is finding a way through...

This year, a remarkable, not-for-profit publishing alliance, *Readers International*, was formed. RI's editors have enlisted the active support of writers, translators, and other editors worldwide. Among them are Dennis Brutus, Robert Fitzgerald, Eduardo Galeano, Gregory Rabassa, Edward Said, and Josef Skvorecky. All share a crucial insight: There is a world of hidden literature beyond the developed West every bit as energetic and inspired as our own.

And they share a single, powerful goal: To make this work available in English translations of the highest quality, in editions that are both modestly priced and durably produced.

The exiled Chilean poet Ariel Dorfman calls RI "the most original and plausible publishing venture I've heard of." Original in devoting itself exclusively to translating the finest contemporary literature into English. Plausible in recognizing that serious readers like yourself are, by commercial measures, few and scattered throughout the country.

So RI does not even try to sell its books through hundreds of stores. Instead, it relies on a time-honored practice that brought us Johnson's *Dictionary*, *Paradise Lost*, and Audubon's *Birds of America*: The sale of ad-

vance subscriptions to permit publication.

How can you join this remarkable alliance? Simply by subscribing. When you do, you quite literally "make the edition possible."

You will receive RI's six new books, described below, at regular two-month intervals. Their retail prices, when available, will total \$90.00. But the series is yours as a founding subscriber for just \$36.00 plus \$1.00 a book for postage. Presented as the contemporary classics they are, each book is a sewn, hardcover edition.

While this subscription brings you a good read every two months at astonishingly modest prices, it also opens the line of communication set up by RI between writers and their future readers. And since you share their need to meet face-to-face in the ways only good literature can provide, why not help break through their, and our, isolation.

Your first six books.

NICARAGUA: *To Bury Our Fathers* by Sergio Ramírez. Tales of cabaret singers, exiles, National Guardsmen, guerillas, beauty-queens and would-be Presidents are interwoven as a colorful, lyrical image of everyday life under Somoza's dictatorship. A portrait of the pre-revolutionary era written by the country's leading prose writer, now a prominent civilian member of the Sandinista government. (ca. 300 pages, retail price \$17.50.)

PALESTINE: *Najran Below Zero* by Yahya Yakhluif. A tour de force, banned in Saudi Arabia, written by the current head of the Palestinian Writers' Union. It demonstrates the dissenting role of the Palestinian intellectual inside the Arab world. During years of civil war, the people of the border region of Najran are buffeted between intimidation and resistance, between Saudi religious repression and an infant Yemeni republic—always with an American presence, hovering and anonymous. (ca. 110 pages, retail price \$12.50.)

CHINA: *A Cadre School Life: Six Chapters* by Yang Jiang. Yang is an elderly scholar, translator of *Don Quixote*; her husband, Qian Zhongshu, one of China's foremost writers. They spent two years in re-education camps during the Cultural Revolution. This is her memoir, subtle, lucid and without bitterness. "An outstanding book, quite unlike anything else from 20th-century China...superbly translated," says the *Times Literary Supplement*. (ca. 100 pages, retail price \$12.50.)

CZECHOSLOVAKIA: *My Merry Mornings* by Ivan Klíma. One of his country's most original and prolific writers, Klíma is the author of novels, stories, plays, travelogues, and children's books—all banned since 1968. Only one book has ever before appeared in English.

Now comes this set of linked short stories, a sardonic look at modern Prague and its citizens, the first of Klíma's works to reach America. (ca. 150 pages, retail price \$12.50.)

SOUTH AFRICA: *A Ride on the Whirlwind* by Siphiso Sepamla. A novel by one of South Africa's foremost black poets, set in the 1976 Soweto uprisings. "Not simply a tale of police versus rebels," said *World Literature Today*, "but a bold, sincere portrayal of the human predicament with which South Africa is faced." (ca. 250 pages, retail price \$17.50.)

CHILE: *I Dreamt the Snow Was Burning* by Antonio Skármeta. A cynical country boy comes to Santiago to win at football and lose his virginity. The last days before the 1973 Chilean coup turn his world upside down. "With its vigor and fantasy, undoubtedly one of the best pieces of committed literature to emerge from Latin America," said *Le Monde*. (ca. 225 pages, retail price \$17.50.)

It is no accident that RI is publishing this year several books initially banned at home. Where the printed word is a threat to power, good writing is literally dangerous. There can be no more practical response to repression than for us to publish and heed these eloquent, critical voices.

Please do not delay these books any longer. RI must make its decisions on publication and initial print quantities based on the number of founding subscribers who reply to this notice. Won't you join us?

"Readers International is an exciting idea. Good books — and a good cause."

A. Whitney Ellsworth
Publisher,
The New York Review of Books



Readers International
9 East 46th Street
New York, NY 10017



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