The Problem of Sovereignty in Regimes of European Literature Transfer

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I am unhappy with the ways Comparative Literature tackles intercultural relations. This is not to say that I prefer nationalist methods. But I am basically unimpressed with studies of universal parallelisms, fragmentary influences, or movements falsely assumed to be homogeneously intercultural. Most of our discipline has no real discovery procedures, no substantially falsifiable hypotheses and no real defence against the non-comparative nationalisms currently disintegrating a good part of Europe. So it was out of discontent that I turned to the theory of international negotiations, to see if it could help. Here is what I found, how I have tried to use it, and how it has presented me with a major problem of what to do with sovereignty.

Regime Theory in a Nutshell

In the 1970s the study of political and commercial negotiations gradually dropped the vocabulary of "international systems" and started talking about "regimes". In 1977 Keohane and Nye gave a simple definition of a regime as a "set of governing arrangements organising relations of interdependence".[1] In 1980 a collective definition was a little more detailed:

"A regime is made up of explicit or implicit sets of principles, norms, rules and negotiation procedures in terms of which actor expectations converge on a field of international relations and through which the individual behaviour of these actors can be coordinated."[2]

Elements of regime theory might fruitfully be introduced into Comparative Literature. But if this is to be done, the discovery of regimes pertinent to literature transfer will have to proceed on two levels: the abstract "principles, norms, rules and procedures" described above, but also the material communication and transport networks in which these principles are or were operative. That is, transfer regimes must be anchored in historical time and space. But how should the axes of time and space be described? In terms of what national or international units? Such is the beginning of my problem with sovereignty. Examples follow.

Regimes and Systems

Since part of Comparative Literature is nowadays enamoured of systems, I should perhaps stress the differences between regimes and cultural systems as you have long known them. Instead of analyzing confrontations and transfers between open but independent entities, regime theory concentrates on contacts and negotiations themselves as a space organized by its own systemic principles. Instead of having two centres disappearing into two peripheries where transfers somehow occur as expressions of those centres, it looks at the intercultural frontier itself as a centre especially designed for the carrying out of transfers. For instance, one could compare the different systems of agricultural subsidies in the EEC and the United States in order to arrive at certain conclusions about international transfers of wheat. But regime theory is more interested in the way representatives of these systems come together and broadly agree on the terms in which their differences can be discussed. In this case the regime concerned is the GATT, which comprises certain general principles like the desirability of a global agreement and a general move to free trade, as well as a certain material network linking the participating countries. Even when, as in this particular example, the negotiations are relatively unsuccessful and the independent systems appear incompatible, the regime still exists to the extent that the actors agree to keep talking. Indeed, according to more recent theories, the fact that representatives continue to meet may qualify them as forming a relatively autonomous "epistemic community". But I leave that for later discussions.

Instead of maintaining distances between cultures, this approach thus tries to see frontiers as forming shared spaces for dialogue and exchange. The theory forces one to look at the way different parties come together and interact.

Who Negotiates Literature Transfers?

Can this basic idea be applied to Comparative Literature? Is it possible to discover regimes of literature transfer? Who would the negotiators be? Where and when would they come together? Perhaps a further anology will help answer these questions.

If a star soccer player is going to be transferred, representatives of the clubs concerned come together and try to work out some arrangement. Here it not difficult to see a certain regime: there is a network (the clubs are linked by national leagues and international associations), there are various general principles (cash payments and subsidiary transfers) and the negotiators represent the interests of quite independent systems (the clubs themselves, open in that they exchange and often depend on outside

players). But is this kind of transfer really analogous to what we mean by literature transfer?

If a literary text is to be transferred, there are of course certain business arrangements by which publishers settle royalty payments and translation rights, using readily identifiable and quite concrete commercial regimes. Yet Comparative Literature has humanistic foundations that merit a more profound view of literature transfers. Publishers and their representatives are not quite the actors that most interest us. It is of far more importance to look at the ways in which a given text becomes a candidate for transfer or is refused right of entry. Who really decides what external elements a literature should import? Who really decides which texts should be exported? Any adequate answer should include not only publishers but also the editors, critics, writers and assorted opinion-makers who most influence the way cultural systems open and close. These then would be our actors: an extensive group of intermediaries.

Now, are these intermediaries like those who organize football transfers? In many ways, yes. They form networks; they act according to general historical principles. But do they represent any particular home club? Are they bound to act in the interests of their native cultures? Indeed, do they have home clubs or native cultures? These questions are rather more interesting. Cultural intermediaries are mostly motivated by reasons that are more than mercenary, often corresponding to something like "the good of the game" or "universal value"; they are mostly not opposed to the external cultures with which they deal. Nor do they have to be. Thanks to the basic material fact of text reproduction through reprinting, re-editing or translation, one culture's gain is not necessarily another's loss. A footballer is not supposed to play for two clubs at once, but a literary text can be transferred and yet still function in the source culture. The kind of transfer we are dealing with is in this respect not at all like that of footballers: one can be on the side of a particular culture, but as Hilde Domin has put it, "writers do not form football teams fighting for the honour of their national flag".[3]

This gives rise to a major problem of representativeness. The actors we are concerned with cannot really be considered representatives of any one culture. They tend to decide and act in accordance with ethical or aesthetic principles of intercultural extension. They can thus often remain decidedly marginal within their national contexts. And they can form minor intercultural communities among themselves, even at considerable distances.

This relative lack of representativeness compounds my problem with sovereignty.

An Example: Sovereignty and Supranationality in a Colonialist Regime

Puchala and Hopkins have applied regime theory to the economic and political relations between the major colonialist powers of the period 1870-1914.[4] The general principles they attribute to this regime may be summarized as follows:

1. *Bifurcation of civilization:* A centre of civilized Europeans was opposed to a wide periphery of savages.
2. *Government at distance:* It was legitimate for a colonial power to rule over distant lands.
3. *Accumulation of foreign land:* The prestige of a power was measured in terms of the territory it controlled.
4. *Need to maintain the balance of power:* European powers expected compensation for any changes to their colonial borders.
5. *Neo-mercantilism:* After 1880 the principle of free trade gave way to a system whereby each European power organized the economy of its colonies to suite its own requirements.
6. *Non-intervention:* Each colonial power had the right to act as it saw fit in its own domains.

The notion of reciprocal sovereignty is particularly clear in points 5 and 6, which exclude the possibility of any content-based supranational ethics. The colonialist powers thus recognized each other's sovereignty at the same time as they refused to recognize any sovereignty on the periphery.

As much as one nowadays talks of colonialist-imperialist culture, remarkably few of the above principles really apply to European literature transfers of the period, if only because the "peripheral" countries supplying raw materials to colonialist economies were mostly not those semi-developed countries receiving European literary influences. It is stupid to pretend that literary relations were as imperialist as economic relations. When I attempted such a projection[5], the only correlatives I found for the above principles were as follows:

1. *Bifurcation of civilization:* The Paris-London centre was opposed to a wide exoticized periphery.
2. *Superiority of passive influence:* The most influential authors were those at the centre who apparently sought not to exert any influence; intercultural influence often began after the death of the author.
3. *Legitimacy of accumulated aesthetics:* On the periphery it was more important to be aware of several aesthetics than to follow any one master.
4. *Principle of professional fraternity:* Progressive oppositional "movements" replaced the master/apprentice relationships implicit in the Romantic idea of the "school".

5. *Superiority of the unknown:* Through exoticism, distance itself produced positive values: South America could be exotic in Paris, just as Paris could be exotic in South America.

6. *Supra-nationality of intellectuals:* Particularly following the Dreyfus Affair, intermediaries took up ethical causes despite local or national allegiances.

Elaboration of this regime would require many pages. But the simple point I want to make is that the sovereignty recognized in the political and economic regime did not extend to international literary relations. The principles of the literary regime were instead based on mostly intercultural ethics and aesthetics, negating the basic axioms of non-intervention. The geometry of centre and periphery was common to economics and literature, but the literary regime did not use sovereignty to define the specificity of its centre.

We thus find that a certain lack of representativity leads to marked failure to reproduce sovereignty on the literary level. A brief example might indicate how this can change the object of Comparative Literature.

A Peculiar Case Study: Darío and Brennan on Mallarmé

Consider two of the poets whom Valéry imagined defending Mallarmé from provincial towns across the globe.[6] In the months following Mallarmé's death in 1898, the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío compared him to a great bullfighter[7] and the Australian Christopher Brennan insisted he was a hard worker.[8] The two receptions of Mallarmé were very different. A systemic approach might seek to explain the bullfighter in terms of Hispanic bullfighting and the hard work in terms of Australians working in the bush. But would anyone really be enlightened by such explanations? After all, Darío was as fit for bullfighting as Brennan was qualified for manual labour (in fact, both were on the way to becoming confirmed alcoholics). Hopefully, we can use regime theory to find greater common ground. But to do so we have to forget about national reception systems for a while and carefully consider the indirect links between Darío and Brennan.

Where are Transfers Carried Out?

It is biographically impossible that Darío and Brennan ever met, and quite probable that they never knew of each other's existence. And yet it is possible to explain some of their beliefs and actions in terms of shared intercultural principles. They were both strongly influenced by French culture, which was at the literary centre of their day, and

it is even possible to find them referring to the same authorities and citing the same phrases. So what kind of transfer network are we then dealing with?

Unlike the transfer of footballers, literature transfers can involve agreement between widely separated individuals. The assumption of actual contact is not necessary. The geometry of this network will thus not be of converging points but of lines that connect distant points, both directly and indirectly.

A transfer network of *fin de siècle* literary influences can be mapped with at least enough certitude for a fairly coherent form to emerge. My own version[9] is a large irregular triangle tracing the influence of post-Romantic lyrical discourses from their central French-English locus to a wide periphery, indicating increasing synchronicity as the twentieth century approaches. This general form is not problematic: the triangle means that transfer mostly went from the centre to peripheries like Nicaragua and Australia, making the centre itself the link between peripheral points. It is not difficult to see how Darío and Brennan, although never in direct contact, could both be involved in the same regime.

However, the real problem concerns the actual points marking the beginnings and ends of each line in the network. Where do transfers begin? When can they be said to reach terminal points?

When I first attempted to map this network, my spatial axis was marked in terms of countries: France, Britain, Germany, Spain, etc. I assumed that the start and finish points should be in some way national; I assumed that the principle of sovereignty must be pertinent. Or rather, I side-stepped a major problem by unthinkingly adopting an external analytical regime, in much the same way as Armin Paul Frank has attempted to simplify the categories of intercultural research by suggesting that "Nation sei hier zunächst im Sinne der Vereinigten Nationen UN verstanden (wiewohl historisch Differenzierungen notwendig sind)".[10] This is a convenient reference because the UN is ostensibly based on a regime of sovereignty, like an association of football clubs who agree to recognize each other as football clubs before playing against each other. But are the principles of reciprocal national sovereignty always pertinent to literature transfer? Given the nature of the colonial regime outlined above, I suspect not. Sovereignty cannot automatically structure our metalanguage.

As I proceeded with my map, it became clear that there were also some quite practical problems with national sovereignty. What should be done with Catalan literature? Should I put in all twenty-one Latin-American republics? Should what we now (at the time of writing) call Czecho-Slovakia figure as one, two or three countries? How many Belgiums? Should Australia appear as six colonies until 1901 and thereafter as an individual country? And so on. Sovereignty provides no simple answer to these questions. In fact, sovereignty only really worked for the major European colonial powers, and even then at the price of hiding their internal colonialism (where should I

have put Scottish, Welsh and Irish literatures?). My map could show the existence of certain kinds of sovereignty, but its grid units should not have presupposed sovereignty.

I think the correct solution here is to have the adequate analytical units for each historical regime somehow ensue from the object of study. In this case, once I recognized that cultural intermediaries were not representatives of sovereign entities (neither of nations, nor of cultures, nor of languages), I began to pay attention to what they were actually doing, where they were actually going, and where the transfers they facilitated actually reached their linkages and endpoints. My first conclusion was that the actors in this network were themselves highly mobile, indeed perhaps as mobile as the literature they transferred. The second conclusion was then that the places they moved between were not nations, not cultures, not languages, but cities, mostly the largest cities of the day, the cities most open to intercultural comings, goings and mixings. Darío was not writing from his native Nicaragua, where there were no bullfights anyway. His comment on Mallarmé, pretending to cite a mediocre Spanish poet, was made in Madrid, ironizing both Spanish bullfights as seen through French eyes and French literature as seen through Spanish eyes. Mallarmé-as-bullfighter cannot be understood without the extremely cosmopolitan context of Darío-as-traveller. Similarly, Brennan did not form his opinion of Mallarmé in Sydney. It was as a student in Berlin that he discovered the French poet, whom he took pains to distinguish from the image of *décadence* promulgated by in the same years by Nordau and his followers. The Australian's reception of Mallarmé was first a result of Brennan-as-traveller. Far from acting as national representatives, Darío and Brennan were both poets whose strategies evolved from moves between cities.

Large multicultural cities were where the strands of this particular network joined in order for literature transfer to take place. If I were to draw my map again, there would be no talk of nations. I would seek the greater relevance and permanence of bricks-and-mortar, drawing lines that would link non-Europeans like Darío and Brennan through a tight and complex network of very European centres. Remarkably, the part of the network most pertinent to this case extends only across Europe, linking Paris with Madrid and Berlin (with no major line going directly between Madrid and Berlin). But were our poets' non-European countries then without consequence?

On the level of general principles, Darío and Brennan remained Nicaraguan and Australian enough to find certain home-grown reasons for turning to Mallarmé, most interestingly the belief that it was better to find models in France than in the former colonial powers of Spain and Britain (overdetermined in the case of Brennan by repugnance at militaristic Prussia). The distance of the French model, the third term, could then act as a "cultural lever" by which they sought relative independence from the binarism of their known colonialist relations. There were thus strong extra-

European reasons for transfers which took place within the European network. And there was no sovereignty at stake.

Although this "cultural lever" strategy must be considered pertinent only to cases of recent decolonization, it was entirely compatible with the general regime for literature transfer outlined above. In fact, the general regime positively invited intermediaries to betray nationalist principles, to leave their native countries and to oppose the formerly colonizing cultures. Darío and Brennan acted entirely in keeping with the international literary regime of their day.

The Future of Sovereignty

If appropriate analytical categories are to be drawn from the object of study, great care should be taken not to confuse present regimes with their past or future configurations. Categories like the UN "nations" cited by Frank might appear solid enough, particularly when backed up by UNESCO declarations proclaiming "respect for the value and dignity of each culture, for independence, for national sovereignty and for non-intervention".[11] But this is itself a highly specific historical regime. Moreover, its principle of reciprocal sovereignty has long been losing weight in actual negotiation practice. UN declarations concerning Iraq, Kurdistan, Libya and more recently Yugoslavia, to say nothing of the principles of organizations like Amnesty International, bypass the classical norms of sovereignty. It is no longer axiomatic that each country can do what it likes within its own territory; it is no longer clear what "nation in the UN sense" really means. The principle of mutual respect is being questioned not only on the economic level but more particularly on the ethical level, where frequent calls for international intervention are revealing the lack of a diplomatic principles adequate to such actions. We are at a moment of major regime change.

What consequences does this have for literary regimes? Do the changes occurring in other spheres determine what happens in literature?

I suspect that the status of major principles like sovereignty is only revealed by test cases which force actors to decide one way or the other. Towards the end of the last century the major test cases were the *Entartung* debate and the Dreyfus Affair. Towards the end of our own century the most revealing text case is perhaps the *fatwa* directed against Salman Rushdie. What can this tell us about the present priority of sovereignty?

On the surface, it would seem that current literary principles are even less concerned with sovereignty than was the case in the *fin de siècle* regime. *The Satanic Verses* have brought about considerable supranational solidarity between intellectuals and publishers, a supranationality also recognized oppositionally through attacks on the text's Italian and Japanese translators. However, non-respect for national sovereignty

was precisely one of the major principles underlying the *fatwa.* How could the same principle also be used to argue against such transcultural threats? Quite logically, Salman Rushdie now argues that more should be done for him by the British government, that there should have been better UN negotiations between Britain and Iran, and that he should be defended as a citizen of a sovereign state. The change is underlined in a recent newspaper comment:

"Back in 1989, at one of the first demonstrations denouncing the *fatwa*, writers wore buttons saying 'I am Salman Rushdie'. Now the real Salman Rushdie wears a T-shirt that says 'Joe Bloggs'."[12]

Paradoxically, the principle of sovereignty is returning to the fringes of the contemporary literary regime, precisely at a time when other regimes are abandoning it. Is it entirely by chance that a writer-president was the last symbol of Czecho-Slovak sovereignty? There are obviously causal relationships between all these levels - quite direct relationships in the case of the *fatwa* -, but the lesson to be drawn is that literary regimes are not simply representations or expressions of what happens on other levels of international relations. Considerable negitivity is involved. Literature can contradict and contest the principles that form its international context.

Conclusion: Some Advantages of Regime Theory

The notion of regimes presupposes neither the relative homogeneity of transcultural movements nor the discrete specificities supporting comparative influence studies. In historical terms, it belongs neither to the universalism of the eighteenth century nor to the nationalism of the nineteenth century, although both universalism and nationalism could certainly be described as major principles of certain regimes. In practical terms, the discovery and study of regimes is based not on comparison between stable entities but on close attention to what happens on intercultural frontiers.

Perhaps more importantly, I am interested in regimes not because they might explain any social or political conditioning of literature, but because specifically literary regimes might be able to dialogue with and ultimately help humanize other levels of international relations. This idealist outlook makes me feel a little happier.

Notes

1. R. O. Keohane and J. S. Nye, "International Regime Change", in *Power and Interdependence* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977).

2. Conference on International Regimes, Los Angeles 1980; cited in J. A. Finlayson and M. W. Zacher, "The GATT and the regulation of trade barriers: regime dynamics and functions", *International Organization* 35/4 (1981), 563.

3. Hilde Domin, *Wozu Lyrik heute. Dichtung und Leser in der gesteuerten Gesellschaft* (Munich: Piper, 1968), 195.

4. D. J. Puchala and R. F. Hopkins, "International regimes: lessons from inductive analysis", *International Organization* 26/2 (1982).

5. Anthony Pym, "Les notions de «réseau» et de «régime» en relations littéraires internationales", *L'Internationalité littéraire* ed. Anthony Pym. (Paris/Barcelona: Noésis, 1988), 5-18; and *Translation and Text Transfer. An Essay on the Principles of Intercultural Communication* (Frankfurt/Main, Bern, Vienna, New York, Paris: Peter Lang, 1992), 140-145.

6. "Il s'isole de tous dans l'amour sans partage et dans la confidence de votre œuvre, difficile à trouver, à entendre, à défendre". Paul Valéry, "Je disais quelquefois à Mallarmé", *Variété III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1936), 9.

7. "Salvador Rueda, no hallando otra cosa mejor que decirme de su torero, me clava: '¡Es Mallarmé!'." Rubén Darío, "¡Toros!" (6 April 1899), *Prosa modernista hispanoamericana. Antología* ed. Roberto Yahni (Madrid: Alianza, 1974), 91.

8. For Brennan, Mallarmé was above all "no *décadent"*, despite his quantitatively meagre *œuvre*. See "Was Mallarmé a Great Poet?" (5 November 1898), *The Prose of Christopher Brennan,* ed. A. R. Chisholm and J. J. Quinn (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1965), 281. Mallarmé died on 9 Sept. 1898.

9. In "Les notions de «réseau» et de «régime» en relations littéraires internationales", *L'Internationalité littéraire,* ed. Anthony Pym (Paris/Barcelona: Noésis, 1988), 9.

10. Armin Paul Frank, *Anthologien als Repertoirebildner: Übersetzungsanthologien als Übersetzungs-kulturbilder und -bildner. Göttingen Ringprojekt "Übersetzungsanthologien"* (Göttingen: photocopied working paper, 1992), 4.

11. "Final Report", *World Conference on Cultural Policies* (Mexico City: UNESCO, 1982), 45.

12. Geraldine Brooks, "Darkness at lunchtime", *The Guardian* 16 July 1992.