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Author(s): BARBARA FUCHS

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theories and methodologies

Another Turn for Transnationalism: Empire, Nation, and Imperium in Early Modern Studies

BARBARA FUCHS

BARBARA FUCHS is professor of Spanish and English at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she directs the Center for Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Studies, the Clark Memorial Library, and the Working Group on the *Comedia* in Translation and Performance. Her most recent book is *The Poetics of Piracy: Emulating Spain in English Literature* (U of Pennsylvania P, 2013), and she has published translations of early modern Spanish Moorish tales and of Cervantes's plays of captivity. A past editor of *Hispanic Review*, she has also coedited *The Norton Anthology of World Literature* (9th ed. [2012]) and *The Norton Anthology of Western Literature* (9th ed. [2014]).

HOW MIGHT EARLY MODERN STUDIES PARTICIPATE IN THE LARGER CONVERSATIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES while attending to the specificities of the age? How might we develop and mobilize period-specific understandings of a moment when states aspire to both empire and nation? My inquiry is motivated not only by the questions posed by the cluster of essays to which it belongs but also by the generalized, and often historically imprecise, move to *transnationalism* as a catchall for work that complicates our traditional nation-based categories. As I will suggest here, despite the strategic advantages of transnationalism for forging transhistorical connections, for developing a critical pedagogy, and for interrogating our own academy, the approach threatens to occlude the intertwined histories of nation and empire, even as it fails to capture the liminal, transitional qualities of the early modern. Instead, I propose a focus on imperium, to highlight the mimetic rivalries occurring among emergent empires at the very time they solidify sovereignty. Imperium studies challenges the self-sufficient histories of nation and empire by arguing for their imbrication and competition: only a plural history of the intersections among them can provide the full picture. Moreover, imperium studies explicitly engages with the multiple early modern temporalities, as well as allegiances—to an imperial future, certainly, but also to a classical past that remained central as exemplar and motivator and to the imperfect, incomplete work of nation making. My own work focuses on European dynamics of imperial competition, particularly in relation to Spain's increasing hegemony as an empire in the Old World and the New, and to England's belated attempts to imitate its imperial success. Yet it identifies cultural and textual phenomena that extend across hemispheres because of Rome's contested nature as imperial exemplum and predecessor. Thus, Ottomans and Incas engage with a Roman imperial imaginary as they argue for their imperial status. In this essay, I trace some of the challenges posed for early modern studies by the transnational turn, and I propose how a model of impe-

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rium studies might address them. I then turn to resolutely metropolitan texts, to show how imperium studies enables us to trace imperial rivalries and contradictions well beyond the texts that explicitly engage imperial contexts.

For many early modernists, the seeming omnipresence of the transnational turn will be reason for suspicion, yet it offers significant opportunities. And for those whose critical commitment includes interrogating the early modern national canon—in my case, a joint deconstructive and postcolonial engagement—the transnational moment represents a chance to make important inroads. The challenge, then, is how to bring transnationalism to bear on early modernity while attending to the particular status of the nation in the period. What, after all, can a transnational approach mean for a moment when the nation itself is incipient? Despite its imperfect fit, this approach provides the occasion for considering the contingency of the nation as ideological construct and historical development, acutely felt in early modernity. As Laura Doyle has stated, "[T]ransnational studies puts nations back into the dialectical history from which they emerged" ("Towards a Philosophy" 1). Moreover, transnationalism challenges the primacy of the nation as organizing principle for early modern literary studies—one that has proved virtually impervious to our interrogation over the last twenty years or so. It unpacks the intertwined histories of philology and nationalism that have led to our present disciplinary configurations, to which it imagines alternatives.

Yet, for all that, transnationalism is more suited to the disciplines we inherited from a nationalistic nineteenth century than to the cultural objects and movements of the sixteenth. For while transnational readings will certainly enliven a purely national purview, they leave out the crucial register of empire and imperial competition. Although a welcome development in relation to purely national preoccupations, then, an early modern transnational approach must attend to the multiple connections between languages, literatures, and imperial imperatives to explore how national exceptionalisms are built on transnational and interimperial appropriations and how the nation emerges from the crucible of imperial rivalries. Attention to this imperial register complexifies our readings while reflecting the historical specificity of the period. Moreover, if we are to develop historically precise models that sacrifice neither conceptual capaciousness nor pedagogical efficacy, transnational readings must be assessed in relation to the existing approaches that also take us beyond the nation.

Over the last twenty-five years or so (1992 and the Columbian anniversary provide a rough starting point), the study of early modern empire has led to strong work beyond the national-literature paradigms, even as transnationalism per se has made limited inroads in early modern studies. Oceanic models, both transatlantic and Mediterranean (and, incipiently, Pacific), have energized the national literatures, although they present certain stubborn challenges. Transatlantic studies, despite its potential to suture the artificial division between metropolitan and colonial in various fields, has often devolved into an English-only, North Atlantic version, challenged in particular by Hispanic colonial studies. It is thus unclear how thoroughly transatlantic studies might permeate or transform the powerful national disciplines of English and American studies (Bauer; Cañizares-Esguerra). Mediterranean studies, a more recent development, has had an uneven impact. It has led to a sustained, though somewhat isolated, interest in England's relations with North Africa and the Ottoman Empire, and its bibliography, too extensive to cite here, has nonetheless had limited effects on English studies. This is the case also, to a lesser extent, for France. In Hispanic studies, Mediterranean approaches complement ongoing work on multilingual,

interregional, and interconfessional politics and transculturation, offering rich possibilities. Yet Mediterranean studies' periodic return to geological time and to a space defined above all by geography, à la Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell's *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, tends to minimize the political and cultural transformations of the early modern period.

The greatest challenge remains transcending the distinctions between a sequestered "postcolonial"/transatlantic/Mediterranean canon, imagined as extraneous to both the metropole and the national literary fields, and the metropolitan texts and disciplines that proceed as usual, ever resilient in the face of these new configurations. To move beyond these artificial distinctions, we need a purview that accounts for the mobility of metropolitan texts and their audiences: translation studies, book history, and comparative drama seem particularly promising in this regard (Bistué; Coldiron; Campbell and Larsen; Henke and Nicholson). Connecting this exciting, primarily metropolitan work with ongoing work on early modern empire would offer the most comprehensive account of how early modern texts operate and circulate on the broadest scale.

History offers alternatives for such large-scale approaches, including world history. Yet, as various literary scholars have pointed out, these approaches seem ill suited to the analysis of complex rhetorical forms and often uninterested in culture altogether. More productively, Sanjay Subrahmanyam's notion of connected or intertwined histories attends to their cultural dimensions while firmly relativizing both Europe and the emergence of the nation-state ("Connected Histories" 739). When Subrahmanyam surveys the global landscape as late as the Peace of Westphalia (1648), he sees "for the most part a patchwork of competing and intertwined empires, punctuated by the odd interloper in the form of a nascent 'nation-state'" ("Holding" 1359). To focus on transnationalism, then, is to risk restricting ourselves to Europe, where those odd interlopers appear, and losing sight of the larger horizons that Subrahmanyam's work illuminates.

Even in Europe, of course, early modern nations exist in a messy process of becoming. As they disengage from larger medieval units such as Christendom or the Holy Roman Empire, they often embark on new imperial pursuits, mimicking earlier ones for ideological advantage, as in Ferdinand and Isabella's yoking of their expansionist ambitions to the defense of Christendom, or in Charles V's new, global version of the Holy Roman Empire, or in the widespread invocation of Rome as imperial precedent. As Doyle puts it, "[M]ost nations, including European nations, have emerged in relation to past and contemporaneous empires (although Europeans have typically traced their origins to one empire and erased their borrowings from others)" ("Inter-imperiality" 161).

The very concept of the early modern nation is slippery. Medieval notions of an ethnic *natio* solidify by the fifteenth century into competing agents in a system of geographically based nations, whether at religious councils, where they vie for primacy, or at the universities, where "nations" organize students from particular places. These versions coexist with more recognizably modern notions of the nation, organized around dynastic monarchies and strong centralized rule associated with bounded territories, which in turn move swiftly, if with varying degrees of success, from territorial consolidation to extended empire. Thus, immediately following the conquest of Nasrid Granada, Ferdinand intervenes in Naples, and in the early years of the sixteenth century Spain attempts an ill-fated expansion into North Africa. Soon after, local versions of the Reformation accelerate the disaggregation of Christendom into various flavors of Christian nations, much to the distress of humanists who perceived their nations' individual vulnerabilities to the en-

croaching threat of Muslim powers. At the same time, the European encounter with the New World raises the stakes of imperial competition, exporting Christendom's internal rifts across the Atlantic. In fact, the closer one looks the more difficult it becomes to disentangle the early modern nations from their nascent empires. In addition to the examples above, one might consider Portugal's imperial exploration or England's archipelagic empire.

Imperium studies offers a model for analyzing this conflation of European national consolidation and imperial expansion, addressing the links between metropolitan sovereignty and expansion abroad in the early modern period, as well as the cultural productions that sustain them both (Fuchs, "Imperium Studies"). The term *imperium studies* strongly evokes the Roman imperial tradition that animates early modern imperial projects, through the notion of *translatio imperii*, or the westward progress of empire. It also foregrounds the earlier meanings of *imperium* as sovereignty and domestic control, as in Henry VIII's 1533 Act in Restraint of Appeals, which proclaimed the "realm of England" as an empire. Imperium studies thus emphasizes the complex relations between nation and empire in the period: the disaggregation of loose, largely conceptual units into territorially bound nations organized around a strong central monarchy and, conversely, the consolidation of contiguous territories that soon gives way to expansion beyond those same territories. Both imperium studies and my earlier work on the mimetic rivalries among empires—primarily England, Spain, and the Ottomans (*Mimesis*)—are complemented by Doyle's model of inter-imperiality, which insists on the plurality and multiplicity of the imperial vectors being considered ("Inter-imperiality").

As an alternative to these theoretical approaches, a transnational approach offers neither the period specificity nor the attention to the imbrication of nation and empire. Transnationalism suggests that the early modern nation is an achieved entity rather than the messy category in process that it was, and thus paradoxically it tends to reinforce teleological readings of the nation-state, as well as the disciplinary distinctions based on that same overinvestment in the nation. Moreover, if a transnational approach is not balanced with an attention to empire, it returns our fields relentlessly to a European metropole, negating even the cautious embrace of postcolonialism by early modern studies, or the more capacious horizons of world or connected histories.

Yet at the same time transnationalism offers some distinct advantages: because *transnational* describes the object of study, however imperfectly, in terms that are cognate with the contemporary literary disciplines, it provides perhaps the most obvious nudge beyond them, a constant reminder of the partiality of our current arrangements and points of view. That is, if students in an English or a Spanish literature seminar are offered a world-history perspective, their training might not change much, given the exigencies and the realities of completing a degree, whether graduate or undergraduate. But if our pedagogy foregrounds a transnational approach, they might be persuaded that their language requirement has a direct bearing on their field of study and that they should take some classes in at least one other national silo. In pedagogical terms, in our classroom practice, transnationalism may thus prove more productive than its theoretically precise alternatives. A transnational approach also emphasizes the modernity of the early modern, marking the continuity between nations then—however tentative they might have been—and now. It thus makes the period more legible for other literary scholars, whose attention to matters transnational and global often overlooks the early modern. Strategically, then, transnational reading might serve as the thin edge of the wedge, bringing scholars and students out of the safe confines

of the national literatures that organize our academy without confronting them with dauntingly large frameworks. These practical and strategic considerations should inform, if not determine, our choice of theoretical apparatus; the more precise our terms, the more they suggest the exceptionality of our period, effacing its connections to other moments and consigning it to an academic *Wunderkammer*. Instead, I propose a dialectical negotiation, in which the earlier periods qualify broader models, refining them through an attention to historical and geographic specificity.

Beyond this dialectic, there are good reasons to embrace the transnational in early modern studies. A focus on the transnational foregrounds a political purchase on early modernity, replacing source or transmission studies with a more explicitly politicized approach. Transnationalism offers a useful approach to canonical, metropolitan texts or problems—the combative defense of poetry, the rise of the vernacular—redefining them to consider contexts that extend beyond the nation. It thus helps us reconsider in all their ideological and political complexity texts that have been safely ensconced in formal contexts and formal readings and that have not come under the purview of postcolonial approaches. Imperium studies, I argue, allows us to expand and refine this work, emphasizing the complexities of the simultaneous development of nations and of empires. In what follows, I offer some examples of how we might develop ideological readings of metropolitan texts through an imperium studies approach, supplementing a transhistorically imprecise notion of the transnational with attention to period specificities.

Much of my work has focused on unearthing England's literary and cultural debts to Spain, even at times of bitter religious and imperial rivalry. This account goes against the grain of the self-sufficient national literature and also of older traditions that place English literature in dialogue with France and Italy to the exclusion of Spain. A transnational approach might focus on England's preoccupation with its belatedly emergent literature or on the connection between national distinction and literary culture. Yet the projects of humanist vernacular aggrandizement, on the one hand, and of establishing a nation that might resist and even emulate Spain's imperial reach, on the other, are intimately connected. The English perceived literary competition as another dimension of imperial rivalry, and many of the humanists who were active in the enrichment of the vernacular were also involved in the conquest of Ireland, as well as the ongoing conflict with Spain. The problem of national distinction in the literary sphere—how to create a vernacular that would match or excel the great classical languages and their contemporary avatars—was for these men another facet of a military and political project that involved emulating Spain in order not to succumb to its empire. The dual focus of imperium—domestic sovereignty and expansion—best captures this overlap.

The imbrication of letters, nation, and empire in the project of national distinction is evident in Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesie*, written around 1579 and first published in 1595, after Sidney's death in Flanders. Full of imperial imagery, the *Defence* offers appropriation and imitation as technologies for territorialized increase, foregrounding from the start the importance of poets as nation makers and of poetry as an imperial exemplum. Poetry precedes history, and poets are the fathers of their countries. The mythical Amphion, whose lyre was said to have moved great stones to take their places on the walls of Thebes, becomes for Sidney the perfect emblem of the connection between poetry and nation making. Given poetry's potential to dignify the nation, Sidney laments the "hard welcome" that it receives in England (I3).

Sidney dismisses the claims of the sententious moral philosopher and the moth-ridden historian that their disciplines produce virtu-

ous action, promoting instead the imperial efficacy of poetry as an incentive to praxis: "The Poet nameth Cyrus and Aeneas, no other way, then to shewe what men of their fames, fortunes, and estates, should doo." Poetry, he argues, is the proper fare for soldiers: "Poetrie is the Companion of Camps. I dare undertake, Orlando Furioso, or honest king Arthure, will never displease a souldier: but the quidditie of Ens & Prima materia, will hardly agree with a Corcelet." Sidney offers Alexander, and his attachment to Homer, as a powerful example of the beneficial effects of poetry on martial pursuits. Perhaps his clearest and most wishful formulation of the relation between poetry and empire is the logical culmination of his sustained emphasis on poetry's imitative power: "substantially [poetry] worketh, not only to make a Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency, as nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses, if they will learn aright why and how that maker made him" (C2). Poetry leads to imitation of the great conqueror, multiplying not only the Cyruses but also the empires attained.[1] In the context of England's belatedness with respect to Spain's empire and of Elizabeth's early reluctance to embrace imperial expansion, Sidney's vision of a mimetic empire achieved through poetry resonates strongly. To fully grasp this text and its circumstances we must attend to how imperial rivalries lie at the heart of the national-literature project.

Spain provides an even more powerful argument for reading beyond the nation while keeping empire as a necessary referent. Much of the strongest work in Hispanic studies has embraced a transatlantic perspective, yet critics are only slowly turning to the Mediterranean and to a consideration of Spain's Old World empire. When examined in the light of Spain in Italy, Spain in Portugal, the expulsions of Jews and Moriscos, and the dispersal of religious nonconformists across Europe and the Mediterranean, the metropolitan canon appears partial and provisional. How else to understand texts born of diaspora and empire, such as Francisco Delicado's *Retrato de la Lozana andaluza* (1528), the story of a *pícara* who makes her way from Córdoba across France and the Levant to Rome, to find a home among prostitutes, *conversas*, and Jewish exiles in the Christian Babylon? When Lozana exchanges notes on porkless cookery with the women she meets, they exclaim in pleasure that she is "*de nostris*" (one of us), the obverse of the exclusionary *ex illis* (one of them) that tars Jews and their descendants in Spain (Delicado 200). What is the nation of this character, whom the text introduces as the "natural compatriot of Seneca" (175)—both a native of Córdoba and part of the classical, as well as the contemporary, Roman imperial purview? And what is the nation of this almost impossibly slippery text, framed by the Italian wars and the Spanish invasion of Rome? *Lozana* stages a transnational Rome, full of foreigners who retain attachments to their nations even as they revel in the imperial city, and yet it is the violent irruption of empire, in the form of Charles V's conquest in 1527, that gives the text its nostalgic, retrospective quality. With its richly ironic "transnational ethos" (Burshatin 199–200), the text exceeds the national frame, yet it also foregrounds imperial politics and the layered referents for Rome as both classical model and contemporary Babylon, so that empire remains a crucial point of reference in making sense of its complexities.

Transnationalism offers great opportunities to transcend monolingual and formal categories of analysis, taking us beyond the national literature and replacing the inert vectors of "transmission" or "imitation" through which literary studies have managed these connections in the metropole. As the examples I have offered reveal, however, transnational readings risk falling short, for the texts and their own horizons extend to imperial contexts that lie beyond the nation and

beyond the European metropole: the relation between exile, diaspora, and empire across the Mediterranean and Atlantic worlds; the negotiation of Spanish dominion in the shadow of Rome; the emulation of Spain that England undertook as it sought imperial outlets. Although imperium studies might tie us to the specificity of the early modern, forgoing the critical currency of transnationalism, it offers an important historical corrective to the inevitability of the nation and to the erasure of the inter-imperial context of political and cultural rivalry in which so many of our most canonical, metropolitan texts emerged.

Note

1. Robert Stillman reads Sidney's Cyrus as an exemplary just prince. Yet this does not negate the incentive to imitate military might.

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