

Paul Sheeran  
Literature and International Relations  
(Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007, 238pp.)

Paul Sheeran had written an earlier book *Cultural Politics in International Relations* which highlighted the role of popular culture in opening creative space in the Soviet Union. In this book he tries to place cultural influences — basically literary — at the center of international relations. As he notes “The book is specifically concerned with the use of literature as a vehicle to make sense of international relations. It is suggested that the use of literature — a literature that speaks through the various voices of fiction, music and art informs actions that may have dramatic consequences in the relations between states.”

By wishing to cover so much ground both in time and space, the book is more an outline of topics that could be developed rather than an analysis of each topic. There are at least six themes that would merit discussion, but none is fully developed.

- 1) Literary and cultural influences on political leaders who create the broad framework of diplomatic efforts: the Bible on Woodrow Wilson, the Roman Empire and Jules Caesar on Benito Mussolini, the operas of Richard Wagner on Adolph Hitler.
- 2) Literary influences on those writers on diplomacy and international relations which have reached a broad public of international relations specialists and practicing diplomats: Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Weber on Hans J. Morgenthau (see the intellectual biography of Morgenthau by Christoph Frei who had access to his student notebooks where Morgenthau listed what he read and thought). Frederick L. Schuman, whose *International Politics* was widely read in the 1930s and 1940s often quotes *Alice in Wonderland* as his guide to world politics.
- 3) Diplomats who were themselves writers of quality: Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Pablo Neruda, Ivo Andrić of *The Bridge on the Drina*, St Jean Perse who as Alexis Léger was Secretary General of the Quai d’Orsay, the French Foreign Office, in the years leading up to the Second World War.
- 4) Writers who as symbols influenced international relations: Thomas Mann as an exile and opponent of Nazi Germany while representing the best of German culture, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn as an exile and opponent of the Soviet Union while representing the best of Russian culture. Jean Paul Sartre as a political conscience even for those who never read his longer works. His introduction to Franz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* stands out.
- 5) Writers who influence a popular appreciation of a period or a country: E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India* or the earlier *Kim* of Rudyard Kipling on “The Great Game”. Ernest Hemmingway, André Malraux, and George Orwell on the Spanish Civil War, Graeme Greene’s novel *The Comedians* for Haiti or his *The Quiet American* for Vietnam, Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago* (and the film) on the Russian Revolution, Arthur Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon* on the Stalinist trials, Pearl Buck’s *The Good Earth* on rural China, James Hilton’s *Lost Horizon* (and the film) on Tibet.

- 6) Writers who highlight new international issues such as urbanization. When Pearl Buck wrote *The Good Earth* the majority of the world's people lived in rural areas, and she called attention in a dramatic way to the rural populations of China. Today, half of all the people of the world live in urban areas, and writers need to stress the nature of urban life. The image of New York City will always be colored by J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and perhaps more by Woody Allen's film *Manhattan*.

The aim of Sheeran's study is clear. "World literature is an amazing resource for cultural investigations of all kinds. The breath-taking scope of international literature produces insight to understanding a range of issues active in international relations: common themes that unite literature and civilisation. Each generation struggles to defend or transform the forces that enslave or liberate it, this occurs in the nation and the home." Sheeran has presented a useful outline which needs to be filled out.

Rene Wadlow

