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Annikadel:The History of the Universe as Told by the Achumawi Indians of California. By Istet Woich

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**Annikadel: The History of the Universe as Told by the Achumawi Indians of California.** By Ístet Woiche, recorded and edited by C. Hart Merriam, M. D. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992 [1928]. 166 pages. \$11.95 paper.

C. Hart Merriam learned the Achumawi creation story from Ístet Woiche, a highly trained and respected elder of the Madesiwi band (which Merriam renders as *Modes'se*). He gathered the many stories that make up this *History of the Universe* during visits with his teacher sometime between 1910 and 1927. Merriam stayed with Ístet Woiche at his home on the Big Bend of the Pit River, between Mount Shasta and Mount Lassen in northeastern California, and the Achumawi elder also visited Merriam in Lagunitas, far to the south in Marin County. The relations between the two men, and between Merriam's daughter Zenaida and Ístet Woiche's wife (whose name is not given in the small book under review) were close and enduring. Merriam learned this history slowly, by considered turns. As a result, the translation he ultimately rendered is respectful and friendly, luminous and deep. It will bear many readings, each taking the reader deeper among its words, farther into its dreaming, where its purposes and meanings await discovery.

The surface that conceals these depths is fairly simple and enjoyable. The story tells of the creation of the world upon the waters by the First People—World's Heart, his grandson Annikadel (*God*), Silver Fox and Coyote, Weasel, Cloud Maiden, Spider-woman, and many others. It goes on to relate the adventures of Edechewe, "The Traveler," who journeyed far and placed Sun-woman and Moon-man and the most important Star-girls in the sky, and it relates how Spider-woman helped various heroes to overcome monsters and many other evils. Finally, there is a section on the adventures and misadventures of Coyote (Ja'-mul), who trades skins with Dog, creates death, eats a lot of grasshoppers, dies often, and is resurrected by the two Raven Doctors just as often. (These last stories were mostly learned by Zenaida Merriam from Ístet Woiche's wife.)

By the end, the world is ready for the Real People, and the First People become the animals and plants and heavenly bodies that we know today: kangaroo rats, bristle cone pines, the North Star, and everyone else. The vastly powerful and wise Annikadel, who formerly lived in the sky, where his blue underbelly made him invisible, became the little lizard (*Sceloporus*) with blue cheeks and

sides (you see him on the rocks today, scratching himself in the sun). Human life began.

In its epic quality and narrative flow, *Annikadel* resembles some of the other recently published or republished renderings of Native American creation cycles (D. M. Dooling's *Sons of the Wind*, a Lakota history of the universe, comes to mind). Yet *Annikadel* is a distinctly Californian text, and its origins are evident in both its stress on locality and its dependence on dreaming.

The many stories that make up this epic history are at once concerned with an intensely local Madesiwi world and with, as the title Merriam gave it suggests, the entire cosmos: with how Coyote's footprint came to appear on a certain rock in the Big Bend country and with how the earth came to turn on its axis, as I'stet Woiche seems to have known it does.

For all of this rootedness in the concrete details of micro- and macro-natural history, *Annikadel* tells of a world dreamt from the primordial sea by World's Heart and the others, where the laws of action and causality arise from the surrealist metaphysics and counterlogic of dream, rather than from the stolid physics and geometry of matter:

*Ja'-mul* [Coyote] was asked how the people who were to come would know the history of the world. There was, he said, only one way in which this could be done, that was by dreams. "If the Real People [the Indians] will dream," he continued, "I will tell them the history of my people, and how long we were in making the world; or *Kwahn* the Silver Fox-man will tell them" (p. 158).

"It was a dream that told the history," I'stet Woiche tells Merriam (p. 115).

These dreamt stories are full of magic and power and transformation. Travel can be in baskets of spider web or along magical ropes thrown into the sky. People throw their minds as well, learning the thoughts of others and reshaping them from a distance. There are great power objects that save heroes from certain death, such as the World's Cane that becomes the Big Dipper. As in dreams, shape and size shift easily. Edechwe's brother Yatch (Weasel-boy), for instance, becomes so small that he travels in Edechwe's hair, where he is concealed by a special braid (called *tah-pahs'-too-gah'-ge*). Like many dreams, *Annikadel* is full of jokes, which are readily apparent, and full of wisdom, which is not apparent immediately.

Istet Woiche (William Hulsey) was, Merriam tells us, “a remarkably learned man” (p. xvii), as was C. Hart Merriam himself. Born in New York State in 1855, Merriam became a physician but soon turned his energies to research biology, which he pursued from 1876 until about 1910. By 1885, he had given up the practice of medicine to pursue biology (or, more accurately, natural history) full time. After 1903, his reputation was well established. His work as director of the federal Biological Survey took him to California, where, by 1910, he became immersed in recording the minutiae of the lives and histories and languages of California Indians, while continuing his biological studies of flora and fauna. His ethnographic and linguistic work occupied him until his death in 1942. Although enormous amounts of this work remain in notes and manuscripts today, *Annikadel* was first published in 1928.

Between 1900 and 1914, professionalized Californian ethnology emerged at the University of California under the strong leadership of Alfred Louis Kroeber. Kroeber’s emphases were on rapid surveys moving toward definition of tribal territories and languages, culture areas and cultural typologies, and other accumulations of data that facilitated anthropological generalization and comparison, such as putative cultural personality types. He stressed rigorous method and professional distancing. Merriam, as what is now called an “Indianologist” rather than an “anthropologist,” valued particularities for their own intrinsic interest, rather than as data enabling generalizations. His delight was in fine-grained things like the variations in pronunciation of a single word between one village and the next, in remarkable individuals like Istet Woiche (rather than in typifying whole tribes, like the Achumawi), and in friendship and intimacy rather than professional distance and objectification of “informants.” In all of this, he was far less like Kroeber than like J. P. Harrington and Jaime de Angulo, ethnographers and linguists left out of the California anthropological establishment that emerged under Kroeber, as was Merriam himself—during his lifetime at least. (Indeed, in Merriam’s plain but poetic language and in his evident love of a good story, he seems a great deal like de Angulo, who also did remarkable work with Achumawi friends.) Unlike Kroeber, Merriam had no grand project. He seems only to have wanted to get as many as possible of the local facts down, in all their detail, and to get them right.

While Merriam is laudable for his generosity of spirit, his equal respect for detail and for the native teachers who revealed it, and his desire to make the particularities of California Indian lives and

languages accessible, his results are at times a bit frustrating for scholars. His transcriptions of California languages are not accurate, giving everything an English sound (as when he renders Madesiwi *Modes'se*), and sometimes his cross-cultural equivalents seem off. What subtle differences did he obscure in translating *Annikadel* as *God*, for instance?

Yet he worked long and hard and with standards and perceptions finely tuned by his scientific disciplines, medicine and biology. From his vast ethnological collections, many wonderful things will no doubt continue to emerge and reemerge, as *Annikadel* does now. It is a little like the dream-history itself, where the most powerful and creative people are often the smallest—Mouse, Kangaroo Rat, and, of course, Little Lizard.

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**Best Left as Indians: Native-White Relations in the Yukon Territory, 1840–1973.** By Ken S. Coates. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991. \$39.95 cloth.

The title of this book is taken from remarks by a white official, made at the turn of the century, who believed that white influence did nothing but damage to Yukon Indians. He thought that they were quite capable of supporting themselves by traditional subsistence pursuits. His represents one pole of opinion, alternating with that which sees assimilation of natives into the Euro-Canadian mainstream as the most desirable policy. No matter which view prevailed at any given time, the outcome has been the same from the start: Yukon natives have been at the periphery of the dominant society.

Coates makes extensive use of archival records, governmental, commercial, and ecclesiastical. This is not, he acknowledges, an ethnohistorical study. There are no native voices in the form of autobiographical or oral history narrative, elicited from Indian informants. The book is focused on "the non-Native forces at work in the Yukon Territory [with] no attempt . . . to use historical methodology to assess the ramifications of European expansion on Native social organization and internal mechanisms of control" (p. xix).

Coates mines anthropological sources minimally, and not al-