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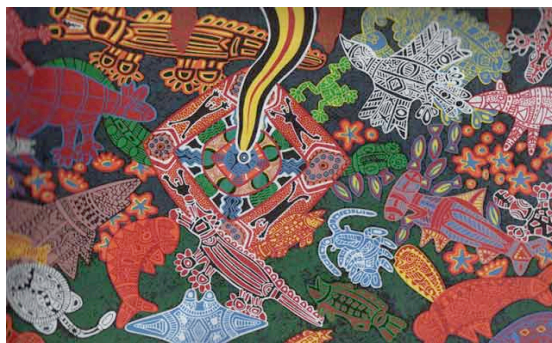
Critical Thinking & Writing II

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### The Unique Australian Creation Story

Most people associate “dreaming” with an unconscious state that serves no apparent purpose except to access a realm of fantasy and unreal actions. However, the Aboriginal people of Australia believed that the Earth was actually created in a dream-like state. Despite the fact that the Australian indigenous population is dwindling, a small percentage of the remaining Aborigines still believe in the creation legends that have been passed down through Aboriginal culture for an astonishing 50,000 years. While the average creation story normally includes a primordial creator and a blend of religious and scientific concepts, the Australian story strays from the norm. They do not believe a God (or multiple gods) created the earth and thus are not devoted to Him like the Hebrews, Christians, Greeks, and Norwegians. And just as every cosmological creation story has unique elements that reflect their respective culture, the Aboriginal one is a mythological tale involving a combination of dreaming spirits, a gargantuan lizard, water-loaded frogs, and obedient animals like those in Figure 1. Apart from a few select



**Figure 1 - Dreamtime Characters**

resemblances to other creation myths, the Australian creation story stands on its own. It is a truly unique interpretation of how the Earth was created because of its original

“Dreamtime” characters and dream-like state, mythical qualities, and stark contrast to the religious beliefs other non-western cosmologies have regarding creation.

The initial “Dreaming” creation concept is completely unique to Aboriginal culture, as it does not parallel the creation myths of any other cosmologies. The Australians view the Earth’s origin as the result of a dream-like state similar to what humans slip into during sleep. According to them, metaphysical spirits floated about the abyss before anything else existed, just as consciousness floats about in human dreams. These spirits dreamed up the idea of creating the Universe, including the sun, moon and planet Earth. To this day, they are thought of as still existing beyond the boundaries of the accessible universe but yet still have an impact on Aboriginal life, as each action is believed to be determined by these Dreamtime spirits. Many other creation stories such as the Egyptian, Native American, and Greek included preexisting gods that created the world and had an impact on its modern existence. While these could be seen as resembling the Aboriginal dreamtime spirits, they have exceptional differences. For instance, most of the other cultures held their creators as revered and worshipped them religiously. The Aboriginal Dreamtime spirits are not religious figures but ancestral characters that play a part in the culture’s myth and philosophy. Also, the other creators were thought of having created everything: from planet Earth itself, to its topography, to its life forms. According to the Aborigines, only the Earth was created by these preexisting spirits. Its topography and life forms were the result of the Rainbow Serpent.



**Figure 2 - Rainbow Serpent**

The Australian creation tale of the Rainbow Serpent is to some extent similar to the creation stories of the Crow and Chinese people because they all use the “earth-diver” concept of creation.

The “earth-diver” concept

hypothesizes that the creation of the earth was a slow process by a primordial creator, who either dove into the ground and brought up pieces of soil to form the physical aspects of the Earth or formed them from his own body parts (“Creation Myths”). This concept is included in several non-Western creation stories. The Crow people believe in the earth-diver legend of Old Man Coyote, who lived in a world of only water. When he asked a duck to explore the bottom of the water, the duck brought back some mud and a root. Old Man Coyote blew on the mud and it expanded to create the earth and then planted the root to grow trees. The Chinese people believed the cosmos were created by a giant named Pan Ku. When Pan Ku passed away, his bodily remains became part of the Earth such as the sky, wind, and thunder (Penprase 77). The Australian people believed that a giant serpent called the “Rainbow Serpent” erupted out of the earth after the Dreaming. This earth-diver slithered around the world, and “her body carved the canyons and rolling hills of the landscape” (Penprase 90). Yet while the Crow, Chinese, and Aboriginal people believed in an earth-diving creator, only the Crow and Chinese creators were thought of as being responsible for creating everything on Earth such as the water, people, and rocks.

The Australian story of the creation of the rest of the earth is unique. The first difference is the Aboriginal view on the origin of water. While other creation myths



**Figure 3 - Frog loaded with water**

believe it was a work of their respective “earth-diver,” the Australian myth explains that after the Rainbow Serpent carved out canyons and hills, many frogs erupted out of the earth. These frogs were fat and heavy with water, and when the Rainbow Serpent tickled their stomachs they laughed and spewed the water everywhere. This water

filled the canyons, crevices, and valleys to create rivers, lakes, and oceans (Penprase 90). The origin of humans on earth is different as well. Most cosmologies believe the original creator formed humans. For instance, the Chinese believed the fleas of Pan Ku’s hair turned into human form upon his death (Penprase 77). However, the Aboriginal legend explains that as more and more animals rose out of the earth’s crust behind the frogs, they were greeted by the Rainbow Serpent and proceeded to live under her watch. These animals were rewarded for good behavior by being turned into humans, and were punished for bad behavior by being turned into mountains and rocks to watch over the humans (Penprase 90). The Aboriginal creation legend is unique in this way because other life forms were magically transformed into humans. This reflects Australian culture, which believes that every life comes from the “eternal life” of the Earth itself, just as the first humans were formed from animals that come from the Earth itself. Upon death, Australians are seen as returning to the Earth, and returning to eternal life (Crisp).

These were not religious views but simply cultural values that reflected Australian spirituality and philosophy.

As exemplified by the secular creator of the Rainbow Serpent, the Australian creation story does not have any ties to a specific religion but rather to aspects of spirituality and philosophy. According to the Australian Government's written explanation of Aboriginal creation, "the ancestors did not disappear at the end of the Dreaming, but remained in these sacred sites, the Dreaming is never-ending, linking the past, present, and future." The Dreamtime characters do not come from or define a certain religion. They are ancestral beings that do not have any godly authority over humans but rather take part in the creation process, and after they are finished they become some part of the world they created.

Although the Aboriginal myth has secular creators of the earth, the myth contains lessons of the spirits to pass on knowledge and to promote spirituality. "The creation or Dreaming stories, which describe the travels of the spiritual ancestors, are integral to Aboriginal spirituality... Ceremonies, such as initiation ceremonies, are avenues for the passing on of knowledge." ("Australian Aboriginal Culture"). The Dreamtime creation story is a rich part of the Aboriginal culture and the passing on of this cultural knowledge has effects on the ethics of Aboriginal society. It is said by the Australian Government that laws and customs of punishment and discipline with regard to social behavior have emerged from the Aboriginal creation stories and that the virtues of Australian society can be based off of ancestral precedent. The creation story of the Rainbow Serpent and her control over the animals of the earth exemplifies the consequences of social behavior. With the ability to reward human form for good behavior and punish for bad behavior,

the Rainbow Serpent can be seen as a judge of what is wrong and right, teaching the importance of good moral conduct to the Aborigines. Unlike the non-western cultures of the Egyptians, Native Americans, and the Greeks, the Aborigines derive their moral code not from the idea of a god or religion, but rather from specific instances in their creation story that exemplify the difference between right and wrong in society. Aside from the example of the Rainbow Serpent acting as a model of conscience for the Aborigines, the creation myth also contains stories about social conduct. The story of the lightning brothers in the sky illustrates the challenges humans face to be chaste, as one brother lusts after another brother's wife and he is consequently decapitated. Stories like these are orally passed down between generations and are numerous in the Aboriginal creation myth. They do not have any affiliation with religion but serve the purpose of educating people about the rights and wrongs of morality and to illustrate what happens when the moral law is broken. The secular contributions of the Aboriginal creation myth act as guidelines for society and help form a healthy conscience.

The Australian creation myth is similar to the Hebrew story of creation because there are many examples in the Torah of how God punishes for bad moral behavior and rewards for good moral behavior. For example, in the story of Noah and the Flood, God decides to punish the world because the majority of His people are leading sinful lifestyles. He rewards Noah and his family with a chance to escape on an ark because they are faithful and lead ethical lifestyles. Similarly, the Rainbow Serpent was known to punish anyone who broke moral law by drowning them in a flood. While the reoccurring theme in both of these stories is a flood sent to punish the immoral people of the world, the Hebrew flood is seen as punishment through God while the Australian flood is seen

as punishment through secular ancestral spirits. And although Aboriginal cosmology does share some similar themes with Hebrew cosmology, its secular nature sets it apart from almost every other cosmology and it provides a unique tale of the creation of the earth.

While the Aboriginal creation story resembles the creation stories of a few other cosmologies like those of the Crow and Chinese people, the majority of the Australian tale is unique because it embodies original characters who are not viewed as religious. While Hebrew cosmology also included a god-like character punishing humans for bad behavior, the Australian interpretation is the only one that actually transformed animals into humans for good behavior and punished them for bad behavior by turning them into rocks and mountains. The formation of the topographical aspects of the earth as a result of the actions of the Rainbow Serpent and is also one of a kind as it differs from other earth-diver legends like Pan Ku of the Chinese and Old Man Coyote of the Crow people. Despite the few resemblances of morality and punishment to other creation stories of the world, the secular creation story of the Aboriginal people of Australia is a story unlike any other. The concept of the earth being created in a mysterious dreamlike state by preexisting, ancestral spirits makes the Australian cosmology truly unique and provides an engaging and memorable way to learn the way in which the earth was created.

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