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### Biblical Flood Narrative: An Analyses of Biblical Flood Narrative Drawings

My interpretation of the biblical flood narrative is meant to be a modern universal reading of both the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of *Genesis 6-9* and *Gilgamesh* "Story of the Flood" that embodies the core aspects of all flood narratives:

A god warns the hero of the coming flood, the ark is built, the flood hits and stops again, the hero uses the birds to test whether the water is receding, he brings an offering before the gods, who smell the offering and regret bringing the flood. (Norsker 56)

In other words, my biblical flood narrative is meant to be a retelling that any western audience should be able to discern and achieve an understanding of the flood narrative's core themes. But can I restore the flood's humanistic characteristics from *Gilgamesh* while keeping it simple like *Genesis* without altering the narrative itself?

The general depictions I employ in my narrative are dependent on culturally accepted symbols that a vast majority of readers can interpret. The houses, for example, are simplistically done as a triangle and square; the actual flood is represented by the colour blue, waves, and clouds; and the essence of time is left to lunar symbols to avoid specific numbers. However, one of my symbols does betray the time of both *Genesis* and *Gilgamesh*. At the end of my flood narrative, I have chosen to use a new testament cross to represent the religious altar due to my target audience being current western culture. In our western culture, due to the predominance and success of Christianity's influence, the image of the cross has been consumed as a general symbol that many people, regardless of faith,

connect with religion. Therefore, using the cross as a current religious icon to replace the altar allowed my narrative to avoid any specific religious ceremonial practices and escape criticism connected with issues of appropriation and ignorance. The depictions of characters, however, needed a lot more thought.

The first concern regarding characters involved the decision of choosing between Genesis's monotheist God or *Gilgamesh's* polytheistic gods. Gilgamesh's polytheistic "gods of the Babylonian tradition can quarrel, go behind each other's back and they are fallible" (Norsker 59). In fact, in *Gilgamesh*, the god Ea betrays the agreement of the other gods to eliminate the humans by warning *Gilgamesh's* hero, Utnapishtim, about the coming flood. In my flood narrative, for the sake of illustration, multiple gods with varying agendas posed far too many artistic and illustrative problems, especially since the Gilgamesh flood is written with an understanding that the audience has previous knowledge of those gods. The benefit of favoring *Genesis's* monotheistic God is that the depiction of one God allowed a simpler narrative in my graphic representation.

To illustrate the actual image of God, because neither *Gilgamesh* nor *Genesis* gave any descriptions, I referred to the saying *man was created in God's image*. As a result, my initial sketches were of a shadow figure, but I scrapped that idea based on the notion that western culture possesses a tendency to connect shadows with evil. Therefore, I made God an anti-shadow or void silhouette with very little additional detail.

The hero's depiction was much easier; the physical depiction is loosely based on the depictions of Noah in *The Action Bible*. However, I purposely did not name my hero because I did not want to favor any version or culture. This is the reason my hero is lacking any defining physical characteristics that could tie him to any culture or ethnicity; nevertheless, I did choose to favor the *Gilgamesh* hero's persona. I rendered the other humans that appear in my version as dark grey shadows, returning to the original idea I had for God. This worked because I decided to incorporate both causes of the flood: the

noise from *Gilgamesh* that leads their gods to eliminate them, as well as the sins and corruption accused by the *Genesis's* God. For the other humans that are later redeemed by my hero, I decided to make the same light grey as the animals because they were not directly chosen by God as pure, nor are they the focus of the story.

For the depiction of the birds, I use both the raven and the dove, which according to Moberly represent "vice and virtue" (346), which results in their functions being completely separate from each other. The raven is sent out to finish the cleansing process of the land by indulging in its "pleasures, in the passions which inundate and destroy lives"; hence, the raven feeds on the carcasses left over from the flood (Moberly 346). The dove, on the other hand, who "could not find any resting place amidst destructive passions," was to find land and, therefore, hope (Moberly 346). In my depiction of the dove, I left its resting place ambiguous, rendering it as nothing more than a square. My reasoning is that, according to Moberly, in some situations, the dove returns to Noah; in others, it lands on an olive tree; this action results in the dove's landing place establishing either hope or hopelessness. As a result, leaving its landing place ambiguous allows my audience to engage and determine the dove's success.

Dealing with the many themes in the narratives also posed many issues. Children's versions of the biblical flood render the story to a simple morality tale wherein the hero as a role model is selected "because he tried to do things that are right" and, as a result, boasts a blind "obedience to God" (Dalton 301-302). Children's versions often overlook the countless deaths of the sinners focusing only on Noah's virtue or attempt to justify the sinner's deaths in some way usually declaring them as evil. Flood narratives that are designed for older audiences have the inherent problem of asking and answering too many questions by "filling in the gaps" that are purposely left unfilled for the sake of "the imagination of the audience" (Dalton 299). Biblical floods designed for older audiences often not only ask but attempt to answer questions such as "whether universal annihilation can be justified," why an "all-knowing being would ever regret past actions," and why Noah would present an undoubting obedience

to such a flawed God and be so indifferent to "the fate of the rest of mankind" (Tumanov 84-85).

Avoiding most of the problems was quite easy because I allowed gaps in my version and ignored any urges to justify and explain my hero's actions.

The issue of the hero's voice was another obstacle because it entered into the problems of narratives designed for the older audiences. How much voice could I give my hero without changing the narrative? I could not make my hero say *no*, yet I could not make him endlessly say *yes*. As a result, most of my hero's characteristics are inspired by *Gilgamesh's* hero, mirroring a lot of his reactions, such as his concern for the people in his initial surroundings. However, as a consequence of adding humanistic qualities to my hero, I did have to impose something on my narrative.

The exchange of my hero's house for the redemption of some of his family and friends is a story-telling aspect I added. It is not present in either the *Gilgamesh* or the *Genesis* version. The reason for the addition originates from the decision of how to show humanity in a *Gilgamesh* based hero and present an accurate response from a *Genesis*-inspired God? I knew that either the hero or the God would have to compromise in order for the story to progress. The compromise of God to a test of faith was influenced by other biblical tales in which God demands much faith with no guarantee of reward or survival. In my hero's exchange, the sacrifice of his house leaves him defenceless for the entire duration of the construction of the ark with no exact date when the flood will arrive. My version's hero is essentially forced to have faith in God for a timely flood to emerge and in his companions' strength and speed in building the ark. Making this exchange happen between God and the hero, however, did not change any theme. Rather, it only amplified the theme of faith that was already within both the narrative. Therefore, I believe that my version of the flood narratives still holds itself to both *Gilgamesh* and *Genesis* versions of the flood.

## Work Cited

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