



Chadwick Allen, *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies*

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AS ITS TITLE indicates, Chadwick Allen's *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies* is an ambitious and capacious text. It is a book with a mission. The study is organized around two related projects: the *recovery* and reclaiming of diverse overlooked, neglected, forgotten, or obscured indigenous texts on the one hand, and, on the other, the *interpretation* of those recovered texts in ways that "place Indigenous histories and politics, cultures and world views, and multiple realities at their vital center" (xvi). Though published in the University of Minnesota Press series entitled "Indigenous Americas," Allen's book is more geographically expansive than even that vast territory might suggest. In his suggestive and fine-grained readings of literature from the North American Plains to Hawaiian, Maori, and Indigenous Australian Aboriginal artists, Allen really does offer a comparative framework which is at once trans-continental, trans-Pacific, and trans-indigenous.

This is a scholarly endeavor that has grown far beyond the author's initial vision of performing a critical intervention into American literature by considering "global Indigenous literatures written (primarily) in English" (xii–xiii). (Though interesting and important, if the study stopped there, I would not be reviewing it for this publication.) Rather, *Trans-Indigenous* solidifies Allen's already-strong reputation for historically acute, culturally rich, ethnologically nuanced readings of indigenous literature, while also taking the arguments made in his first book (ALLEN 2002) and thinking them through at a broader conceptual level. Essentially, Allen star-navigates and dead-reckons his way through an ocean of indigenous artworks to chart the contours of a global literary studies whose methodologies respect and respond to "the political act of operating between two or more languages and cultural systems, actively engaging the politics of their asymmetry within (post) colonial relations" (215). As Allen notes,

The point is to invite specific studies into different kinds of conversations, and to acknowledge the mobility and multiple interactions of Indigenous peoples, cultures, histories, and texts. Similar to terms like *translation*, *transnational*, and *transform*, *trans-Indigenous* may be able to bear the complex, contingent asymmetry and the potential risks of unequal encounters borne by the preposition *across*. It may be able to indicate the specific agency and situated momentum carried by the preposition *through*. It may be able to harbor the potential of *change* as both transitive and intransitive verb, and as both noun and adjective (xiv–xv, emphases in original).

In this sense, Allen's approach is deeply indebted to various political, aesthetic, and scholarly conversations around decolonization (most prominently SMITH 1999).

A quick summation of Allen's five chapters will provide a sense of the territory he covers. Chapter 1 juxtaposes 1960s North American scholarly accounts of "The Indian Today" against similar documents from Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, while chapter 2 examines American Indian responses to the U.S. bicentennial celebration, comparing these to Maori and Aboriginal responses to national celebrations in New Zealand and Australia. Taken together, these two chapters indicate many useful ways of enlarging the accessible archive of indigenous texts. Chapter 3 brings together a discussion of pictographs, weaving, carving, and poetry, "mov[ing] outward from a tribally specific approach to indigenous literary reading and interpretation toward an intertribal or international approach and toward the possibility of a more global, trans-Indigenous approach" (xxix). Chapter 4 performs a similar act of juxtaposition in order to dilate on the presence, or absence, of indigenous language and to adapt a model of "trans-customary" art—that is, art that is "neither 'hybrid' nor caught 'between' but ... that establishes ... a 'visual empathy with customary practice'" (153)—to an understanding of bilingual punning as generative language practice. Finally, chapter 5 brings indigenous poetry into conversation with indigenous technologies for exploration, trade, migration, and settlement (earthworks and open sea navigation, for instance). In general, Allen's juxtapositional methodologies "help us see in more precise terms" how particular ideas of indigeneity have been "conceptualized, authenticated, distributed and interpreted" in various locales across the long twentieth century (6).

While I am obviously quite taken with Allen's accomplishments, I will register three, minimal critiques. First, I will note that Allen's scholarship (like my own—we are both comparatists by training) is organized in broadly transnational, global, and transcultural ways. Other academic formations, such as those requiring extensive fieldwork in particular local communities, may find Allen's arguments—which, in the course of one chapter juxtapose a poem by N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa/Cherokee) with the hip hop lyrics and music video of Upper Hutt Possee (Maori), the writing of Naomi Losch (Hawaiian), and the modernist drawings of Ralph Hotere (Maori)—to be rough going over unfamiliar territory. I urge you to stay with it, to stay with him. The read, and the ride, is well worth it, and his prose does drop into numerous oases of extended, deep reading, such as his luminous navigation of Robert Sullivan's *Star Waka* or the loving meditation on Momaday's "Carnegie, Oklahoma, 1919" that weaves its way through the entire book. Second, more figures would have been useful, particularly in places where Allen performs in-depth analyses of visual artifacts, such as the photograph of a Sioux dance and give-away (36), the dust jacket for Nsanga's 1975 novel *Indians' Summer* (77), and the promotional material for several museum exhibits (101, 165). Perhaps he will be able to include these if (or when) his book finds its way to a second edition. Finally, and most crucially, the book offers no formal conclusion. This is a sore loss.

Criticism aside, *Trans-Indigenous* is a treasure, particularly for scholars in the fields of comparative literature, indigenous studies, and postcolonial studies. If Allen's goal has been to increase understandings "of how the settler colonialism practiced within the borders of the United States might relate to off-shore U.S.

imperialism and to various manifestations of colonialism around the globe” (48), in this he has been wholly successful.

More immediately germane to the readers of this journal, those of us working in the areas of Asian ethnographies may be encouraged by Allen’s successful example to consider the promise of his methodologies for other literatures, peoples, and places. I, for one, would be interested to see the poetics of juxtaposition that Allen offers thought through in other extended cultural triangles. How might his methodologies, articulated with respect to the Polynesian triangle of Aotearoa New Zealand/Rapa Nui/Hawai‘i (with connections to the North American continental cultures of Navajo and Kiowa), shift to reveal new archives and fresh voices in other areas: the trans-Strait grouping Ainu/Chukchi/Yupik, for instance, or the more southerly maritime grouping of Okinawa/Chamorro/Taiwanese aboriginal groups (perhaps with connections drawn to indigenous cultures in the Philippines)? These are ambitious groupings, but no less so than Allen’s own, each with its own complex layering of multiple waves of colonization and settlement. In the final analysis, Allen’s book opens a conversation, the elaborations and responses to which should take us all many fruitful years to articulate. *Tihei mauriora*, indeed.

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#### REFERENCES

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