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The Trans-Indigenous Lens: A Re-recognition

REGULAR READERS OF this journal will be aware that, historically, Indigenous literatures have not been included within dominant formations of comparative literature, or within dominant practices of comparative literary studies. These readers will be aware, as well, that even within more capacious programs designated "world" or "global" literary studies, the inclusion of Indigenous texts and contexts has remained limited and, too often, poorly informed, since those working in the fields that typically feed these approaches tend not to engage Indigenous studies scholarship in any depth. Because much of my own scholarship can be described as comparative, world, or global Indigenous literary studies, I have been invited to multiple conversations about how "we" (a particular department, program, institution, or association) might include the Indigenous within "our" teaching and research.[1] At first, I accepted such invitations eagerly; the opportunities for collegial dialogue felt momentous, and I hoped my contributions, however modest, might spur positive change. But as the motivations for these lunch-and-learn, roundtable, and plenary discussions have shifted over the past twenty years from asserted interests in "multiculturalism" and "postcolonialism" to asserted commitments to "antiracism" and "decolonization," I have become less rather than more optimistic about their prospects. The staged conversations have felt increasingly performative and abstract. And although I continue to participate (hope really does spring eternal), I have grown increasingly wary of discussions that do not actually contribute to the development of Indigenous studies scholarship or advance the interests of Indigenous students and faculty—or their communities.

For this invited essay, therefore, rather than (once again) recounting Indigenous exclusion or surveying Indigenous marginalization, I am choosing to meditate on the fact that my second book, *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies*, is now (remarkably) ten years old.[2] Published in 2012, *Trans-Indigenous*

[1] For published versions of three such interventions, see Allen, "Indigenous Literatures," "Decolonizing Comparison," and "Charting Comparative Indigenous Traditions."

[2] I presented a condensed version of this essay as part of the Presidential Roundtable on Comparative Literature and Indigeneity at the 2022 ACLA meeting, held online. I am grateful to ACLA President Shu-mei Shih for inviting me to participate in what turned out to be a lively conversation with Maori scholar Alice Te Punga Somerville (Te Ati Awa, Taranaki) and Indigenous Taiwanese scholar Paelabang Danapan (Puyuma).

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followed from my first book, *Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Maori Literary and Activist Texts*, published in 2002, by expanding *Blood Narrative*'s focus on Indigenous self-representations from the United States, Aotearoa New Zealand, and international activist organizations produced across what I call the early contemporary period (from the demographic upheavals of World War II through the focused activism of the 1970s) to include a greater range of self-representations from a greater number of locations, produced across the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. *Trans-Indigenous* also expanded *Blood Narrative*'s methodologies, moving from a limited set of one-to-one comparisons to a series of more peripatetic and venturesome juxtapositions. Moreover, *Trans-Indigenous* intensified *Blood Narrative*'s commitments to centering Indigenous rather than settler or colonial histories, cultures, and aesthetics and to working across alphabetic literatures and other forms of self-representation, including Indigenous visual, installation, and performance arts as well as Indigenous technologies and built environments. Finally, *Trans-Indigenous* intensified *Blood Narrative*'s commitments to centering the close examination of the formal qualities of Indigenous self-representations across genre and media rather than the more typical centering of specific content, messages, or themes.

Trans-Indigenous posed two broad questions: What might it mean to organize literary, arts, cultural, and other humanities-based scholarship *across* and *among* multiple Indigenous traditions, rather than endlessly recentering colonial structures and the Indigenous-settler binary? And what might it mean to shift methodological emphasis away from an ideal of deracinated, "objective" comparison to more grounded articulations of specific and specifically routed itineraries for juxtaposition?[3] *Trans-Indigenous* thus explores both the possibilities and the many challenges—conceptual, practical, and ethical—of organizing work that centers not only multiple Indigenous voices, but also multiple Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and relationalities.

Since the book's publication, its provocations have been taken up, critiqued, quoted (occasionally misquoted), extended, and reimagined by other scholars in productive ways. One of the sustained engagements with *Trans-Indigenous* I find especially invigorating for my own ongoing work is Edgar Garcia's remarkable study *Signs of the Americas: A Poetics of Pictography, Hieroglyphs, and Khipu*, published in 2020.[4] Garcia positions his analysis as an extension of trans-Indigenous methodologies by centering Indigenous sign systems from across the full expanse of the American continents. A goal for this hemispheric project is to more fully account for the ways sign systems that circulated in the deep past continue to be productive in contemporary works produced not only by Indigenous authors, artists, and intellectuals (inspiring in its own right) but also by non-Indigenous authors, artists,

[3] What I describe in *Trans-Indigenous* as a method of "purposeful Indigenous juxtapositions" is related to what Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Sean Coulthard describes in *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* as "grounded normativity": "the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time" (13)—including in our scholarship.

[4] Others include Diaz, "Ocean in the Plains"; Perez, *Navigating Chamoru Poetry*; and Gandhi, *Archipelago of Resettlement*.

and intellectuals (which draws interest for a host of reasons, both aesthetic and political). Part of Garcia's project is thus "tracking how indigenous signs play an integral but unrecognized role in shaping" not simply Indigenous poetics, which dominant literary studies might be willing to acknowledge and even expect, but rather "world poetics," which dominant literary studies has not been willing to expect or even acknowledge as a possibility (*Signs* 4). Garcia's work builds from (and improves on) trans-Indigenous methodologies "by examining how signs do not exactly interact in a singular world system but carry world systems of their own—that is, worlds against the one world of world literature" (5). In this way, Garcia articulates what remains a radical idea within orthodox literary studies, whether marked as comparative, world, or global: that sign systems developed across the Americas, like other Indigenous sign systems, are not necessarily subsumed within the "one world of world literature" but potentially bear whole worlds of their own. "Indigenous . . . cultures are not only content for interpretation by way of the theories of white Western men," Garcia writes, "They are also the framework and form by which interpretation and experience can be had and understood." Indigenous sign systems, in other words, "bear their own theories on the scene of interpretation" (222).

Garcia's argument has profound implications for literary studies of all kinds. And it affirms one of my central ambitions for the concept of the *trans-Indigenous*: that it name methodologies rather than (only) objects of study, that it name ways of seeing and modes of analysis; that it name, that is, an optics, a lens through which to view the full range of Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) representations of self and others. My ambition was thus for *trans-Indigenous* to function grammatically more as an adjective than as a noun, and for it to gesture toward the directional verbs that undergird its adjectival form—to gesture toward the significant *actions* of seeing and analyzing diverse literary and artistic expressions *from* multiple Indigenous locations and *through* multiple Indigenous perspectives. My ambition was to name an expansive set of itineraries for reading and analysis rather than a fixed schedule of preferred destinations.

One of the ways I tried to suggest that *trans-Indigenous* names methodologies and modes of analysis was through the image I chose for the book's cover: the mixed-media sculpture *Whakamutunga (Metamorphosis)* by the New Zealand Maori *tohunga whakairo* (master carver) and renowned international artist Fred Graham (Ngati Koroki). Through visual empathy and artistic abstraction, Graham records a personal and professional history of decades of trans-Oceanic travel that enabled multiple interactions, on both sides of the Pacific, with Native American artists from the Northwest Coast of what is now Canada and the United States. In the introduction to *Trans-Indigenous*, I offer a close reading of *Whakamutunga (Metamorphosis)* that emphasizes the generative possibilities of Graham's enactment of multiple Indigenous juxtapositions within a single work. Graham's dynamic figure of a diving whale performs both material and symbolic transformations—from distinctly Northwest Coast Native American to distinctly New Zealand Maori traditions of form and design—as day crosses to night and as the whale crosses the Earth's equator to traverse and connect an Indigenous Pacific. In a current project, I am now extending this reading of Graham's figure of a diving and transforming whale, created in 2005, by analyzing a related work Graham created a decade earlier, in 1996. Similar to the work from 2005, this significantly larger mixed-media

composite sculpture is marked with a bilingual title, *Te Waiata o te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa (Song of the Pacific Ocean)*. Also similar to the work from 2005, this piece evokes the figure of a whale crossing and connecting a diverse Indigenous Pacific while exemplifying the possibilities of trans-Indigenous visual empathy and artistic abstraction. The sculpture is a condensed figure *for* as well as a concentrated presentation *of* complex ideas about Indigenous-to-Indigenous encounters, exchanges, and collaborations produced outside colonial binaries of active settlers versus static natives, cosmopolitan centers versus isolated peripheries, or major international arts traditions versus minor traditions of local craft.

I was unaware of Graham's earlier sculpture until many years after I first encountered *Whakamutunga (Metamorphosis)* in the catalog for a trans-Indigenous art exhibition and until several years after I published the book *Trans-Indigenous*.[5] When I began my position at the University of Washington in 2015, I made a point to visit the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, located on the Seattle campus, as soon as possible, since I had been told the museum held excellent collections of Indigenous art not only from the coastal and plateau regions of what is now the state of Washington and the broader Pacific Northwest region of North America but also from across vast Oceania. The permanent exhibit, titled *Pacific Voices: Worlds within Our Community*, was located on the museum's lower level, and its main entrance was marked by a world map that filled an entire wall—a map that centered the painted blue of the Pacific Ocean rather than the painted green of the American continents. Visitors' eyes, however, were immediately drawn to the far end of the map, across from which stood a seven-foot-tall, abstract carving of an upright black whale with a prominent dorsal fin. The first time I visited the exhibit, I may have gasped out loud, for I instantly recognized the stylized whale as the work of Fred Graham. Following that unexpected first encounter with *Whakamutunga (Metamorphosis)*'s elder sibling, I made a point of visiting *Te Waiata o te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa (Song of the Pacific Ocean)* as often as possible. As I became acquainted with the work, the exhibit, the museum, and the museum's staff, I learned that Graham's composite sculpture had been commissioned specifically for *Pacific Voices* and that it had been on display since the exhibit's opening in 1996. But I learned, too, that the museum's conventional, brick-and-mortar building, constructed in 1962, along with its dated, colonial-style displays (the institution now known as the Burke Museum has served as the official Washington State Museum since 1899) were slated for a much-needed refashioning.[6] In 2015, planning was already underway for a larger, state-of-the-art facility that would be animated by a more expansive, up-to-date theory of curation. In 2018, the Burke closed to visitors so that its millions of objects could be packed for storage and travel, and so that its emptied structure could be torn down and the rubble hauled away. Finally, in 2019, *Te Waiata o te*

[5] An image of Graham's *Whakamutunga (Metamorphosis)* appears in the exhibit catalog *Manawa—Pacific Heartbeat: A Celebration of Contemporary Maori and Northwest Coast Art* (Reading and Wyatt).

[6] In 1899, the facility now known as the Burke Museum became the official Washington State Museum and was charged to serve as "a depository for the preservation and exhibition of documents and objects possessing an historical value, of materials illustrating the fauna, flora, anthropology, mineral wealth, and natural resources of the state, and for all documents and objects whose preservation will be of value to the student of history and the natural sciences." For a fuller history of the museum, see www.burkemuseum.org/about/history.

Moana-nui-a-Kiwa (Song of the Pacific Ocean) was on display once again, but now as part of a new permanent exhibit located on the main floor of the high-tech, glass-and-sustainable-wood structure of the new Burke, located immediately adjacent to the site of the now demolished older building.

The multiyear planning, construction, and curation of the new Burke has involved both a radical reconfiguration of the museum's material spaces *for* display and a radical reconception of the museum's curatorial philosophies *of* display. In the parts of the museum devoted to culture rather than natural history, it has been a shift from spaces and philosophies that were implicitly colonial to spaces and philosophies that are explicitly labeled as "decolonizing." These changes have created a rare opportunity to analyze how a complex work of trans-Indigenous art (Graham's mixed-media composite sculpture) produces meaning within state-sanctioned spaces for public display that are in one sense "the same" (each is named the Burke Museum and each is intended to serve the educational needs of the settler state of Washington) and, in another sense, "not the same" (each is materially and conceptually distinct). There is much to say about this fortuitous juxtaposition of related-but-distinct public display spaces for trans-Indigenous representation and the related-but-distinct experiences these spaces enable for diverse visitors, and I am currently at work on a detailed analysis of how Graham's composite sculpture makes meaning in the old and new Burke Museum(s). For my purposes here, I highlight three early observations that seem especially salient for understanding the ways Indigenous literatures are (and are not) permitted to function within the dominant formations and practices of literary studies marked as comparative, world, or global—and the ways Indigenous literatures potentially challenge these dominant structures, whether marked as "old" or "new," "colonial" or "decolonizing."

My first observation concerns the sculpture's positioning within each exhibit's display space and in relation to each exhibit's other objects on display. In the old Burke Museum, Graham's seven-foot-tall, torpedo-shaped composite sculpture—encoded with multiple forms of Indigenous knowledge expressed through multiple techniques of Indigenous art, including carving, painting, and shell inlay—was positioned near the *center* of the multicomponent permanent exhibit titled *Pacific Voices: Worlds within Our Community.* As already noted, when visitors entered the exhibit space through the main entrance, they first approached the sculpture from a distance. From this primary perspective, the sculpture appeared to represent a singular figure. That is, it appeared to (only) represent the abstract figure of a whale: the rounded, convex, torpedo-shaped body was painted black, and the prominent dorsal fin protruded toward the entrance and thus toward entering visitors. When visitors moved closer, however, the sculpture was revealed to be not singular but composite. Set a few inches behind and to the right of the convex body of the representation of the black whale stood a similarly torpedo-shaped but concave body of the representation of an ocean-voyaging canoe (in Graham's Maori tradition, a *waka*) in the contrasting color of natural wood. Given their similar sizes and shapes, the composite figure's offset pieces appeared to fit together like the top and bottom of a carved box or decorated container (in Graham's Maori tradition, a *waka huia*). But that wasn't all. When visitors viewed the upright, parallel figures more closely and from multiple angles, the black

whale and the wood canoe were also revealed to be representations of voiced instruments. The convex body of the black whale with distinctly Northwest Coast designs carved in shallow relief on its triangular dorsal fin was revealed to be simultaneously the hollow body of a flute. Viewed up close, not only did the whale feature a prominent blowhole drilled above its fin, but it also featured four holes drilled in a line below the fin—that is, the four tone holes of a flute (in Graham's Maori tradition, a *koauau* or *putorino*, but perhaps also, given the sculpture's location in Seattle, an American Indian flute). Similarly, the concave body of the ocean-voyaging canoe—which features a noticeable slit cut through the center of its hull, highlighted with white paint, and an unfurling spiral carved at its bow and extending down its right gunwale, also highlighted with white paint—was revealed to be simultaneously both the elongated body of a slit drum and the spiraling body of a shell trumpet, voiced instruments from the central Pacific and Hawai'i. The round wood base supporting the upright, torpedo-shaped figures of the whale/flute and canoe/slit drum/shell trumpet was revealed to be simultaneously the representation of a drumhead, the kind often constructed, in American Indian communities, from a stretched animal hide.[7]

The positioning of the multiply encoded sculpture at the center of *Pacific Voices: Worlds within Our Community*, rather than on the exhibit's periphery, suggested not only the composite figure's centrality to multiple distinct Pacific cultures, but also its dynamic mobility *across* the open space of the Pacific Ocean. In this way, the figure's positioning enabled Graham's sculpture to function as a trans-Indigenous optics, as a central lens through which to view the exhibit's surrounding displays of multiple related but distinct Pacific cultures. As visitors moved their eyes and bodies around the exhibit space, they literally looked *through* Graham's dynamic figure *toward* the displays representing the cultures of Hawai'i, of Aotearoa New Zealand, of Tonga and Samoa, of parts of Pacific Asia, and of the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America. Visitors thus experienced Graham's composite figure as *in transit*, as a whale and a canoe and a voiced instrument repeatedly launching into the fluid space between islands and continents (what in some Oceanic traditions is known as the *vā*) and repeatedly arriving at a different Indigenous local destination, again and again.[8] Contrary to the assumptions of dominant, orthodox modes of scholarship and understanding, in the old Burke, Graham's sculpture was not simply a static object successfully appropriated into the museum's conventional (that is, colonial) architectural space and ideologies of display. No, in the old Burke, despite the museum's dated *mise en scène* and rather tired overall milieu, the form of Graham's composite figure—multiply encoded with Indigenous knowledges and strategically positioned as *crossing* the vast expanse of the Pacific—bore its own theory (to borrow Garcia's provocative phrase) on the exhibit's scene of interpretation. The

[7] Elsewhere I describe Graham's sculpture in greater detail; see Allen, "Charting Comparative Indigenous Traditions."

[8] In the introduction to her collection *alchemies of distance*, Samoan poet and intellectual Caroline Sinavaina-Gabbard writes, "In Samoan epistemology, the *space between* things is called the 'vā.' Relationships are vā, the space between I and thou. In friendship we cultivate the vā like a shared garden. . . . Teu le vā. Cultivate the space between us, our relationship" (20).

constraints of the old Burke's (colonial) environment of display were countered by the installation's assertions of (Indigenous) methodological power.

In contrast, in the new Burke Museum—with its state-of-the-art display spaces and its updated theories of display—Graham's sculpture is positioned not at the center of the permanent exhibit that celebrates material culture and technologies from across the Pacific, titled *Culture Is Living*, but rather near the exhibit's main entrance, just off the main hall on the museum's main floor. This prominent positioning locates Graham's composite, multiply encoded figure at one of the Pacific's edges, as though the whale that is simultaneously an ocean-voyaging canoe and a voiced instrument were now anchored on the nearest shore. Moreover, compared to its positioning in the old Burke, the figure has been rotated, so that its large dorsal fin protrudes away from the main entry point for visitors and toward the center of the exhibit space. This rotation means that visitors first perceive not the figure of the black whale, as they did in the old Burke, but rather the bottom of the figure of the wood canoe. In the new Burke, the figure of the whale with its large dorsal fin is not easily discerned until visitors have fully entered the exhibit space and turned to look back toward the main entrance. Depending on how they navigate this material space and how closely they pay attention to its signage and other interpretive cues, some viewers may not notice that the upright canoe located near the exhibit's entrance is a component of the same sculpture as the upright whale they perceive from across the room.

The *Culture Is Living* exhibit as a whole emphasizes this initial focus on the technology of the canoe and its potential relationships to other modes of Indigenous transportation. Unlike in the *Pacific Voices* exhibit in the old Burke, which clearly demarcated displays of related but distinct cultures (the display featuring the Hawaiian Islands, for instance, was clearly separate from the display featuring Aotearoa New Zealand), in the *Culture Is Living* exhibit objects are displayed according to their visual empathy and similarity of material design and function. The large Duwamish dugout canoe suspended from the ceiling near the exhibit entrance, local to the Salish Sea and what is now the Seattle metropolitan area, is in conversation not only with Graham's abstracted figure of a *waka* (ocean-voyaging canoe) standing upright on the floor but also with additional Oceanic canoes suspended from the ceiling at other locations in the exhibit space and, in particular, with an intricately decorated Tao *tatala* (fishing canoe) from what is now Taiwan mounted prominently on the back wall. In addition, a striking display of upright canoe paddles originating from multiple Pacific traditions is set before this *tatala*. Finally, in the space between the entrance and the back wall (that is, in the *vā*), several glass cases display scale models of canoes and other watercraft from across Oceania and the Pacific.

The objects positioned at the center of the *Culture Is Living* exhibit amplify this emphasis on visual empathy and technologies of transport. Instead of Graham's composite and multiply encoded figure of a whale/canoe/voiced instrument, three Indigenous "boards" are affixed to the architectural pillar that stands near the center of the exhibit space. On the side of the pillar that faces the exhibit's main entrance, and thus on the side that is visible when visitors look from behind Graham's sculpture toward the center, a large, striped surfboard, designed by Hawaiian surfer Donn Ito, is affixed to the central pillar. On the side that faces away from

the main entrance, and thus is visible when visitors move near the far wall of the exhibit and look back at Graham's sculpture, a snowboard and a skateboard deck, each designed by Tlingit and Athabascan Alaskan artist Rico Worl, are affixed to the central pillar. Although the new exhibit highlights a visual empathy among technologies of transportation and showcases youth-focused examples of contemporary Indigenous design, it decenters the idea of long-range, communal travel (none of these boards evokes Oceanic voyaging) as well as the potential relationships among Pacific peoples, their human-produced technologies, and their other-than-human kin (including whales). In the new, updated Burke, whale, canoe, and voice—or, more precisely, whale/canoe/voice—no longer serves as the permanent exhibit's central modality for seeing and interpreting Oceanic and Pacific connections.

My second observation concerns the sculpture's ability—or lack of ability—within each exhibit space to produce particular kinds of shadows. In the old Burke Museum, Graham's torpedo-shaped composite sculpture was set before an exhibit wall that had been specifically designed for the installation. The wall was wide enough to serve as a neutral backdrop for display, but narrow enough to allow visitors to move almost completely around the sculpture, making it possible to examine both the interiors and exteriors of the sculpture's complex material form and thus possible to notice Graham's precise use of multiple art techniques from across Oceania, including carving, painting, and shell inlay. But, again, that was not all. In addition to providing a backdrop for display, including space for explanatory signage, the wall provided an ideal surface on which Graham's carved, painted, and inlaid figure could cast shadows. The sculpture was multiply spotlighted so that the figure cast a series of crisp, upright shadows that could be viewed from multiple angles and distances within the exhibit space. The distinctive shapes and relative densities of these well-defined, often overlapping shadows added depth to the composite sculpture's overall effect, but also a heightened sense of drama, for the shadows suggested both a generative multiplicity and an embodied theatricality. As visitors moved toward and around the complex figure of the whale/canoe/voiced instrument, the cast shadows evoked ethereal presences accompanying the figure's material form: a pod of migrating whales, a fleet of voyaging canoes, a host of spirit beings sounding the wind—perhaps all of these together. Similar to the old Burke's positioning of the sculpture at the center of the exhibit space, its installation of the sculpture before a narrow exhibit wall and its use of spotlighting to enable the production of multiple upright shadows created a sense of the composite figure's dynamic mobility, its movement across not only space but also time and, potentially, other dimensions.

In contrast, in the new Burke Museum—with its state-of-the-art display spaces and its updated theories of display—the positioning of Graham's sculpture at the extremely narrow end of the large wall that demarcates the main entrance to the exhibit and that displays its orienting signage, along with the higher ceiling and more diffuse lighting of the exhibit space, means that the composite figure no longer casts multiple, well-defined, or upright shadows. The pod of whales, the fleet of canoes, the assembled spirit beings from the old Burke are all but vanished. What remains of their ethereal presences is a single silhouette projected (seemingly) haphazardly onto the concrete floor. Easily passed over, this shadow appears incidental

rather than intentional. And thus a significant aspect of the composite sculpture's ability to produce dynamic meaning, one of its most innovative and evocative techniques of Indigenous art, has been effectively disabled. Visitors to the new Burke are provided no means to perceive—nor any impetus to imagine—that which the new exhibit space and the updated installation have rendered all but invisible.

Finally, my third observation concerns the explanatory signage within each exhibit space that helps frame visitors' experience of Graham's composite figure. In the old Burke Museum, the small size of the sign affixed to the low guardrail that protected Graham's sculpture required visitors to move close in order to read the Maori-English bilingual title and other identifying information. Three additional signs, also of modest size, were positioned at the far right of the narrow exhibit wall, where they would not interfere with the cast shadows. One sign provided a black-and-white photograph of Graham in the act of *whakairo* (carving with a mallet and chisel). A second sign served as a caption for the photograph. And a third, somewhat larger sign repeated Graham's name and *iwi* (tribal) affiliation, but also offered a significant paratext for the sculpture, a brief poem Graham had written to accompany his composite figure. Titled "Pacific Voices" to echo the name of the exhibit, the poem—which might also be understood as a song or chant—both clarified and complemented potential Indigenous meanings of the whale/canoe/voiced instrument in transit. We might say Graham's poem helped focus the figure's lens so that visitors could better see the composite, multiply encoded figure itself and so that they could better interpret its relations to other aspects of the exhibit's display:

Pacific Voices

Voices—sounds—singing chanting
Pacific sounds—volcanoes, sea wind
Human voices communication between people.
Human voices singing and chanting
accompanied by
conch shell—Hawai'i
flute—Aotearoa
drums from hollowed out log—Tonga and Samoa
drums stretched animal skin—North America
Voices: communication: canoe
A common communicator between the
northern hemisphere and southern
hemisphere—the whale.

The midpoint of the thirteen-line poem, line 7, spotlights "flute—Aotearoa." Although this positioning centers Graham's Maori cultural perspective, the poem's notable marks of punctuation—the eight elongated dashes and two amplifying colons—simultaneously emphasize how the sculpture makes connections *across* diverse Pacific cultures. Anchored, as it were, in Aotearoa, Graham's alphabetic text, similar to his carved, painted, inlaid, and shadow-casting sculpture, is structurally linked to Hawai'i, to Tonga and Samoa, to the West Coast of North America. At line 10, Graham places the set of colons—symbols used in both alphabetic writing and mathematics to denote significant relationships—to explicitly connect modes of human communication to the movement of the canoe, a technology deployed by Indigenous peoples across the Pacific. Similar to human voices,

canoes transport meaning across distances. At line 13, Graham explicitly connects the communicative human technology of the canoe to the communicative other-than-human figure of the whale, another symbol of movement that crosses the Pacific, and specifically a symbol of movement that is cyclical and migratory, that crosses and recrosses, and thus repeatedly links and relinks Northern and Southern Hemispheres. Graham's poem illustrates how human voices and technologies anchored in Aotearoa are linked not only to other human voices and technologies located across the Pacific but also to their other-than-human kin. In the final line, the poem's final dash, which links "hemisphere" to "the whale"—and which implies "whale's" near-homographic pun in English, "whole"—demonstrates how Graham's composite figure comprises two halves of an elongated sphere, two halves of a microcosm and complete (Indigenous) world. In the old Burke, the signage helped make explicit that the whale, which is simultaneously an ocean-voyaging canoe and a voiced instrument, carried a world system of its own.

In contrast, in the new Burke Museum—with its state-of-the-art display spaces and its updated theories of display—the signage has been completely rethought throughout the facility. In the Pacific cultures exhibit, the new signage includes not only improved versions of the expected "objective" and "scholarly" voices of unnamed, culturally unmarked curators, but also the unexpected voices of named Indigenous individuals with cultural (and often personal) connections to particular objects on display. One of these latter signs, on which I was invited to collaborate, encourages visitors to move around Graham's sculpture and to notice how it has been encoded with multiple Indigenous knowledges.[9] The exhibit's primary orienting signs, positioned on the large wall near the main entrance, contextualize these more personalized signs by announcing the museum's updated curatorial conviction, "Culture Is Living," alongside its updated ethical commitment, "The Burke Acknowledges the Violent Legacies of Colonialism" and "promise[s] to change." But despite these notable improvements over more typical museum signage that ignores the histories of multiple colonialisms and erases their ongoing legacies for living communities, the exhibit no longer displays the alphabetic paratext Graham produced to accompany his composite sculpture. In the new Burke, visitors no longer have access to Graham's voice through his evocative poem/song/chant "Pacific Voices," no longer have access to his vision of centering Aotearoa in relation to other Pacific cultures, nor to his striking use of punctuation to mark multiple forms of human and other-than-human connections.

In these and other ways, the new Burke's state-of-the-art display spaces and updated theories of display appear to curtail rather than enhance the ability of Graham's sculpture to function as an optics, as a central lens through which to view the exhibit's presentation of "living" Pacific cultures as multiply connected and reconnected, as part of an Indigenous world system. Shifted from its *central* and *dynamic*

[9] The new sign is labeled "Relationships Span the Globe." The text reads, in part, "Move around the sculpture and look closely at its many details. It is both a Northwest Coast whale and an ocean-voyaging canoe. It is also a 'voiced' instrument—a drum, a flute, a shell trumpet—and a navigational sky chart." The last detail refers to an interpretation of the shell inlay positioned on the whale's head, which I do not discuss in this essay but do discuss in "Charting Comparative Indigenous Traditions" and in the larger project.

position of *making relations* within the old Burke to its *peripheral* and *static* position of *vying for attention* within the new Burke, Graham's composite sculpture is reduced from its orienting function as a lens for (Indigenous) analysis to the status of yet another inert object within a crowded field of (colonial) display. These significant changes—from *central* to *peripheral*, from *dynamic* to *static*, from *making relations* to *vying for attention*—represent a shift from understanding a complex Indigenous text in terms of its generative *form* traversing space and time toward understanding a complex Indigenous text in terms of its fixed and extractable *content*. Although prominent signage in the new exhibit space announces an explicitly "decolonizing" curatorial philosophy and an ethical intention "to change," in its actual practice, the new exhibit appears (as yet) unable to fully escape either the asymmetrical power relations or the established rules of encounter of the conventional (that is, colonial) museum. Ironically, despite its stated "promise," the new Burke appears (as yet) less capable than the old of breaking colonial habits and supporting Indigenous self-representations on their own terms.

My early observations about the reconceived and reconstructed Burke—especially about the museum's potential to assist visitors in experiencing Graham's sculpture in its fullness—brings me back to the question of literary studies marked as comparative, world, or global and the potential to reconceive and reconstruct these formations and practices in ways that will be of benefit to Indigenous studies scholarship, to Indigenous students and faculty, and, ultimately, to Indigenous communities. Will public declarations of an ethical intention to "decolonize" comparative literature—a shift, as it were, from outdated to updated display spaces and signage—be enough for the field and its institutions to actually escape their own deeply ingrained colonial habits?

The cautionary example of (re)positioning and (re)framing Graham's sculpture within the Burke Museum(s) also brings me back to the trans-Indigenous work of Edgar Garcia. After publishing *Signs of the Americas* in early 2020, during the initial phase of the worldwide COVID-19 health crisis, Garcia produced a new manuscript that meditates on the ongoing relevance of a classic Indigenous text from Central America, the Kiche Mayan *Popol Vuh*; Garcia's book was published in March 2022 as *Emergency: Reading the Popol Vuh in a Time of Crisis*. As his title suggests, Garcia rereads the Mayan creation story through the lens of the disorienting early months of the global pandemic. He juxtaposes his textual analysis and personal ruminations with two sobering historical facts. First, that the *Popol Vuh* was inscribed as a written text around the year 1524, near the beginning of the crisis of Spanish colonialism in the Americas. And, second, that the oldest extant version of that sixteenth-century manuscript, currently held at the Newberry Library in Chicago, was inscribed in 1702, during the crisis of Spanish colonialism that remained ongoing nearly two centuries later. Garcia observes that the version of the Mayan creation story to which diverse readers have access today *emerges* not from some primordial state of Indigenous authenticity, unsullied by outside linguistic, cultural, or political forces, but rather from *within the emergency* of colonialism and the early attempts of colonial officials not simply to interrupt the Mayan social world but to violently impose their own social world on it. Far from presenting an account of primal Indigenous purity, Garcia observes, "The [*Popol Vuh*] is explicit about its colonial context" (Garcia, *Emergency* 50). The colonial emergency remains ongoing, and the current crisis of the pandemic, he argues, is but one aspect of its

contemporary manifestation. *Emergence*, in the sense of the Mayan story of creation, in inextricably linked to *emergency*, in the sense of the ongoing crisis of colonialism.

Within his wide-ranging rereading, Garcia highlights the *Popol Vuh*'s one moment of explicit colonial intrusion. During the extant text's physical inscription, the Spanish Dominican friar Francisco Ximenez unexpectedly inserted himself into the manuscript he was simultaneously transcribing in Kiche Mayan and translating into Spanish (*Emergency* 53). Like similar projects of colonial inscription, the project of transcribing and translating the *Popol Vuh* was an attempt not to preserve or advance Maya thinking on its own terms but rather "to help regulate Maya thinking and assimilate it into the colonizers' world" (53). As an agent of colonial power, it served the friar's interests to efface his presence within the Indigenous text—which is what marks this singular moment as so exceptional. Suddenly, "near the end of a book of fifty-six folios that has been filled with what Ximenez would have considered idolatrous gods, incorrect speech, and damnable stories," the friar inserted himself through the work's only parenthetical aside (52). And because his textual project of transcription and translation proceeded in tandem, he interrupted the manuscript not once but twice, and in two languages. In one column, the parenthetical aside is written in Latin, with which the friar interrupts his Kiche Mayan transcription, while in the other column, the parenthetical aside is written in Spanish, with which the friar interrupts his simultaneous Spanish translation.

At this relatively late point in the narrative, the *Popol Vuh* describes an important moment of migration and existential crisis. The "first humans" have already been created, but they remain lost and without an appropriate language with which to successfully appeal to the gods. To assist them, the gods of the Underworld send a "person," in the form of a "bat-winged spiritual broker," who bears a critical message (52, 53). It is at this precise moment, when the "bat-winged" messenger appears from the Underworld to offer explicit guidance to the first humans, that the friar inserted his colonial voice and his colonial power into the manuscript. Both the Latin interruption within the Mayan transcription and the Spanish interruption within the Spanish translation can be translated into English as "the devil is speaking here" or "the devil spoke henceforth to them." Garcia argues that the Spanish friar's unprecedented "demonization of the scene" not only draws greater attention to the important messenger and thus makes readers "want to read" the scene and the message "more closely." The colonial interruption also "intend[s] to surveil and control" both the specific message and the larger manuscript. The interruption intends "to transform [the Mayan myth world] into a devilish fiction," and thus "to transform [that Mayan world] into content within the order of Roman Catholic world form" (52, 54). In other words, in "that flash of colonial interruption," Garcia argues,

> readers get the trace of a social world imposing itself on the Popol Vuh in 1702. The Spaniards have arrived. Their power is like an ocean of flame in the eastern sky, now speaking itself into existence over the earth's darkening face. And, while Latin and Spanish are still marginal languages in the early eighteenth-century Guatemalan highlands where this text is transcribed, the principle of incorporation is already here in a text whose larger framework is designed to help convert the Mayas to Christianity. (53)

In his often poetic analysis, Garcia does not simply reread the *Popol Vuh*; he re-recognizes the Mayan creation narrative on its own terms, not as an Indigenous

text that has been corrupted or made inauthentic by colonial interventions, but rather as a text fully within its specific—highly dynamic and ever *changing*—Indigenous world.[10]

Although the colonial interruption occurs late in the text of the *Popol Vuh*, Garcia places his analysis of the parenthetical aside and his meditation on its rhetorical force and political impact near the center of his own work, within chapter 5, "Demons," of *Emergency*'s nine chapters.[11] Similar to Graham's composite sculpture as it was positioned in the old Burke Museum, Garcia's analysis of the colonial interruption functions as a specific optics, a critical lens through which to view other aspects of the larger text—including not only its content but also its form. As his chapter progresses, Garcia highlights how the *Popol Vuh* repeatedly describes itself not as a literary object but, rather, similar to my description of Graham's composite figure, as an "instrument for seeing":

> [The *Popol Vuh*] is proposing its form as theoretical and historical form—as a way of seeing, understanding, and shaping artistic expression, conceptual interpretation, and historical knowledge. It is not just mere *content* to be interpreted and interpolated by European form; it is *the form* by which to interpret and illuminate the world beyond itself. This is one of the book's touchstones: it offers frameworks for expression and interpretation explicitly. It wants us to think in its forms. (60)

It is at this point in his analysis, late in the chapter, that Garcia reveals an important detail about how the *Popol Vuh* has been permitted to circulate within colonial structures, both historical and contemporary, including those that undergird the contemporary academy's dominant formations and practices. He writes,

> It is worth noting that [friar] Ximenez's dictional interruptions do not appear in any of the English- or Spanish-language translations of the Popol Vuh that I know. Mention of these interruptions is made in the paratextual or parenthetical apparatus of a footnote or endnote in the published translations. While such elision of colonial diction into the parenthesis seems appropriate for foregrounding the Indigenous text itself, paradoxically it gives the dictional interruption more force than it deserves. My sense is that the Popol Vuh is designed to handle such interruption, to configure and cast it inside Mayan form. Ximenez's fatal flaw . . . was to be convinced that he could capture the content of Mayan stories in Catholic world form. . . . But the Popol Vuh has its own form—its own sense that it is *the* world form, and its own means for enacting that world. (61)

I began to wonder, Does the *Culture Is Living* exhibit in the new Burke display a similar fatal flaw? Despite the innovations of its material structure and the best intentions of its advisory board, director, and curators, has the assertively "decolonizing" museum failed to recognize that Graham's composite sculpture carries its own world form?[12]

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[10] In *Blood Narrative*, I develop the term *re-recognition* (recognizing again) as a way to acknowledge how, contrary to the edicts of orthodox postcolonial theory, the Indigenous writers, artists, and activists I was studying did not always "disavow" dominant discourses or work to "hybridize" them. Sometimes, I observed, Indigenous writers, artists, and activists *re-recognized* dominant discourses in their original colonial contexts and in their original assertions of colonial power. This is particularly evident, I argue, when Indigenous writers, artists, and activists engage the discourse of treaties, since both the materiality of treaty documents and the actions of treaty making implicitly acknowledge and explicitly affirm Indigenous political sovereignty. It has often been strategically advantageous to Indigenous writers, artists, activists, and communities to re-recognize these particular colonial discourses in order to further specific Indigenous agendas.

[11] *Emergency*'s nine titled chapters are followed by a brief afterword.

[12] I want to be clear that my intention is not to unduly critique the new Burke Museum—of which I am an ardent supporter—or its leadership, curators, and staff, whom I respect and admire as colleagues. My

Within the inter- and multidiscipline that is Indigenous studies, "decolonization is not a metaphor" has become a familiar maxim, a starting point for discussions as we plan our itineraries for transforming the dominant academy and its (colonial) institutions into better environments for the coming generations of Indigenous students and faculty.[13] We understand that it will take more than a catchy slogan to alter asymmetrical relations of power or to reverse histories of subjugation and erasure. We understand that placing well-crafted land acknowledgments on websites and in signature blocks is no substitute for creating courses in Indigenous studies—or for hiring qualified Indigenous and Indigenous studies faculty to teach, support, and administer them. And yet, our colleagues in more-established and better-funded fields continue to proclaim their intentions to "decolonize" with (seemingly) little understanding of what it means to relinquish actual power, what it means to return stolen land and other resources, what it means to respect Indigenous sovereignties—whether political, intellectual, artistic, or even literary. Within the ongoing emergency of colonialism, what is needed is not for the dominant structures of comparative, world, or global literary studies to (suddenly) recognize Indigenous literatures as legitimate objects for study. No, what is needed is a re-recognition of Indigenous texts and contexts on their own terms, not (only) as content suitable for multiple approaches to analysis, but as optics, as instruments for seeing and tools for interpretation. Perhaps what is needed, as well, is a re-recognition of dominant texts and contexts—whether produced in Europe, North America, Asia, or elsewhere—as they are seen from Indigenous perspectives and as they are known within Indigenous experiences and understandings. Which classics from the canons of comparative, world, or global literary studies will be seen as productive sites of inquiry within projects of teaching and research that center not conventional (that is, colonial) but Indigenous epistemologies and ways of knowing?[14]

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intention is to point out the great difficulty for all of us in trying to escape dominant discourses and structures, especially discourses and structures rooted in colonialism.

[13] Many cite the epitomizing and illuminating essay "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor" by Eve Tuck (Unangax) and K. Wayne Yang, published in 2012, but the central point has been made, repeatedly and in various forms, at least since the 1970s.

[14] An example of this kind of work is Oceanic scholar Teresia Teaiwa's well-known essay "The Ancestors We Get to Choose: White Influences I Won't Deny," originally published in 2014.

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