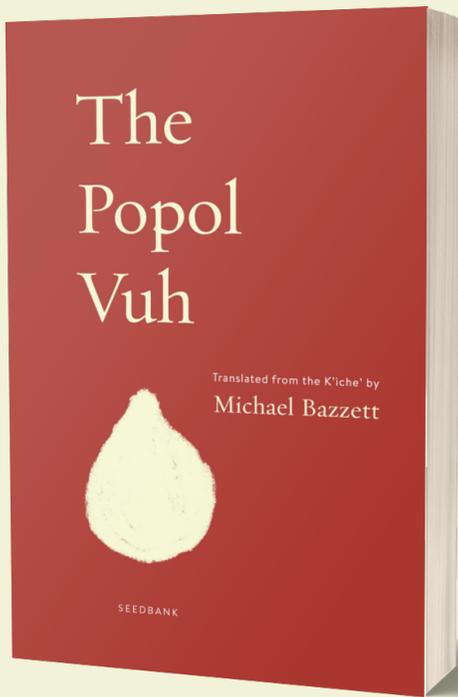


# THE POPOL VUH TRANSLATED FROM THE K'ICHE'

## BY MICHAEL BAZZETT



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The original manuscript contained pages of the K'iche' aristocracy and lineage but Michael Bazzett chose to end this translation at the close of the mythic narrative to make the text more accessible. Do you agree with his decision? How might the inclusion of historical genealogy have affected your understanding of *The Popol Vuh*?
2. During the preamble, Framer and Shaper struggle to create a people that will properly praise and worship them. They seem to believe that their divine acts require someone to acknowledge and appreciate them. Do you believe that an act of greatness can still be great without anyone there to be impacted by it?
3. Once the animals were created by Framer and Shaper they were condemned to a life cycle of eating and being eaten for their inability to speak intelligently. What does that say about the value of communication? Why is intelligent speech the main differentiator between humans and animals in *The Popol Vuh*?
4. Seven Macaw and his sons are defeated when the hero twins trick them into becoming one with the earth. What does that say about the power of nature vs pride? How can the earth be stronger than supernatural power?
5. In the reader's companion, *The Popol Vuh* is often explained in relation to Christianity which came long after this Mayan epic and ultimately destroyed the ancient civilization. Does the comparison strengthen the reader's understanding of the text or undermine the significance of Mayan beliefs? What could it mean that this epic and Christianity as we know it today have so much in common?
6. *The Popol Vuh* often repeats itself in language and story reminding us of the idiom, "History repeats itself." However, when Hunahpu and Xbalanque descend to Xibalba they do not meet their demise like their fathers One and Seven Hunahpu. What do the hero twins possess that saved them that their fathers did not? What does it mean that they succeed where their fathers failed?
7. When finally "true people" are created, the gods are threatened by their divine knowledge and understanding and "undo them / a little." Why was it important that the people's vision be limited and understanding of the world capped?
8. *The Popol Vuh* was originally an oral epic passed down verbally through generations until it was written sometime in the middle 1500s. Bazzett did his best to translate the story back into its original lyricism. How do you think hearing it sung and spoken would change the meaning of the story? How does writing down an oral tradition change its impact?
9. *The Popol Vuh* was originally an oral epic passed down verbally through generations until it was written sometime in the middle 1500s. Bazzett did his best to translate the story back into its original lyricism. How do you think hearing it sung and spoken would change the meaning of the story? How does writing down an oral tradition change its impact?
10. As part of the Seedbank series, *The Popol Vuh* can be regarded as a guide for reflection on our relationship to the world around us. In what ways does this book challenge and broaden your perception of the world and humanity?

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## SYNOPSIS

A *New York Times* Best Poetry Book of 2018 and *World Literature Today* Notable Translation, *The Popol Vuh* is a striking translation of the Mayan creation epic passed down through the centuries. Originally sung and chanted, before being translated into prose—and now, for the first time, translated back into verse by Michael Bazzett—this is a story of the generative power of language. A story that asks not only *Where did you come from? How might you live again?*

In the beginning, the world is spoken into existence with one word: “Earth.” There are no inhabitants, and no sun—only the broad sky, silent sea, and sovereign Framer and Shaper. Then come the twin heroes Hunahpu and Xbalanque. Wielding blowguns, they begin a journey to hell and back, ready to confront the folly of false deities as well as death itself, in service to the world and to humanity.

By turns poetic and lucid, sinuous and accessible, this striking new translation of *The Popol Vuh*—the first in the Seedbank series of world literature—breathes new life into an essential tale.

## ABOUT THE SEEDBANK SERIES

This new series of world literature expands Milkweed’s publishing program to bring ancient, historical, and contemporary works from cultures from around the world to American readers. Just as repositories around the world gather seeds to ensure biodiversity in the future, Seedbank gathers works of literature from around the world that foster conversation and reflection on the human relationship to place and the natural world—exposing readers to new, endangered, and forgotten ways of seeing the world.