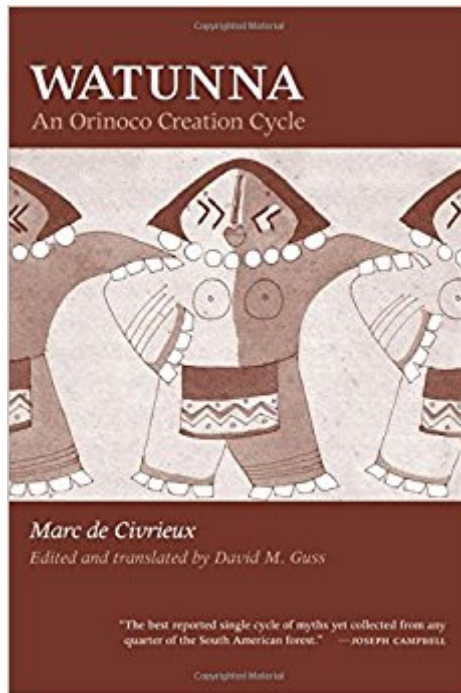


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Watunna: An Orinoco Creation Cycle



Synopsis

Originally published in Spanish in 1970, *Watunna* is the epic history and creation stories of the Makiritare, or Yekuana, people living along the northern bank of the Upper Orinoco River of Venezuela, a region of mountains and virgin forest virtually unexplored even to the present. The first English edition of this book was published in 1980 to rave reviews. This edition contains a new foreword by David Guss, as well as *Mediata*, a detailed myth that recounts the origins of shamanism.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Anthropologists and folklorists have gathered, against the coming night of worldwide electronic frost, sheaves and sheaves of oral narrative, but little of it is as readable, coherent, and thought-provoking as *Watunna*... Though the *Watunna* can be for us... little more than a resonant entertainment and gaudy fossil, the two existential mysteries that it addresses—the existence of the universe, the existence of *the*—have not been, beneath the great flurry of modern knowing, dissolved." (New Yorker) "One rarely reads a mythical corpus so richly textured as this Makiritare cycle.... The result is a stunning portrayal of Makiritare creativity and an enthralling narrative of the way they imagine meaning in the universe. ...Civrieux and Guss bring the reader inside a contemporary worldview breathtakingly different in the way it imagines conflict and beauty." (New Scholar)

Text: English (translation) Original Language: Spanish

This book was excellent! If every course I took had me reading a book like this, my grades would be pristine. The first few pages of the book are completely boring, but if you just skip the intro and go right into the folklore you will not be able to stop reading this book. Once you're done with the book you'll actually want to read the intro to learn about the people. My teacher told us this was a great book to curl up on a lazy afternoon and drink tea while reading...we all laughed at her...but she was not kidding. I will keep this book forever and re-read it regularly, it's great.

An extraordinary cycle. Similar in scope to the bible and other cycles in ancient civilizations.

WATUNNA : An Orinoco Creation Cycle, by Marc de Civrieux, edited and translated from the Spanish by David M. Guss. 195 pp. North point Press, 1980. I first learned of this book from a review by John Updike, 'Happy on Nono despite Odosha,' which was reprinted in his 'Hugging the Shore' (Penguin Books, 1983, pp.669-75). Normally I don't read much anthropology, and have no particular interest in myths, but Updike's was such an excellent review and got me so excited about this book that I decided to get a copy. It turned out to be the most fascinating compilation of myth I've ever run into, and one with a significant difference. Rather than being recast in the scholarly prose of your standard anthropologist, the Watunna Creation stories are given to us as they issued from the mouths of the Makiritare themselves, a tribe which lives in the mountainous regions of the upper Orinoco in Southern Venezuela. They were pieced together by French ethnographer, Marc Civrieux, who spent over twenty years visiting the villages of the Makiritare and listening to their vivid and moving myths of the world's creation, and the role their tribe played within it. The word 'myth' is, of course, a convenient catch-all. In fact it explains nothing. All it does is serve to excuse us from further thought, as does the word 'instinct,' a word which really refers to a kind of intelligence that we do not understand at all. But if even a tiny fraction of what the Makiritare are saying is true - if in fact these stories are not myth, but, as they themselves firmly believe, real history - it would indicate a knowledge of human history that reaches back in time for tens and perhaps even hundreds of thousands of years. But whether 'myth' or 'history,' the Watunna stories are fascinating, and they have been beautifully rendered into English by David M. Guss. Here are a few lines from the opening of the book: "There was Kahuna, the Sky Place. The Kahuhana lived there just like now. They're good, wise people. And they were in the beginning too. They never died. There was no sickness, no evil, no war. The whole world was Sky. No one worked. No one looked for food. Food was always there, ready. // There were no animals, no demons, no clouds, no winds. In the highest

sky was Wanadi, just like now. He gave his light to the people. . . ." (page 21). Besides a Translator's Preface, and a 19-page Introduction on the history of the Makiritare and the nature of their Watunna, which in its highest form is communicated from the spirit world in a secret language, and is heard only by initiates while in trance, the book also contains a section of eight interesting photographs of the Makiritare people, a detailed 20-page glossary, and two maps. The book, as is customary with North Point Press, is well-printed on excellent paper, stitched, and bound in a glossy wrapper. If you're looking for something both different and utterly compelling, and if I haven't succeeded in convincing you, check out John Updike's review, because I'm pretty sure he will. He certainly convinced me, and he was right!

This book examines and conveys the creation tales of the Watunna tribe located in tropical rain forest of Venezuela as collected over 15 years by the author. The stories and the descriptions of the story weavers are spell binding. One of the more interesting books I have ever read! See if you can find the connections and similarities between the creation stories of your people and the Watunna!

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