

The Collective Unconscious of Amerind Origin Narratives

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INTRODUCTION

*Après moi, le deluge*¹

Stories of catastrophic flooding are among the oldest that humans have shared for generations in seeking a rationale for natural phenomena ranging from the placement of mountains, to the creation of wild species, to the life-giving splendor of the Sun and to the very creation of the land all inhabit. In many of these legends below the Cold Heaven lay the terrestrial sphere and its attendant torments, and the edge of menace.

The Collective Unconscious of Creation Flood Legends

The German *kollektives unbewusstes* refers to structures of the unconscious mind which are shared among beings of the same species. To Karl Jung, the unconscious was divided into the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious, with the collective unconscious being “common to mankind as a whole and originating in the inherited structure of the brain.”² More precisely, for Jung collective memories are ancient and primordial, that is to say, “the images impressed upon the mind since of old.”³

The nearly instinctual invocation of flood myths verges upon an *a priori* quality of creation stories throughout the world. Most renowned is the Mesopotamian flood story of the epic poem of Gilgamesh, with its twin terrors of death in life and life in death, recorded in Mesopotamia *cerca* 2100-1200 B.C.E., in which the flood hero Utnapishtim is granted immortality. Gilgamesh asks Utnapishtim how he, a mortal, eluded death and became a god, and Utnapishtim tells the story of how he had been king of Shuruppak, a city on the banks of the Euphrates. Enlil, the god of Earth, Wind and Air, ordered a flood to destroy humanity, swearing the other gods to secrecy. Ea, the cleverest of the gods, and the god of Wisdom, broke his vow and warned aloud of an imminent flood in a voice loud enough for Utnapishtim to hear him. Ea told him to build an immense boat, and with the help of his people he did so in seven days, laying in also the seeds of all living things. The boat was launched upon the Euphrates River, and when the storm came the Earth flooded. Eventually the boat ran aground on the peak of a mountain. After seven days Utnapishtim released a dove to search for dry land, but the dove could not find any and so it returned. A swallow too was released but could find no land. Lastly Utnapishtim released a raven, but the bird did not return. At last reaching the shore of the land the raven had found, Utnapishtim prepared a sacrifice. Enlil arrived to partake of the sacrifice, but was furious to discover that many people had survived. Learning that the offending party was Ea, Ea himself stood up to Enlil and told him that whatever humankind’s transgressions might have been, they did not all deserve to die at once, and that their numbers could instead forever be limited by plagues, wolves and famine.

¹ Accepted as a reference to the biblical flood of the BOOK OF GENESIS 9:8-17, THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED (2010) (Michael D. Coogan *et al.*, eds)(2010), and also a foretelling the French Revolution as retribution for aristocratic decadence, a theme of divine punishment found in numerous aboriginal flood legends discussed below.

² Gregory Mitchell, *Carl Jung and Jungian Analytical Psychology*, <https://mind-development.eu/jung.html>.

³ PAUL RADIN, THE WORLD OF PRIMITIVE MAN 305, 306 (Evergreen/Grove 1953, 1960), discussing JOLAN JACOBI, THE PSYCHOLOGY OF JUNG 53 (Yale 1943).

A congruence can be seen with the Bible story of Noah,⁴ set in the Levant, in which “God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ‘As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.’”⁵

The epoch and the geographical setting of the Gilgamesh poem, or the story of Noah, bear no relation to the circumstances described in hundreds of Native American flood legends, and yet as will be seen in myriad tales, the miasma of dread, the operation of supernatural forces, the salvation by boat or raft, and the ultimate fate of humankind are thematic to all, transcending theatres of operation.⁶ The tribal lands of most Amerind may be static, but their tales are nomadic, with peregrinations that are alternately haunting and optimistic.

Foundational Typology of Flood Creation Stories

From Kraken, the Norwegian sea beast of myth and legend, to the imaginations of Merpeople throughout the world, flood stories are lodged in the inherent nature of how peoples have imagined their origins. A collective mythology allows for richly varied accounts of the origins of man, as Amerind tales from the Kamchatka Peninsula of the Russian Far East to the southernmost Andes attest. For their variety, however, unmistakable similarities are extant, even between tribes with no evident coincident geographic or cultural connection. As to this class of oral histories, independent yet comparable ideation of how floods occurred and the underlying reasons attributed for the calamities suggest strongly operation of a collective unconscious that has led to so many congruous accounts in the cultural and spiritual education of generations of Native Americans.

While some Amerind origin stories make no reference waters of any type or size,⁷ it is much more typical to find creation myth and folklore interwoven with descriptions of the life-giving, sustaining, cleansing and purifying character of water.⁸ As American anthropologist Gladys A. Reichard explains, there are two near constants: (1) the underscored horror of dissolution by watery obliteration; and (2) the agency of a supernatural god, dissatisfied with either or both the existing topography or the moral capacities of humankind, that responds with a purifying flood and a method of building a new *terra firma*.

⁴ GENESIS 9:8-17, THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED (2010) (Michael D. Coogan *et al.*, eds) (2010).

⁵ None of these recitations alter the geological proofs of actual floods. In the Pacific Northwest several inundation stories can be harmonized with that region’s actual experience with tsunamis originating in underseas volcanoes or tectonic shifts. *Tsunamis and Native American Legends*, www.oesd.noaa.gov/TERK/other.../nativeamericanlegends.doc; <https://ceetep.oregonstate.edu/sites/ceetep.oregonstate.edu/files/resources/24-tsunamis-and-floods-in-native-american-oral-tradition-and-mythology.pdf>.

⁶ Sharing of creation stories in the organic oral tribal communion was not the only means for the preservation of such legends. Discovering of wall drawings of supernatural creatures, notably felines, in seeming communication with one and other have been found in numerous overlapping sites on the borders between modern Texas and Mexico, and bear similarities with geographically foreign art found in Inca ruins. Additionally, enormous 3200-year-old knife-wielding pictographs of spiders are visible on cliffsides in Peru, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/peru-temple-mural-spider-god-1955029>.

⁷ RADIN, PRIMITIVE MAN at *id.*

⁸ “And when the clear Moon, with its soothing influences, rises full in my view, from the wall-like rocks, out of the damp undergrounds, the silvery forms of past ages hover up to me, and soften the austere pleasure of contemplation.” GOETHE, FAUST at p. 100 (London, 1855), <https://www.scribd.com/document/422333753/Goethe-s-Faust-Prose>.

Marc de Civrieux, citing Charles Long,⁹ described five foundational types of flood creation stories, two included within which are: “[1] Creation *ex nihilo* in which the creation is through thought, word, dream or bodily secretions of a divine being, and [2] Earth Diver creation in which a diver, usually a bird or amphibian sent by a creator, plunges into the seabed through a primordial ocean to bring up sand or mud which develops into a terrestrial world.”¹⁰ Reichard offers this comparable and illuminating typology of American aboriginal flood myths, allowing for subordinal variations: “A flood occurs, --- either a primeval flood or a deluge with various causes given. A few animals survive, usually on a raft on the surface of the waters. They feel the necessity of having land. A number of them dive for it, but come to the surface dead. A final attempt is made, and the successful animal re-appears exhausted, but carrying mud in its mouth, ears, nails, paws, nails, or armpits. The dirt magically becomes larger until the whole of Earth is restored.”¹¹ Scholars have identified widespread congruence in the species and natures of the animal actors in the so-called “Earth Diver” myths,¹² including ducks, beavers, muskrats and water beetles. The recitation of Native American creation and flood myths that follows amply reveals these themes.

Although to a lesser extent than does the Sun, the Moon too figures in Man’s collective aquatic recollections. For the Persians Moon was the cause of an abundant supply of water and of rain, and therefore the many names of the most fruitful places in Persia are compounded with the word *mâh*, or Moon.¹³ Jan Baptista van Helmont, the Seventeenth Century Belgian chemist and physiologist, wrote: “The Moon is chief over the night darkness, rest, death, and the waters;¹⁴ . . . If the new Moon, with its waxing light, may represent the primitive nature-worship which spread over Earth, the full Moon is the deity who is supposed to regulate our reservoirs and supplies of water.”¹⁵ In the poly-theistic Native American cultures there existed also alternative lower deities. In his MOON LORE, Rev. Timothy Harley writes of ancient Old World and New World cross-cultural rites and recites lunar stories that describe the Moon as a water deity, noting that “in the language of the Algonquins of North America the ideas of night, death, cold, sleep, water, and Moon are expressed by one and the same word.”¹⁶

Native American Flood and Creation Stories

Disaster and catastrophe myths are a cross-cultural constant, common to dozens of Amerind cultures.¹⁷ Among the most prevalent of these mimetic tales are those of cataclysmic flood or deluge.¹⁸ It is in their curation and translation by anthropologists and linguists that Native American creation stories find their scriptural tableau.

⁹ CHARLES LONG, *ALPHA: THE MYTHS OF CREATION* (Oxford U. Press, 1963), <https://archive.org/details/alphamythsofcrea00long>.

¹⁰ MARC DE CIVRIEUX, *WATUNNA: AN ORINOCO CREATION CYCLE* (David M. Guss transl.) (2nd Ed.) (2008), <https://www.google.com/books/edition/Alpha/UksqAQAAMAAJ?hl=en>.

¹¹ Gladys A. Reichard, *Literary Types and Dissemination of Myths*, 34 J. AMER. FOLKLORE no. 133 at pp. 269-307, (Am. Folklore Soc. 1921), https://www.jstor.org/stable/535151?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

¹² The same animal actors of the “Earth Diver” appear with a consistency verging upon uniformity. “Even the Creator . . . is an animal - Great-Hare, Great-Turtle, Crow, Hawk, Eagle, or Old Man Coyote. In the Cree-Ojibwa type and among the Newetee the culture-hero gives orders, molds the mud and magically causes Earth to appear The particular species mentioned varies in different areas and is relatively unimportant except where the story has been adopted in its entirety, although the animal is unknown to the people.” Reichard, *Dissemination of Myths*, *id.* at p. 281.

¹³ WILLIAM SMITH, *BIBLE DICTIONARY*, rev. ed (1863) (Peloubet, 1991).

¹⁴ *WORKES OF JAN BAPTISTA VAN HELMONT* (London, 1644) at p. 142, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A43285.0001.001?view=toc>.

¹⁵ <https://www.sacred-texts.com/astro/ml/ml14.htm>; <http://www.geocities.ws/mabcosmic/articles/astarte.html>.

¹⁶ IGNAZ GOLDZIEHER, *MYTHOLOGY AMONG THE HEBREWS* (Russell Martineau, transl.) at p. 206 Note, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/48967/48967-h/48967-h.htm> (2015).

¹⁷ Isra Aeme Saghir, *Torrent and Tempest and Flood: An Analysis of the Flood Myth Across Cultures*, 1 YOUNG ANTHRO. (Student Journal of Anthro.) at pp. 1-4 (2019) (Dep’t Anthro., U. Toronto (Mississauga)).

¹⁸ Saghir has compared and contrasted the flood myths of three geographically and temporally disparate cultures: the Mesopotamian tale of Utnapishtim, the Greek myth of Deucalion, and the Maori legend of Parawhenuamea.

The Cherokee

In one deluge myth of the Cherokee, a man on his customary daily walk to the river with his dog was surprised when the dog addressed him: "Very soon there is going to be a great freshet and the water will come so high that everybody will be drowned; but if you will make a raft to get upon when the rain comes you can be saved." The man believed the dog and commenced to build the raft. The rain came, and the man with his family got in it as "the water rose until the mountains were covered and all the people in the world were drowned." When the waters receded, "there was no one alive but the man and his family." Days afterwards the family hear the sound of dancing and singing on the far side of a ridge and climbing to its top saw nothing that stirred, "but all along the valley he saw great piles of bones of the people who had been drowned, and then he knew that the ghosts had been dancing."¹⁹

The Chuckchee

For all of the anthropological support suggesting oceanic migration to the America's from Pacific or from African populations, it is accepted that the New World was inhabited initially by pre-agricultural tribes that found their way northeast from Eurasia and crossed from Siberia over the Chuckchee Peninsula and on into what is now Alaska. The indigenous Chuckchee produced a rich collection of folklore and mythology that dove-tails neatly with the tales of their American successors, including origin stories focusing on life-giving sustaining and purifying waters.²⁰ In an eponymous Chukchee tale *Raven* begins his story in a very small world sufficient only to Raven and his wife.²¹ Raven hesitates to create human or other animal companions, much less Earth, and his wife is understandably frustrated. She essays to create a "spleen companion" while her husband sleeps, or at least so feigns. In a short while his wife sheds her animal form for that of a woman and gives birth to male human twins, as Raven himself remains his namesake.

Raven says: "There, you have created men! Now I shall go and try to create Earth. If I do not come back, you may say, 'Raven has been drowned in the water, let him stay there!' I am going to make an attempt," and he flies away. First he approaches certain Benevolent Beings²² for advice in his quest, but receives none, and is similarly disappointed in his queries to Sunset, Evening, Dawn, Mid-day and Zenith, receiving neither answer nor advice.

At last Raven came to the place where sky and ground come together. There, in a hollow, where the sky and the ground joined, he saw a tent full of humans making a great noise. He peeped in through a hole burnt by a spark, and saw a large number of naked backs. Raven jumped away, frightened, ran outside, and stood there trembling. In his fear he forgot all his pride in his recent intentions. One naked man goes out and cries: "Oh! it seemed that we heard someone passing by, but where is he!" "No, it is I," answers Raven. "Oh, how wonderful! Who are you?" asks the man. Raven replies: "Indeed, I am going to become a creator. I am Ku'urkił, the self-created one." The man then reveals that he and the other men "have been created from the dust resulting from the friction of the sky meeting the ground. We are going to multiply and to become the first seed of all the peoples upon Earth. But there is no Earth. Could not somebody create Earth for us?" "Oh, I will try!" answers Raven, whereupon Raven and the man who spoke fly off together. As Raven flies he defecates. Every piece of excrement that falls upon the water grows quickly and becomes land, including the continent upon which all dwell and appurtenant islands.

"Well," says Raven, "Look on, and say, is this not enough?" "Not yet," his companion answers. "Still not sufficient. Also there is no fresh water; and the land is too even. Mountains there are none." "Oh," says Raven, "shall I try again?" He begins to pass water.

¹⁹ James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, NINETEENTH ANN. REPORT, BUREAU OF AMER. ETHNOL. at p. 261, www.gutenberg.org (eBook #45634)(2014).

²⁰ WALDEMAR BOGORAS, CHUCKCHEE MYTHOLOGY vol. III, The Jessup North Pacific Expedition (Franz Boas, ed.), collected during the years 1900 and 1901 in various villages on the Pacific Coast of the Chukchee Peninsula, Alaska's immediate westerly Russian neighbor, between Mariinsky Post and Uñi'sak. ©www.globalgreycbooks.com. Franz Boas was an influential Columbia-educated American anthropologist of the first half of the 20th Century

²¹ Told by Ae'ttin-geu, a Maritime Chukchee man, at Mariinsky Post, October, 1900. A. L. KROEBER, INDIAN MYTHS OF SOUTH CENTRAL CALIFORNIA, 4 AM. ARCH. & ETHNOL. no. 4 at p. 36 (University of California, Berkeley 1907), <https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/anthpubs/ucb/text/ucp004-005.pdf>.

²² *va'irgit*.

Where one drop falls, it becomes a lake; where a jet falls, it becomes a river. After that Raven begins to defecate. Large pieces of that excrement became mountains, smaller pieces became hills. The whole of Earth became as it is now.

Then Raven asks, "Well, how is it now?" The human looked. "It seems still not enough. Perhaps it would have been sufficient if there had not been so much water. Now some day the water shall increase and submerge the whole land, even the mountain-tops will not be visible." Raven, ever accommodating, flies farther on. He strains to the utmost, creates ground, exhausts himself, and creates water for the rivers and lakes. "Well, now, look down! Is this not enough?" His companion studies Raven's work, and finally allows: "Perhaps it is enough. If a flood comes, at least the mountain-tops will remain above water. Yes, it is enough!"

The Pohonichi Miwok

The Pohonichi Miwok tale *The Beginning of the World* is a brief account of how Earth was formed as told among the Chukchansi Yokuts.²³ By legend, at the beginning of time and before there were people there was only water. Coyote looked at the array of ducks then living and ordered one of them, *yimeit*, to dive in search of land. Coyote overcame the duck's objections, and the bird dove down into the water, finally reaching the bottom. Biting the submerged soil, the duck returned to the surface and gave it to the Coyote. Coyote then bid the duck to bring him seeds, which it did. Coyote mixed the soil with the seeds and it grew until there was created Earth as we now know it.

The Gashowu Yokuts

Another tale, also named *The Beginning of the World*,²⁴ is from the heritage of the Gashowu Yokuts (Cassons) of Central Eastern California, and tells of a world before man in which "all was water aside from Prairie Falcon, Raven, and aquatic animals that included the beaver, the otter, the mallard and other ducks. While Raven and Prairie Falcon, who were friends, stayed dry, the swimming animals each in turn dived and tried to reach the bottom, to no avail. Finally, *k'uik'ui*, a small duck, succeeded, and reaching the bottom grasped the sand there. As he ascended to the surface, however, all of the sand washed away except for a small amount left under its finger-nails. *K'uik'ui*, gave this sand to Prairie Falcon, who had tobacco. This he mixed with the tobacco, and dividing the poultice-like substance into two parts, gave one half to Raven. The two flew off, and at Prairie Falcon's direction Raven flew southward on the West while Prairie Falcon flew southward along the East, where today there are mountains. As both flew holding the sand and tobacco composite mixture between thumb and forefinger, they dropped it onto the water, which, the story-teller describes, "began to boil as and the world grew from underneath," from the mountains to the prairies.

Prairie Falcon was displeased to see that Raven's westerly mountains were taller than those he had sown, and so he moved the mountains from the West to the eastern boundaries of California. Seeing that, Raven determined to surpass Prairie Falcon, and made his mountains larger, without Prairie Falcon's knowledge. These large mountains were then in the West. When Prairie Falcon arrived he saw that Raven's mountains were the larger, and so he changed them about. And so, the tale concludes, it had not been for *k'uik'ui*, Raven and Prairie Falcon the world would not have been made.

The Rumsend Costanoans

In a kindred story from the Rumsend Costanoan,²⁵ the world was already created, largely inundated yet incomplete, where we find Eagle, Humming-Bird, and Coyote standing on the top of the hill Pico Blanco. When the water rose to their feet, Eagle plucked up Humming-Bird and Coyote and flew to the mountainous Sierra de Gabilan,²⁶ where they stood until the water receded. Then Eagle sent Coyote down the mountain to see if the world were dry, and upon his return Coyote told them that save the rivers and lakes, "The whole world is dry," Eagle then bade Coyote: "Go and look in the river.

²³ The Pohonichi Miwok, now called the Mariposa Miwok or South Sierra Miwok, historically lived in the present Yosemite National Park and adjacent foothills.

²⁴ <https://www.firstpeople.us/FP-HTML-Legends/The-Beginning-Of-The-World-Yokut.html>.

²⁵ *Id.* at pp. 29-30. The Costanoan Rumsen Ohlone Tribe are an indigenous people of the Central California coastal area.

²⁶ A mountain range in the California Coastal Ranges.

See what there is there," and Coyote did so. Upon his return Coyote reported that there was a beautiful girl, to which Eagle responded: "She will be your wife in order that there may be people."

Eagle then gave Coyote an abalone shell and a digging stick. When Coyote asked: "How will my children be raised?" Eagle did not answer, as wanted to see if Coyote was wise enough to know. The narrator continues: "Coyote asked him again how these new people were to be raised from the girl. Coyote offered: "Well, I will make them right here in her knee." Eagle said: "No, that is not good." Coyote rejoined: "Well then, here in the elbow." "No, that is not good" "In the eyebrow." "No, that is not good." "In the back of the neck." "No, that is not good either," Eagle replied, "None of these will be good." Humming-Bird cried: "Yes, my brother, they are not good. This place will be good, here in the belly," patting his belly. Then Coyote was angry, and wanted to kill Humming-Bird, but Eagle raised his wings and Humming-Bird flew into his armpit. Coyote looked for Humming-Bird in vain. Now the girl said: "What shall I do? How will I make my children?", and Eagle said to Coyote: "Go and marry her. She will be your wife."

Obediently, Coyote went off with the girl. Coyote soon ordered her: "Louse me." When the girl found a wood-tick on him she was afraid and threw it away. This angered Coyote, who demanded: "Look for it, look for it! Take it! Eat it! Eat my louse!" Finding the louse, the girl did so, and when she swallowed it she became pregnant. Thoroughly frightened, the girl ran away through the bushes and thorns. Coyote gave chase, calling: "Do not run through that brush." To calm the girl, Coyote made a good path for her, but she demurred at taking it. Coyote then made a road bedecked with flowers, but the girl would not stop to take a flower. Coyote said: "There is no help for it. I cannot stop her." The girl ran towards the ocean, with Coyote close behind. Just as Coyote was going to take hold of her, she threw herself into the water and the waves came up between them as she turned to a sand flea. Coyote, diving after her, struck only the sand, despaired: "I wanted to clasp my wife but took hold of the sand. My wife is gone."

The Yaquie

Ethnologist Ruth Warner Giddings collected over 60 tales of the living oral tradition of the Yaquie people.²⁷ In the tale *The Flood and the Prophets* Giddings presents the "martyrology of the period of the universal flood."²⁸ Out of this catastrophe were saved only "those from whom sprang the generations of Yaitowi, a just and perfect man." Yaitowi, in his time, "walked with God when on the seventh day of February in the year 614 [A.D.] waters rose over Earth to destroy all living things beneath the sky - on Earth and living in the water - even the birds who fly over Earth in the open expanse of the sky. On the 17th day of that month it rained over the entire world for fourteen days and fourteen nights."

"Since the blessed end," the tale continues, "everything that had been alive, and all life substance was thus finished. The waters increased hugely over all of Earth, destroying all living things, after the days of men and women were terminated. And on the seventeenth of the month of July the waters were receding until the first of October, when the tops of the hills showed. And the first day of November, the water retired from the world's surface." Yaitowi and only thirteen others, as well as eleven women, were saved on the Hill of Parbus, which today is called Maatale. And on the hill of Jonas, eleven men and one woman called Emac Dolores were saved. The woman disappeared in the seventh year, turning into a statue of stone, now Mount Matuakame. On Egosin hill, now called Tosalkawi, six were saved, and three from Mount Tohowai, called today Rehepakawi."

The Muisca

Many tales of apocalyptic inundation hew to the theme that the floods were acts of retribution for mankind's sinful behaviors. An ancient Aztec text relates: "When the Sun Age came, there had passed 400 years. . . . Then all mankind was lost and drowned and turned to fishes. The water and the sky drew near each other. In a single day all was lost." But before the flood began, the god Titlachahuan had warned the man Nota and his wife Nena, saying: "Make no more pulque,²⁹ but hollow a great cypress, into which you shall enter in the month Tozoztli, when the waters shall near the sky."

²⁷ RUTH WARNER GIDDINGS, *YAQUIE MYTHS AND LEGENDS* (U. Ariz. Press, 2015), originally U. Ariz. Anthro. Paper 2, <https://www.sacred-texts.com/nam/yml>. The Yaquie lived in what is now Arizona and the contiguous Sonora of Mexico.

²⁸ <https://www.sacred-texts.com/nam/sw/yml/yml33.htm> at p. 97.

²⁹ The fermented sap of the blue agave, and an ingredient of tequila.

The two did so and entered the hollowed cypress. When Titlachahuan had shut them in he said to Nota: “‘Thou shalt eat but a single ear of maize, and thy wife but one also’. And when they had each eaten one ear of maize, they prepared to go forth, for the water was tranquil.”³⁰

Another example of floods as divine response to human misbehavior derives from the Chibcha-speaking Muisca people of modern Colombia, and tells of one Bochica who came from the east and who instructed the Muisca in ethical and moral norms. Lamentably, the dazzling beautiful but malicious wife of Bochica plotted to destroy all of her husband’s salutary undertakings: “She succeeded by magic arts in causing the Funzha,³¹ the river of the country, to rise to such a height as to overwhelm the whole high plain with flood. Only a minority of the inhabitants were able to escape to the summits of the mountains. But then the just wrath of Bochica was kindled; he drove the wicked woman off the Earth forever, and changed her into the Moon. Since then there has been a Moon.” And to get rid of the troubles of Earth, Bochica made an opening in the wall of rock, and allowed the water to run off, and returned on a rainbow to herald the return enlightened times.³²

The Cherokee

Vast undifferentiated expanses of water characterize many origin stories of the Cherokee. More than one Cherokee creation tale invokes the universal aquatic ether, in which Earth is seen as a great island floating in a sea of water, suspended at its cardinal points by a cord descending from a stone vault in the sky.³³ The Cherokee, it was said, lived in a preternatural fear that the cord might break, and Earth sink into the ocean. All of the world’s animals lived above and beyond the arch in Gälûñ’läti, but they wanted more room. Wondering what was beneath the water, Water-Beetle (*Dâyuni’si*), offered to descend to the water to see what it might learn. Traversing widely upon the water’s surface, Water Beetle could find no place to rest, so it dove to the bottom, and returned with some soft mud. That mud, exposed to the air, began to grow and to spread in every direction until the island grew into Earth that we know now, still fastened to the sky at its four corners by the sky.

But Earth was yet flat, soft and wet, altogether unlike what would come to be known as the Cherokee homestead. The animals sent out different birds to search for dry land, but all failed until they dispatched Buzzard, the father of all today’s buzzards. Buzzard searched the entire Earth, flying low and far, and found it still flat and soft, but as he reached Cherokee country, he wearied and as his wings flapped, “wherever they struck Earth there was a valley, and where they turned up again there was a mountain.” Seeing this, the animals “were afraid that the whole world would be mountains, so they called him back, but the Cherokee country remains full of mountains to this day.”³⁴

In another story from the Cherokee, at the world’s beginning all was vast, dark and cold, over which was the great stone arch of the sky, crowded with creatures, all asleep.³⁵ Underneath was water, although this was unknown to them. Among the first creature to awake was Water Beetle, who declared “I smell water,” and unprompted, he dove from the arch. At length, a splash was heard from far below. Soon the creatures heard Water Beetle declare: “Underneath the water there is something soft, but it is strong and large enough to hold all of us.” One animal said: “Throw down some rope so that we might fetch it.” Then Spider, who could spin silken thread, wove some strong rope that the creatures lowered to Water Beetle, at the water’s surface, who then dove again with the rope and attached it to the four corners of a great slab of mud. Water Beetle returned to the arch to tell all what he had done, and together they pulled on the four corners of the slab until it rested atop the waters. The creatures all scrambled down the rope to alight upon this new capacious and inviting place. Some, realizing they were fish, swam away. Others took flight and flew off, while frogs simply settled in the mud.

³⁰ *Codex Chimalpopoca*, translated by Abbé Charles Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg, https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Great_Flood.

³¹ Now Rio Bogotá.

³² https://www.ancient.eu/Muisca_Civilization/; IGNAZ GOLDZIEHER, MYTHOLOGY, *supra* at Note 553, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/48967/48967-h/48967-h.htm> (2015).

³³ https://www.firstpeople.us/FP-HTML-Legends/Cherokee_Creation_Story2-Cherokee.html.

³⁴ W. POWELL, NINETEENTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE BUREAU OF AMER. ETHNOL. TO THE SEC’Y OF THE SMITHSONIAN INST., 1897-1898, part I at pp. 239-240 (Washington, D.C., 1900), <https://www.americanyawp.com/reader/the-new-world/indian-creation-stories/>.

³⁵ Cherokee Creation Story 2, *op. cit.*

And so the world was populated with animals. “There the land hung,” the tale concludes, “where it hangs to this very day, until the day that will come when the ropes will break and the land will sink once more beneath the waters.”³⁶

The Haudenosaunee Iroquois

This tale is narrated by Keller George, Wolf Clan Member of the Haudensene, as shared with him by his maternal great-grandmother.³⁷ In a time before time Earth was completely submerged beneath deep water, and totally dark, devoid of sun, moon or stars. Only aquatic animals, such as Beaver, Muskrat, Duck, Loon, Swan and Turtle lived in this dark world. In the firmament above Earth was the Land of Happy Spirits, wherein resided Great Spirit, and “in the center of this upper realm was a giant apple tree with roots that sank deep into the ground.” One day Great Spirit “pulled the tree up from its roots creating a pit in the ground.” He commanded his Daughter to peer through the resulting hole, and doing so Daughter saw below her the Lower World covered by water and clouds.

Great Spirit instructed Daughter to descend to the world of darkness, and she, who would now be called Sky Woman, began to slowly float downward. Initially seen from below only as a great light, the water animals “were initially afraid because of the light emanating from her. In their fear, they dove deep beneath the water.” Eventually emboldened to return to the surface, these creatures became concerned about what would happen to Sky Woman when she reached the water. Beaver deduced that his animal brethren and he must find a dry place for her to rest upon. Beaver plunged deep beneath the water in search of the seabed. He was unsuccessful, and drowned in the process.³⁸ Loon too tried, but was unavailing in its search for some soil, as were several other animals who tried but failed to return with any. Lastly, Muskrat agreed to try, but it also drowned. “When his dead body floated to the top,” Keller George continues: “his little claws were clenched tight. The others opened his claws and found a little bit of earth.” The water animals then summoned Turtle and patted the earth upon its back. At once Turtle grew and grew, as did the amount of earth, becoming the continental “great island.” In the meantime Sky Woman, continued her gentle fall to Earth. As her landing became imminent, Swan gathered a flock of his kind, that “flew upward and allowed Sky Woman to rest upon their backs. With great care, they placed her upon the newly formed Earth.”³⁹

The Inca

The plangent, melancholy mood of many inundation stories is tempered in an Inca legend that post-figures tales of apocalyptic flooding with the appearance of a rainbow, a felicitous image signifying a creator’s covenant to never again flood the entire Earth.⁴⁰ Two tales within Andean flood lore include references to the rainbow as the symbol between God and man that there will never again be a universal deluge on Earth. At least two references to this tradition can be found among early Spanish writings. The following from Cabello Balboa, written in 1586, describes two clerics, the Brothers Ayar, as they went forth after a decimating flood:⁴¹

³⁶ In another Cherokee rendition of the myth, one day Water Beetle (*Dayuni’si*) volunteered to explore underwater and found mud. He brought so much back to the surface that he created Earth. As Earth hardened, the creatures pulled Sun out from behind Rainbow and placed it high in the sky to light the path, <https://www.firstpeople.us/FP-HTML-Legends/CherokeeCreationStory-Cherokee.html>.

³⁷ <https://www.oneidaindiannation.com/the-haudenosaunee-creation-story/>. Originally the Haudenosaunee, of the Iroquois, were a confederacy of five nations inhabiting the northern part of modern New York and contiguous Canada, comprised of the Seneca, Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga and Mohawk.

³⁸ Be the ultimate sacrifice be borne by a loon, a muskrat or any other animal these drownings can be considered, theologically, as substitutional, in the sense that the animals are taken in order that the principal, or for that matter all of the eventual animal populations, survive.

³⁹ The Haudenosaunee tale continues to recite the Sky Woman’s giving birth to twins, one of which was named Good Spirit, and the other, inevitably, Evil Spirit, in a labor so difficult that Sky Woman perished, whereupon the Good Spirit took his mother’s head and hung it in the sky, and it became Sun. The Good Spirit also fashioned Moon and the stars from his mother’s body. He buried the remaining parts of Sky Woman under the earth. Thus, “living things may always find nourishment from the soil for it springs from Mother Earth.”

⁴⁰ The vast Inca Empire flourished in the Andean regions from the early 15th Century A.D. up until its conquest by the Spanish in the 1530s.

“They came to a hill that today is called Guanacauria, and one day at dawn they saw the rainbow of the heavens that came to the foot of the same hill, and Mango Capaca told the rest that it was a good sign that the world would not be destroyed any more by water, and that they should follow him and climb the hill, and from there they would see the place where they were to settle.”

A congruent and earlier version dating from 1572 is found in the work of Father Cristobal de Molina:⁴² “The Brothers Ayar climbed to the summit, and there they saw the rainbow of the heavens, which the natives call Guanacauria, and Manco Capac⁴³ said to them: ‘Hold this as a sign, that the world will never be destroyed again by water.’”

Another picturesque Andean tale chronicled by Francisco Davila in 1598 relates:⁴⁴ “They say that anciently the world was to be destroyed, and it happened like this: as one Indian tied up his llama in a good pasture ... the llama talked to him, saying: ‘Loco, what do you know, or what do you think? Understand that I am worried, and with good reason. You should know that in less than five days the sea is going to swell and burst open until only it covers the whole of Earth ... You must take refuge on the summit of the mountain Vilcacoto.’”⁴⁵ Carrying his belongings on his back, and taking his llama on a leash, the Indian arrived at the summit of the indicated mountain, where he found diverse animals and birds huddled together. ... The waters rose until only the summit of Vilcacoto was not covered.” It was said that one of the frightened animals, a fox, was so close to the water that in waving its tale it touched the floodwaters, which explains why today the fox’s tail is black at the tip. When at last the waters receded, the sea was even lower than it had been before the flood, and thus “the entire Earth was cleansed of people except the Indian referred to.”

The Chitimacha

A short curated myth of a flood from the Chitimacha of modern Southern Louisiana relates a great storm that prompted the people to bake a great earthen pot that floated, with two tribe members within, permitting their survival, together with two rattlesnakes, then considered friends of man. The Red-Headed Woodpecker hovering above flew so close to the waters that they wet its tale, forever marking it. When the waters receded, the Woodpecker flew far and wide to find land, but found none. The Dove was the next to try, and returned with a single grain of sand. Placed upon the waters the sand spread out and became dry land.⁴⁶

The Ojibwe

In an intricate Ojibwe story *Great Serpent and the Great Flood* Nanabozho, at once a creator and a trickster, returns one day to his lodge⁴⁷ to find that his cousin has been taken by Great Serpent, Nanabozho’s sworn enemy.⁴⁸ Picking up his bow and arrows Nanabozho tracks the serpent past great rivers, over mountains and across valleys to the shores of Spirit Lake. Beneath the clear waters he sees within the house Great Serpent, its head as red as blood and its eyes glowing like fire, among its devilish serpent companions, wrapped around his cousin’s lifeless body.

⁴² Father Cristobal de Molina was a Spanish priest of the Hospital for the Natives of Our Lady of Succor in Cusco (today’s Peru). Skilled in the Quechua language, spoken by the Inca, Molina was able to interview the older indigenous men of Cuzco who were among the last surviving eyewitnesses of Inca religious beliefs and practices.

⁴³ Manco Cápac, also known as Manco Inca, is known to some historians as the founder of Inca civilization in Cusco, Peru.

⁴⁴ HANDBOOK OF SOUTH AMERICAN INDIANS vol. 2: *The Andean Civilizations* (Julian H. Steward, ed.) at p. 585 (Smithson. Instit. Bureau of Amer. Ethnol., Bulletin 143 (U.S. Gov’t Printing Office, 1949), <https://repository.si.edu/handle/10088/34955>.

⁴⁵ A mountain near Junín, Peru, some 125 miles East of Lima.

⁴⁶ KATHARINE B. JUDSON, *MYTHS AND LEGENDS OF THE MISSISSIPPI VALLEY AND THE GREAT LAKES* (A.C. McClurg & Co., Chicago, 1914) at p. 19, <http://www.2.latech.edu/louisianaanthology/texts>.

⁴⁷ *THE FLOOD MYTH* (Alan Dundes, ed.) (U. Cal. Press, 1988), citing CHARLES LONG, *ALPHA: THE MYTHS OF CREATION* (Oxford U. Press, 1963).

⁴⁸ <http://www.native-languages.org/ojibwestory3.htm>. The Anishinaabe Ojibwe, or Chippewa, derive from tribes from Southern Canada and the contiguous Northern Midwestern United States.

Looking at this writhing evil congress Nanabozho swore his revenge. He charged the clouds to “Disappear,” and the clouds vanished. To the winds he commanded “Be still,” and all was calm. But as long as Great Serpent remained at the bottom of the lake it was immune to Nanabozho’s fury, and so lastly, he petitioned Sun: “Shine over the lake with all the fierceness you can. Make the water boil,” reckoning that the heat of the water would rout Great Serpent and force it to seek shade at the water’s edge, where Nanabozho could seize it and exact his revenge. Summoning his craft as a trickster, he changed himself into the broken stump of a withered tree. Heated by Sun’s rays, the Spirit Lake’s waters began to bubble, its hot waves dashing upon its shores. Soon one serpent, then others, came to the surface. While wary of their enemy, they could hear no footsteps of Nanabozho, and concluded he was sleeping.

Familiar with Nanabozho’s cunning the serpents thought that the broken stump of the withered tree might be Nanabozho in disguise, and so one of them wound itself around it and tried to drag it down into the water. Only with great fortitude did Nanabozho not cry aloud. The serpents moved on, seeking shade where ever they could find it. Nanabozho quietly drew an arrow from his quiver, took aim at the heart of Great Serpent, and loosed it. The arrow reached its mark, and “with a howl that shook the mountains and startled the wild beasts in their caves, the monster awoke. Followed by its terrified companions, which also were howling with rage and terror, Great Serpent plunged into the water.”

While knowing it would die from its wounds, Great Serpent and its companions remained determined to destroy Nanabozho, and “caused the water of the lake to swell upward and to pound against the shore with the sound of many thunders. Madly the flood rolled over the land, . . . carrying with it rocks and trees.” Nanabozho, fleeing, ran through the villages of his children, shouting, “Run to the mountaintops! The Great Serpent is angry and is flooding Earth! Run! Run!” The tribe with their children found safety in the mountains, where Nanabozho found many people and animals that had escaped.

Nanabozho continued his flight North along the base of the western hills and then up a high mountain beyond today’s Lake Superior. There he found many others who had escaped from the flood that was already covering the valleys and plains and even the highest hills. Still the waters continued to rise. Soon all the mountains were under the flood, except the high one on which stood Nanabozho. He gathered timber sufficient to build a raft, aboard which the people and the animals clambered as the last mountaintop disappeared beneath the waters. For days they drifted, until at last the flood began to recede, and they could see first the mountains and hills, then the plains and valleys.

The survivors now knew that Great Serpent was dead, and that “his companions had returned to the bottom of Spirit Lake. There they remain to this day. For fear of Nanabozho, they have never dared to come forth again.”

The Hoh and the Quillete

From the stories of the Hoh and Quillete of the Olympic Peninsula comes *Thunderbird and Whale*.⁴⁹ It was said that Thunderbird, a giant, lived in “a dark hole, under the feet of the Olympic glacial field,” a giant, made lightning when she opened and shut her eyes, and thunder when she flapped her wings. Soaring above the glacial waters and mountains, Thunderbird hovers waiting for Whale to surface. The leviathan at last appears, and Thunderbird dives and seizes it in her talons, and with great effort soars away. Thunderbird must at intervals alight and rest, and each time she does so Whale and she battle and Whale escapes, but each time she seizes him again. Their flight takes them to Beaver Prairie, where there is another great struggle. The combatants then fly to the mountains where they have their final battle, and “there were . . . a shaking, jumping up and trembling of Earth beneath, and a rolling up of the great waters.” Finally Thunderbird prevails and devours Whale.

The waters recede, and again rise, and then recede, leaving many sea monsters stranded on dry land. Each time the waters rose the people take to their canoes, “and float off as the currents wafted them, as there is neither Sun nor land to guide them.”

⁴⁹ https://pnsn.org/thunderbird-and-whale-stories/tales-;http://www.ess.washington.edu/SEIS/PNSN/HIST_.CAT/STORIES/story.html).

CONCLUSION

In legends from Siberia to the Andes, and from the Inuit to the Inca, there is a leitmotif of the magnificent desolation of an Earth inundated. Even so, for the travails of tribes in their imagined pursuit of the world as we now know it, Amerind flood stories are in the end hopeful, for a principal reason that humans yearn for optimism and promise in visualizing their lives today and in the future. Within the curated body of flood narratives this nearly universal catastrophic backdrop transcends tribal, cultural and geographic boundaries, differentiable principally in the expedients chosen by the actors to overcome a flood commencing or punctuating an epoch of mankind. The revelatory teaching is that only a broad collective unconscious of such tales explains these similarities adequately. Collectively, these stories form part of the New World literary canon. Their synchronous narratives, varied yet often concentric, exist in a timeless zone outside of history, ready to be recalled at any moment.