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► **To cite this version:**

Brigitte Ouvry-Vial. Contemporary book trading between West and East, information or transmission? The Case of Eastern Literature in French Publishers Foreign Series. Reading Books - Trading Ideas SHARP 2006 Conference, Jul 2006, The Hague/Leiden, Netherlands. hal-02111627

**HAL Id: hal-02111627**

**<https://hal.science/hal-02111627v1>**

Submitted on 26 Apr 2019

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**Brigitte Ouvry-Vial**

*Contemporary book trading between West and East, information or transmission? The case of Eastern literature in French publishers catalogues.*

**SHARP Conference 2006. The Hague**

Publishing foreign books – fiction and non fiction- in France has always been a self-assigned mission for literary publishers and although the general book market is decidedly not as wide as it is in the States or even in other European countries, foreign books have also become profitable products for French commercial publishers investing in bestselling translations from English mystery masters, American Science Fiction or Japanese Mangas. The difference in targets, values, goals and results between these two lines of trading ideas through Foreign books publishing is however striking and impossible to reconcile – the literary publishers trying to retain financial stability in order to discover, promote and transfer to selected readers new talents or unknown authors for the long term while commercial publishers seek immediate and significant profit and try to seduce a broad market of readers that is sociologically and culturally scattered and less demanding. The first ones are East oriented, the others essentially west oriented and focusing on English or Spanish literature.

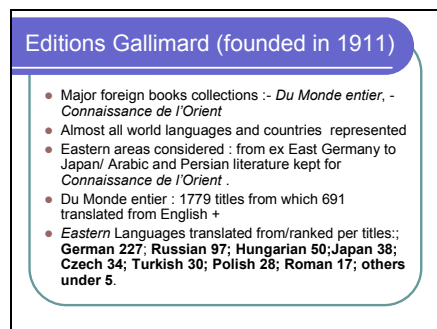
It is however not the purpose of this paper to set a comparison and we rather intend to focus, within the broad area of Foreign books published in France, on the narrow angle of Eastern literature published by literary publishers, to state facts, social, editorial or at large intellectual grounds or reasons that make it possible. While it will not be possible to consider the details of the whole

production, specific examples of publishers and an attempt at ordering their communication assets and strategies, will convey a picture of the conditions - how, why and under which circumstances - *East* meets *West* in France or the other way round.

### ***Six different editorial policies towards East***

There are no strict geographic, linguistic and national boundaries attached to the word “East”. The meaning of “eastern literature” remains so far undefined and changes from one publisher to another. Yet, one can identify typical attitudes or editorial policies towards Eastern literature as represented by six different publishers namely Editions Gallimard, Editions Joelle Losfeld, Editions Allia, Editions L’Age d’Homme, Editions Noir sur Blanc, Editions L’Inventaire, which we will now briefly introduce.

Editions Gallimard is a well known and prestigious literary publisher with



thousand titles in its catalogue, and an assessed universalistic and patrimonial editorial policy sustained by a great diversity of collections publishing texts from almost all linguistic and geographic sources in the world. Two major foreign books collections<sup>1</sup> - *Connaissance de l'Orient* and *Du monde entier*-, sustain this global universalistic policy: *Connaissance de l'Orient* (pocket book and hard

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<sup>1</sup> Major as regards their contribution to the intellectual rather than financial assets of the publishing house.

cover) mainly publishes translations from classical oriental poetry and epics and also a few contemporary writers, *Du Monde entier* publishes translated fiction from all possible languages in the world and Eastern literature considered comes from a variety of countries. Yet, oriental literature is set aside from *Du monde entier* and far east or south east literature very discreet, so that *East* considered in *Du monde entier* roughly ranges from Germany to Japan, including Turkish and Balkan literature. Statistics show that among 1779 titles published in the collection, 691 titles are translated from English, 227 from German, 97 from Russian, Hungarian 50, Polish, Czech and Turkish around 30, Roman 17 and the remaining eastern European languages less than 5 or just not existing. The patrimonial and panoramic approach is therefore unbalanced or biased yet proportionate to the economical dynamics of the publishing and linguistic areas considered and as a result of this fragile equilibrium, eastern literature is fragmented into myriads of linguistic units.

Joelle Losfeld, and independent publishing house created in 1992 now

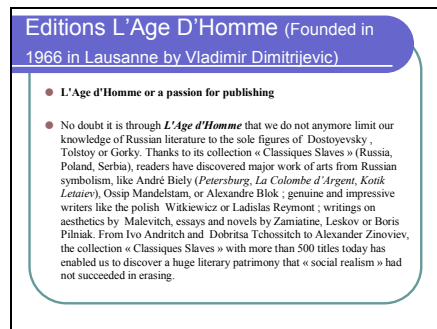
Editions Joelle Losfeld (founded in 1992, attached to Gallimard in 2003)

- Its Collection Littérature étrangère is mainly devoted to « Western » literature with translations from English, Spanish and Italian.
- Yet, asked about her editorial policy, Joelle Losfeld insists on her interest for
- « Fantastic literature » « Ce qui m'intéresse, fondamentalement, c'est le fantastique. "Le Tour d'écrôur", de Henry James, m'a beaucoup marqué. J'aime ce fantastique légèrement révéle qui induit une "inquiétante étrangeté" »
- « Identity issues » « Je m'intéresse également aux problèmes identitaires, de double culture ou de schizophrénie. De Janet Frame, la Néo-Zélandaise de "Un ange à ma table", en passant par Taos Amrouche, l'Algérienne, et un certain nombre d'autres femmes, mes centres d'intérêt vont vers des auteurs qui ont une histoire un peu compliquée ».
- « Disturbing texts revealing doubts rather than certainties » « J'aime ce qui est dérangeant. Qu'une fois le livre refermé, on se dise : "Il y a là quelque chose de l'ordre de l'inconnu qui m'est apparu." C'est cette lecture que je privilégie, par rapport à d'autres textes qui, au contraire, appuient des certitudes »
- Three arguments and interests that seem consubstantial with Eastern literary traditions...

attached to Gallimard, has a moderate commitment to Foreign literature but Eastern literature represents an even smaller part of the catalogue mainly devoted to Western literature with translations from English, Spanish and Italian. Eastern

literature in this policy appears as a side concern, although the editorial policy declared towards identity issues, disturbing texts and Fantastic literature should clearly lead this publisher towards eastern literature where these lines of writing are traditional and well developed. Therefore it is not clear whether the reason for the relative absence of Eastern literature in this catalogue is the lack of interest, lack of network or a cultural choice economically oriented towards books considered more marketable.

L'Age d'homme whose motto is "An opening to the world" is a publishing house based in France, founded in Switzerland by a Serbian born publisher called Dimitrievitch, whose catalogue is mainly devoted to literature from Central and East Europe with a clear historical and nationalist orientation that sometimes raises debates and critics. The decisive contribution of L'Age d'Homme to the knowledge of Eastern books, fiction, essays and documents along with the rigorous quality of authors and texts chosen is however unquestionable. The Classiques Slaves department of the catalogue with three separate sections Russian, Polish and Serbian shows a *parti-pris* but also an impressive, deep, and insightful commitment to classical masters of the early XXth century such as for Polish Czeslaw Milosz, Adam Mickiewicz or Marian Pankowski. The Classiques Slaves Collection in its whole allows French readers an access both to some of the biggest writers of the XXth century and to the main clues and course of events in modern European history.



Noir sur Blanc founded and directed by Vera Michalski in 1986 is part of an independent group, Libella, dedicated to European literature and including other French publishers like Buchet-Chastel, Phoebus and Maren Sell. Since 1990, the publishing house is based both in Paris and Warsaw and although Polish literature is the hard core, each branch adjusts to its own economic and cultural context. Thus, it is an interesting example of how trading books and ideas between East and West may not or cannot be reciprocal. The differences between the Polish and French catalogues of Noir sur Blanc outline differences between two contexts of writing, publishing and reading. It concentrates on central and oriental Europe, publishes novels, essays, short stories, drama, but French branch publishes mainly Polish authors along with a variety of eastern authors Albanians, Austrians, Bulgarians, Estonians, Hungarians, Israelis, Romans, Russians, Serbians, Czechs, Ukrainians. Polish writers left alone the Polish branch publishes essentially English and Spanish writers. There are few French authors in the catalogue for example, the reason given being both the size of the catalogue restrained to 35 books a year and the desire to exhaustively follow up an author's production which means concentrating on a limited number of people. Still, Vera Michalski pursues her initial design for *Noir sur Blanc* to be a bridge allowing cultural and emotional exchanges between east and west.

**Editions Noir Sur Blanc (founded in 1986 by Vera Michalski)**

- Part of an independent group, Libella (including other French publishers like Buchet-Chastel, Phoebus et Maren Sell) dedicated to European literature.
- The publishing house is based both in Paris and Warsaw and publishes on both markets texts adapted to each different socio-cultural context.
- Concentrates on central and oriental Europe, publishes novels, essays, short stories, drama
- Authors from Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Israel, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Czechoslovakia, Ukraine.
- Its motto, to be : « Une passerelle de culture et sensibilité entre l'Est et l'Ouest ».

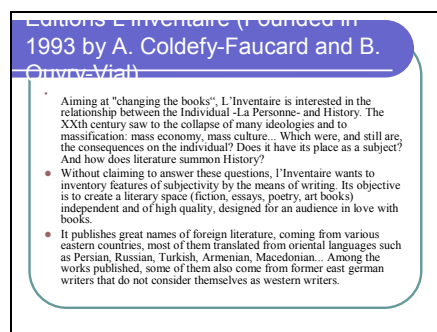
Editions Allia provides major landmarks to understand the trading of ideas through books between East and West. Its approach is both philosophical and historical and eastern contributions – like Walter Benjamin’s, Adorno’s or Boris Souvarine’s essays are not set aside in a specific section but mingled within the thematic and periodical organization of the catalogue. Choices are highly personal and reflect an attempt at pulling the sometimes invisible threads concurring for each historical period considered to main trends of ideas in Europe. Its contribution for example is decisive at bringing out the intellectual impact and carrier of a movement known as “Internationale Situationiste” that was launched in France by Guy Debord then spread in Europe and connected with Lettrism.

**Editions Allia (founded in 1982) by Gérard Berreby**

- Its motto is to publish « The Other things »
- No specific or identified collection of either foreign or eastern literature but a dedication to the history of ideas in Europe with both a chronological and transcultural approach to this history.
- List of collections:
  - A propos de l'héritage antique
  - L'Europe médiévale
  - Une renaissance
  - Les renaissances de l'âge classique
  - Le Dix-Huitième siècle - entre les lumières et l'incendie
  - De l'Europe napoléonienne à la Révolution de 1848
  - De Marx à la Belle Époque
  - Début du Vingtième siècle - autour d'une révolution sociale
  - Début du Vingtième siècle - la révolte des artistes
  - Nouvelles dictatures européennes et seconde guerre mondiale
  - Dans la guerre froide : la révolte et son double
  - La fin d'une époque - les conditions du vrai
- Eastern literature is spread within various collections and the catalogue, meant to be the personal library of the contemporary humanist reader, provides major philosophical and historical texts from or about East Europe .

The last example is L’Inventaire, a small publisher founded in 1993 by Anne Coldefy-Faucard and myself, with above 100 books in the catalogue where Foreign books in principal and especially Eastern Europe and oriental literature are everywhere yet subordinated to the editorial set of themes which privileges the relations of the person and history. The choice of books published relies

strictly on the literary quality of writings along with the strong, personal, insightful approach and contribution to the topic. Translations are carefully checked and sometimes heavily edited to meet with the set of literary criteria but these standards being met, and as long as the book contributes to the general topic of individual confrontation to History, the catalogue freely accepts a variety of authors and books, novels, short stories, albums, poetry, art books, essays, documents, thus implying a variety of formats, styles, treatment and linguistic origin. As a whole it is not meant to issue nor assert final statements but to display an inventory, as the publisher's name suggests, of the many different and often painful encounters between personal or local destiny and global history. Western literature is not expelled but as a matter of fact interesting and aesthetically satisfying projects come essentially from Eastern literature. East in this catalogue has no boundaries, and ranges from Iran, Russia, New Zealand, to closer areas such as Germany (former east German writers), Turkey, Armenia and we are considering publishing a Lebanese and an Indonesian writer.



Let us now extract from these examples some significant statements about trading ideas through books between East and West.

### **Broad aspects of today's book trading between East and West**



- French publishers can be considered a valid sampler for European literary trade since book market in France is fairly stable, it allows kind of pacific coexistence of big publishers doing trade books and small publishers doing creative literature, thus retaining at least part of its intellectual traditions, mission and standards.

- Eastern literature is intellectually attractive to west European publishers in search of renewal and interested in filling the void of knowledge imposed on writers, readers and publishers on both sides of the wall, by the long lasting cold war and ideological pressure. Until 1989 access to these books was difficult except for libraries, and political censorship along with tricky payment conditions were discouraging. Thus we simply ignore a massive amount of texts that could not be printed or remained hidden, confidential, forbidden and it will take time before we can catch up.

- In response to this frustration and urge and following the political opening of East Europe and its concurrent access to economic liberalism, east and west European publishers have indulged in an intensive book trading, buying licenses and translation rights in both directions: on the east side, publishers went in debts after signing too many contracts, printing too many copies, and accepting advance payments and percentages far above the price of books in Eastern Europe. They now reduce the pace, partially disregard West European books, and turn to Anglo Saxons productions commercially profitable yet intellectually cheaper. On the west side, legal matters in East Europe differ either from the American copyrights system or from French legal system distinguishing patrimonial and moral rights. An adjustment has to be found since most eastern writers - polish for example- retain their world rights and their publisher is neither

part nor interested in the translation contracts with western publishers. Moreover, as many of eastern books come from rare languages, few publishers have direct access to the text and the evaluation and decision making is uneasy as it goes through numerous intermediaries, translators, agents, scouts etc... Last but not least, there are technical differences in book promotion systems between west and east leading to significantly different results in sales and consistently to some bitterness: in France although it can be enhanced by the publisher, most of the book promotion relies on bookstores and depends on the bookstore keeper 's dynamism and motivation. In Eastern Europe, including Germany, most of the promotion business is centrally handled by the publisher. Technological adjustment has to be made too, to adapt western and eastern book grades and ease coproductions.

-The main barrier is however cultural and western publishers find it hard to overcome in order to broaden the audience for eastern literature. Outside a few visible and mediated authors, most of whom have settled in west Europe and do not publish in their native countries (like Milan Kundera, Andrei Makine or others), eastern literature is resulting in high translations costs, small critical interest, limited sales margin and confidential contribution to intercultural communication. Vera Michalski from *Noir sur Blanc* blames French reader's lack of curiosity and education that prevents them from fully understanding Polish literature. Thus publishing eastern literature is a challenge, intellectually stimulating task and western publishers who devote on purpose part or whole of their catalogues to it , recognize the unrivaled and ever creative quality of eastern picture or graphic tradition, especially Czech. Therefore the analysis should bring

nuances and separate the relative failure of literary fiction or non fiction from the fairly successful line of illustrated books coming from the east.

### **Case study of a book series dedicated to foreign literature : “Petits grands textes”**

In order to approach less technical and more intellectual issues of book trading between East and West in France, I would now like to focus on a specific series called “Petits grands textes” developed at l’Inventaire since 1996. At this stage, with 15 titles published in the same small easy handling format 16, 5 x 12 cm, it is possible to state common characteristics that reunite these texts and underline the specific and rich trend of ideas and aesthetics that west needs to import from the east. “Petits grands textes” consists in

- Foreign literature meaning an interest for others rather self focus or complacency.
- Great living or contemporary writers, highly recognized in their countries.
- Short texts that are neither secondary nor marginal, nor minor texts within their author’s work but that fully represent his or her main style of writing.
- Narrations or short novels, a narrative form that fully belongs to the linguistic and literary tradition from which the author originates.
- Excerpts, moments of living, an aesthetics that is freely and best practiced in eastern literature (while novels are a more recent and fragile

endeavor), that cannot be reduced to codified or conventional short stories or novellas, as we know them<sup>2</sup>.

- Subjective texts, “intimate” except that the confrontation between individual and global history gives a universal value to the experiment described.
- Committed texts, if anything because of the social, political context in which they were composed and towards which they are acts of defiance or rebellion.
- Texts that have often been censored and whose communication process – from author to reader- is full of obstacles.
- Texts that often have been exclusively published in translation in foreign countries, while the original remains prohibited, thus our bilingual editions that allow the coincidental release of both versions.
- texts that are all the more strong that they are short and use disguise and art, thus demanding an emotional and understanding reader’s contribution and response.
- Texts carefully written as if carved in the stone of language, to convey their message with minimal possible misunderstanding although they never flatly or blatantly denounce regimes or individual oppression.
- Consistently the book format is directly linked to the length of the texts and the specific, careful conception and aesthetics of the book, printed on thick

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<sup>2</sup> Ce qui explique peut-être en partie pourquoi, à ce jour, aucun texte traduit de l’anglais n’est entré dans cette série tandis que de les patrimoines littéraires d’Europe de l’Est, centrale, du Sud et du Proche et Moyen-Orient semblent très riches en la matière. La brièveté et concision ne fait pas tout, il entre dans cette série un critère supplémentaire de sensibilité, d’approche subjective de l’expérience historique et plus encore de *ton*. A ce jour, nous n’en avons pas trouvé d’exemples chez les écrivains de langue anglaise. Il y a toutefois fort à penser qu’une investigation de la littérature du continent indien pourrait se révéler fructueuse.

paper with wide margins, sometimes unusual ink color is meant to stress the quality of writing, to adjust to its rarity and rigor<sup>3</sup>.

- Significantly the media's and readers' reaction to the encounter provided by such texts leads to unexpected findings : exotic, specific historical and political features are undermined while literary assets, namely the art of the writers convey to the foreign western readers an intense feeling of broader kinship and common values.

I will not describe the editorial history of these texts which quite often got to the publishers' desk after strange and hazardous tribulations, manuscripts hidden or sawn in people coats for example, and simply underline that it takes sometimes years before these writings come to light if they ever do and that ideas coming from the east still need occidental support to be released and spread. Neither will I get in the details of the various tricks and traps encountered in the translation process of such texts that convey messages through implicit or allusive statements, parables, understatements, periphrases mixed with clichés or codified references that should not sound exotic to the reader of the translated version. Nor do I have the time to be more specific about one significant aspect of this publishing experiment, namely publishing Iranian contemporary writers and poets, although they provide a complete and thoughtful understanding of what trading ideas between East and West is about. All of these should be the matter of an entirely different paper.

I just want to point out the communicational<sup>4</sup> impact of foreign literature and book trade.

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<sup>3</sup> As opposed to standardized, commercial edition where the cheap, sometimes vulgar physical appearance of the book reflects strict marketing considerations, disregarding basic reading comfort and literary aesthetics. Cf Daniel Pennac, *Comme un roman*: "Et je massicote le papier au ras des mots pour que ma collection de poche soit plus rentable (texte sans marge aux lettres rabougries par l'étouffement), et que je te gonfle comme une baudruche ce tout petit roman pour donner à croire au lecteur qu'il en aura pour son argent, et que je te colle des « jaquettes » m'as-tu vu ? dont les couleurs et les titres énormes gueulent jusqu'à des cent cinquante mètres : « m'as-tu lu ? » Et que je te fabrique des exemplaires « club » en papier spongieux et couverture cartonneuse affublée d'illustrations débilitantes... »

## Communicational impact of publishing eastern literature in France

- A writer establishes bridges between different linguistic, cultural, emotional and aesthetic worlds. So does a publisher. Texts borrow from the world and have an effect on it through reading. Yves Bonnefoy, major poet and translator advises the reader to look up from the book to observe what it shows from the world.

- A publisher, whether he translates or not, questions the world implied by the book he intends to publish and the possible reception of this world within the cultural context of publication. Publishing is both a personal and collective gesture. It implies the publishers' own relationship to literature and cultures of the world as well as that of the audience which he addresses. He is also not an expert, and publishing is both a learning and teaching process.

-A publisher's catalogue is therefore not final, nor rational, nor thought as such, but reflects a rough, temporary and empirical state of knowledge, thinking

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<sup>4</sup> The general communicational value of book reading is another aspect that we cannot develop here but that is well understood by artists and authors themselves and clearly stated in their work. In many cases books are used as panels or posters connecting people, allowing characters to speak to address each other without speaking to each other : in Milan Kundera's *l'Insoutenable légèreté de l'être* (p. 75), when Tereza meets Thomas in the café where she used to be waiter, he has a book in front of him open on the table and it is for Tereza a sign of hidden fraternity since nobody has ever done that in the czechoslovakian context of the novel and she herself uses or "wears" books almost as accessories to distinguish herself. Next time they meet, she brings a book herself and carefully chooses Tolstoï's *Anna Karenina* :

*"Un livre ouvert était pose sur la table. Dans ce café, personne n'avait encore ouvert de livre sur une table. Pour Tereza, le livre était un signe de reconnaissance d'une fraternité secrète. Contre le monde de la grossièreté qui l'entourait, elle n'avait en effet qu'une seule arme : les livres qu'elle empruntait à la bibliothèque municipale ; surtout des romans... Ils lui offraient une chance d'évasion imaginaire en l'arrachant à une vie qui ne lui apportait aucune satisfaction, mais ils avaient aussi un sens pour elle en tant qu'objets ; elle aimait se promener dans la rue avec des livres sous le bras... Ils la distinguait des autres. »*

In Erri de Luca's *Trois Chevaux*, the main character reads while eating in a restaurant, looking up from the book from time to time : "Je tourne des pages dociles, des bouchées lentes, puis je lève la tête du blanc du papier et de la nappe, je suis la ligne du carrelage qui fait le tour de la pièce et qui passe derrière deux pupilles noires de femmes, mises sur cette ligne comme deux « mis » fendus de la ligne basse d'une portée musicale. Elles sont pointées sur moi. Je lève mon verre au même niveau et je le laisse en l'air avant de boire. Cet alignement force mes pommettes à ébaucher un sourire. La géométrie des choses environnantes fait maître des coïncidences, des rencontres. La femme, de face, me sourit. »

The film maker Jean-Luc Godard depicts books in numerous films both as texts heard as « off voice » and as physical objects used for fighting, suggesting, referring to extra filmic realities... ("Une femme est une femme", "Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle").

and reacting. There is no such thing as a methodical or systematic approach to literature but texts and books' encounter as well as release follows an idle and risky pace and order. Thus the voids or lacunas or mistakes or missing texts observed in foreign literature departments and especially eastern literature with minor texts and authors published before major ones, contemporary authors before classics, multiple versions of the same text in different catalogues with different translations or editions, scattering of texts with similar literary origins among several small publishers none of them having the means to promote it while bigger publishers follow their carrier from afar waiting for one author to stand out etc...

- The main asset of eastern literature lies in its political past and the part books played in its history. While the conditions in which books are received have an impact on what is being written in the same social and cultural context, western writers leaving in peace and in economic prosperity address western readers devoted to an information oriented society where reading is a leisure not a freedom right. Thus as writer Cesar Aira points it, occidental writing is gradually conceived of as a professional know how, whose techniques one can learn and master in order to produce entertainment. On the eastern side of Europe, in middle and Far East, expressing oneself, writing and reading have for years been individual rights people had to fight or to die for. In Iran, since the first centuries of our times, poetry has been the headquarter of a resistance to Islam and an ongoing diary or log for national history and identity. And links between classical and contemporary writers is extremely strong, the younger constantly referring to the older in order to keep their spirit. In view of this, publishing literature can be the means of a cultural discovery for western readers if the publisher forgets

occidental reading and literary categories, if he mingles texts from different periods, if he underlines the narrative and political value of poetry in eastern countries: its impact cannot be assimilated to that of our marginalized occidental poetry but seen as a leading instrument of political awareness and individual emancipation. It is especially true and visible in the long lasting tradition of political prisoner's memoirs connecting writers from different eastern countries such as the great Russian poet Ossip Mandelstam and a major Iranian writer like Houchang Golchiri<sup>5</sup>.

Indeed trading ideas and books between East and West, means importing Eastern literature into western countries as necessities : while the writer and editorial adviser Italo Calvino observed the growing gap in our occidental societies between Politics and Literature, eastern writers 's experiences enlightens strong connections between them, the power of literature revealing its strength when it is forbidden. Having experienced oppression, they still demonstrate today the need for a socially conscious writer, even if new eastern states have adopted western materialistic values.

### **New concepts about East**

Gradually the definition of East has evolved from geographic to philosophical meanings and to put it shortly :

- is considered Eastern any book that is an invitation to question and to look for one's identity through an exploration of the otherness. In these respect it

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<sup>5</sup> Houchang Golchiri (1937-2000), author of *Prince Ehtejâb* (L'Harmattan), of *Chronique de la victoire des Mages* (L'Inventaire, 1997), has written in 1987 such a memoir first published in English as *King of the Benighted*, Mage Publishers, in 1995, under a pseudonym and a false publisher's name then published in French as *Le Roi des Noir-Vêtus*, Ed. L'Inventaire, 2002.



is the specific value of poetry to allow an exchange of ideas and a feeling of kinship despite linguistic and cultural barriers.

- Is considered Eastern any book that allows a travel of the mind and thus produces a reflection on how to use the world. Significantly Claudio Magris's novel *Danube*, altogether a travel book, literary essay, historical enquiry, philosophical meditation translated into more than ten languages, is both a masterpiece in recent European literature and a major contribution to the understanding of European complex identity.

- Is considered Eastern any book that is seeking to speak the truth of the world and it is worth remembering that in many regions where information is controlled or censored, it is still through literature that journalists can state truth beyond facts. Seno Ajidarmi, a south East Asian writer and journalist who was sacked from the magazine *Jakarta Jakarta* after publishing strict eyewitness reports from of the 1990's bloody events in East Timor known as the *Dili Incident*, testifies through his novellas and novels that fiction is the place for truth, although he has to hide it among purely fictional chapters, insert a limited number of clues and conceal the exact situation his short stories are telling to escape the self-censorship of the editorial committees of the mass media wherever he sends the stories. Of course this desire to foil the journalist's gagging through literature enhances western publishers' curiosity and interest for the book.

Although you might think I have derived from my initial standpoint, my conclusion will be that examples given of publishing experiments between East and West in France do suggest how publishers influence their community and establish intellectual hierarchies that try to balance or counteract economical

hierarchies. Despite the relative modesty of sales for eastern literature, their contribution is decisive since Europe is in a building or rebuilding process, thus literarily fertile and productive. While Stefan Zweig in 1928 and after him Vaclav Havel in *Summer meditation*, considered that as European writers they were looking after an “open house”, it is the west European publisher’s task and mission to make sure the door remains open, to record and register the to and fro.

However, this purely intellectual approach of book trading will sound utopian or just unrealistic with respect to the current economical liberalism affecting the global market of books and not just the United States, as it did until recently. Concentration takes its toll and literature pays the price. Although the asset of book trading between East and West proves a substantial increase of information – namely displacing facts of life from one area to another- it also underlines a decrease in transmission – or displacing facts in time from one period to another. This general distinction brought by Régis Debray in

- *After a comparison with other French publishers interested in Eastern literature, the communication will explain the editorial policy and criteria leading to the discovery of these often forbidden or hidden texts: in view of this, ideas coming from the east still need occidental support to be released and spread.*
- *The exotic asset of the eastern or oriental text is undermined while readers rather have a feeling of kinship and common values; yet, the status of books in many eastern countries whether they are east European or muslim states, is superior and stronger than in western Europe or in the United states. So these texts have literarily and politically a didactic or educational value.*
- *This publishing experiment – which does not focus on a specific linguistic or geographical area- suggests that there could be such a thing as a European union*

*of books beyond strict boundaries separating east from west, and that western publishers may act as cultural ambassadors contributing to the general debate and process of a growing European union.*

**Brigitte Ouvry-Vial**, ancienne élève de l'Ecole normale supérieure, agrégée de Lettres modernes, Ph'D (Columbia University), is currently Professeur associé at Université Paris 7, Literary and editorial director of Editions L'Inventaire.

She has published numerous articles and books on French XXth century literature and now concentrates on studying the publisher's/ editor's act as a critical and interpretative approach of literature.

Since 2004, she chairs G.E.S.T. (Geste Editorial : Situations, Théories) an interdisciplinary research group devoted to editorial and publishing topics.

In November 2005, she co-organized a comparative symposium (with Université Paris IV) on « L'Acte éditorial à la Renaissance et aujourd'hui ».

#### Abstract

For more than ten years now, and almost 80 titles, Editions L'Inventaire, a small publishing company represented in bookstores by Actes Sud commercial team and devoted to foreign literature, has been publishing

The communication will explain the editorial policy and criteria guiding the choices and the circumstances leading to the discovery of these often forbidden or hidden texts: in view of this, ideas coming from the east still need occidental support to be released and spread. Yet, it will also analyze the media's and readers' reaction to the encounter provided by the texts and in this respect, it leads to some unexpected findings : the exotic asset of the eastern or oriental text

is undermined while readers rather have a feeling of kinship and common values; yet, the status of books in many eastern countries whether they are east European or muslim states, is superior and stronger than in western Europe or in the United states. So these texts have literarily and politically a didactic or educational value.

This publishing experiment – which does not focus on a specific linguistic or geographical area- suggests that there could be such a thing as a European union of books beyond strict boundaries separating east from west, and that western publishers may act as cultural ambassadors contributing to the general debate and process of a growing European union.

*Quand l'ouest publie l'Est, Information ou transmission ? Le cas des éditeurs français de littérature d'Europe de l'est et orientale.*