Gayle Rogers. *Incomparable Empires. Modernism and the Translation of Spanish and American Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. 296 pp. ISBN 978-0-231-17856.

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In 1916, U.S. author John Dos Passos made a transatlantic voyage from the U.S. to Spain and Spanish poet Juan Ramón Jiménez' traveled from Spain to New York. With this memorable metonymy, Gayle Rogers begins his book *Incomparable Empires. Modernism and the Translation of Spanish and American Literature*. He proceeds to paint these poets' visions for their writing and the historical place of their respective nations as they were elaborated and created in the linguistic cross-pollination of translation. Dos Passos decried the decadence of American literature and its terminal phase, tracing a parallel between artistic decadence and political ascendancy, while imitating and translating the works of his Spanish contemporaries Pío Baroja and Antonio Machado. Meanwhile, Jiménez spent his U.S. honeymoon doing poetic tourism as he visited the graves of Emily Dickinson and Edgar Allan Poe, translating their works with his bilingual bride Zenobia. This sets off a contact zone study vis-à-vis translation, what Rogers frames as a literary cartography constructed on "inter-imperial dynamics and cross-linguistic traffic" (11).

This study of a reciprocity across languages and political realities at the incipience of the United States' imperial ascendancy and the end of the Spanish Empire establishes the critical approach to Rogers' book. The fertile cross-pollination of North American and Spanish authors throughout the first few decades of the 20th century is demonstrated in unexpected ways that Rogers thoroughly establishes with concrete textual examples read with precision and acuity. From Ernest Hemingway, who considered himself "a Spanish author who happened to be born in America"(3) to Miguel de Unamuno who eschewed and denied any influence from Spanish authors while claiming to discover his poetic voice by translating Thomas Carlyle, to Ezra Pound's aesthetic development as a translator of *Cantar del mío Cid*, the centrality of the U.S. in Spain and Spain for North American modernists is vital to the production of these literatures, and an important factor in their critical interpretation. Rogers successfully implodes and violates often ossified *lugares comunes* of the academic

discourse surrounding these authors, who often sit comfortably, and erroneously, on the shelf of a purely "American Studies" or "Spanish letters" section of the collective conceptual library.

The following chapters are a bilingual *tour de force* of Rogers' central claim, namely that translation was a catalyst for all manner of literary innovations across North American and Spanish literary modernism. The first chapter follows Ezra Pound's poetic career beginning with his early and abandoned doctorate in Spanish literature. His translations of the medieval Spanish epic *Cantar del mío Cid* led him to conclude that far from being a purely Castilian literary artifact, the epic poem was inspired in Europe's multinational and multilingual troubadour tradition. He claims this lesson learned from Spain as grounds for his own intellectual project of polyglot and palimpsest poetics. In other words, his translation work as a young man forged what would become his multilingual renovation of American poetics. Like other writers studied in this book, this multilingual and transnational posture posits itself in opposition to the homogenizing aspects of an expansive Anglo-Saxon U.S. empire at the beginning of the 20th century. For Pound, Spain's poetic greatness lay in the past of its polyglot balladeer tradition, and upon losing this cultural reserve, Spain lost its cultural promise; Pound feared the same for the U.S. and its parallel efforts at imperial expansion and the establishment of its poetic tradition. This is one of the strengths of Rogers' book; he forsakes the Solomonic decision of reading literature through politics or vice versa, and instead disentangles the complex dialogue between the literary and the political spheres, passing both discourses through the filter of translation across English and Spanish.

The balance between politicized readings and translation is difficult to maintain, and there are places in the book that have a vague echo of *noventayochista*, Eurocentric definitions of modernism. Despite Rogers' in-depth understanding of transatlantic theory and his deconstructionist reading of both canons, and his prescience of this very criticism (13), we still came away from this book with some disappointment at another lengthy discussion of Hispanic Modernism in which Latin American authors are given a desultory tip of the critical hat, while Modernism as a European and Anglo-American phenomenon still governed the authors and texts given a critical platform. The peripheral presence of Latin American authors here is problematic. Are we to infer that inter-imperiality does not include the very subjects of empire? The Spain/U.S. binary of translation as a motor of aesthetic creation glances over the third party to this triangulation and its seductive examples of translation as *poesis*: Spanish America. The example of Darío's decanting the music of French symbolism into Spanish in *Prosas profanas* (1896), or the French and Spanish versions of Huidobro's *Altazor* (1919-1931), or the myriad of translated languages enriching Borges' poetic oeuvre all come to mind. Given Spanish America's primacy in the genesis and nature of Spanish modernism and Spanish American authors' own history of relating translation to *poesis*, we judge their voices to be missing in a triangulation of translation as literary modernism grappled with its imperial realities. The mirror metaphor, of Spain seeing its reflection in the rising

empire of the United States and the ascendant empire of the U.S. posturing itself in the reflection of the decadent Spanish empire, is a useful one, but the image appears to be incomplete. Both empires addressed their imperial anxieties against and alongside variegated visions of Spanish America. Rogers' critical approach via translation and imperialism could render very rich readings in the works of Spanish American modernists in future studies.

Following the initial study of Jiménez and Dos Passos, the subsequent chapters tie in unexpected and diverse branches of Anglo-American and Peninsular Spanish modernisms under the unifying reading of translation studies. Movements as disparate as the New Negro Writers (W.E.B. Dubois, Langston Hughes and Richard Wright) in translational collusion and collision with the Spanish Avant-garde (Federico García Lorca and Cuban author Emilio Ballagas) are illuminated by the writers' engagement with inter-imperial translations.

Throughout *Incomparable Empires*, Rogers engages the tension held taut between two concepts resurgent throughout his discussions of translation: purity and impurity, eternal tradition versus heterogeneous cosmopolitanism. For example, in Chapter 1 Rogers examines Ezra Pound's vindication of the impure medieval demotics that provided the cultural and aesthetic background of Spain's great epic poem *Cantar del mío Cid*, this same translation later providing an aesthetic transfusion for Pound's own polyglot poetics. In Chapter 2, this same dialectic between purity and impurity plays out in John Dos Passos' initial works where he sees the homogenizing process of American imperialism as detrimental to its achieving a great poetic voice. Like Pound, Dos Passos draws from Spanish history to articulate his admonition. He wrote these thoughts down in Spain, visiting the *Residencia de Estudiantes* and socializing with Antonio Machado and Juan Ramón Jiménez. Spain provided Dos Passos with an anti-capitalist image of anachronistic, trans-historical layering of Spanish being which, for Dos Passos, U.S. thinkers would do well to emulate before losing their collective soul to empire and greed.

Whereas Pound saw cosmopolitanism as a path to great art, and Dos Passos saw the heterogeneity of diverse traditions as a means to address eternal truths, Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno would use translation to simultaneously criticize Spanish decadence while asserting Spanish spiritual and aesthetic dominion over its former, in some cases recently lost, colonies. Rogers demonstrates that Unamuno's translation work presupposed a Spanish nativism, a pure eternal tradition generated by the *Volk* that served to isolate and concretize the purity of the Castilian language (a purity which he then used to retranslate the literatures of the Spanish colonies into an eternal Castilian tradition, thus divesting them of autonomy and rendering them linguistically dependent). For Unamuno, American literature in particular served as a model for Spain's weakening poetic tradition. Regional poets like Carl Sandburg, Sidney Lanier and William Vaughn Moody represented the authentic voice of America. Mirroring Dos Passos' projection of American anxiety onto Spain's past, Unamuno cites the

suffocation of these regional voices as the end of America's authentic poetic tradition, a danger he feared for the imperiled Castilian soul. The paradoxical relationship between Unamuno's feverish work at translation and his obsessive drumming up of a Castilian mythos is persuasively studied across Unamuno's career.

In his reading of Juan Ramón Jiménez' translations of North American poetry and their nurturing of his own work, Rogers adumbrates one of the great consonances of this transatlantic modernism, wherein Anglo-American and Peninsular Spanish poetry symbiotically inform each other's development. Jiménez' own idealistic vision of poetry as a trans-historical construction that "crossed linguistic, national, temporal and formal boundaries" (109) had him posit the center of modernism in between "a centuries-old tension between the two languages" (109). Rogers forefronts the American empire and Anglo-American modernism in Jiménez's work, pushing back against more provincial readings of the *andaluz universal*.

Jiménez' definition of modernism as a global phenomenon is exemplified in the final chapter and conclusions of the book. Spanish and American English and the literatures they co-create in the 20th century continue their fruitful copulation in Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). Any bilingual reader of the novel will have noted the strange translations of Spanish pronouns, maledictions, and expressions as part of its originality. Rogers exploits this strange fusion to argue a strain of Joyceian modernism in Hemingway, distancing him from the traditional academic readings of realism. Following the tradition of Joyce and his hispanophile predecessor Pound, Hemingway creates his own literary language across his native English and his imperfect understanding of Spanish. Rogers focuses on the linguistic innovations of the novel that have often been overlooked due to a politicized reading of the text based on the author's own political convictions. Rogers' reading of this canonical text is fresh and original, reinvigorating it with new life and opening new trajectories of criticism that establish its transatlantic realities.

Jiménez and Hemingway appear to augur a future literature progressively distanced from any Romantic aesthetic of linguistic purity, favoring instead a mutually beneficial effort to translate and appropriate the imperial dialects of American English and Spanish. Rogers closes his argument masterfully with an analysis of Ilan Stavans' 2001 Spanglish translation of the first chapter of *Don Quixote de la Mancha*. The juxtaposition of Cervantine Spanish and the gestating demotic ambiguity of Spanglish implodes all notions of linguistic hegemony, *castizo* Spanish, and the homogeneity of both empires.

Incomparable Empires is a provocative and welcome text; it demonstrates many of the bilingual benefits that have nurtured artistic creation in a global literary modernism, and some of the possibilities of bilingual/translation criticisms of that literature. As these summarized examples demonstrate, Rogers has successfully used translation as a skeleton key to open up these canonical works in both traditions, American and Hispanic Studies, and to disclose the complex transnational and translating nature of

their creation. Just as bilingualism and translation shake up the often ossified and half-informed certainties of language, their application to the criticism of modernism reveals our own critical provincialisms and the complex interactions taking place outside of time-tested critical categories and *lugares comunes*. This text is certain to provoke stimulating discussions in graduate study on translation, literary history, and naturally Literary Modernism, both Anglo-American and Hispanic.