

Coyote's Eyes

The following story called, "Coyote's Eyes", is adapted from the version found in Jo-ann Archibald's paper as told by Terry Tafoya of the Pueblo Nation. Archibald's paper is called "Coyote's Story About Orality and Literacy". I am posting this story because it resonates with me as I stand in a place where I can see various worlds and am not sure how they can co-exist. The story is a metaphor for this conflict from a Native American perspective. Archibald describes it as an "analogy for the condition of First Nations people who see the world with mismatched eyes: perhaps the small eye representing their oral tradition which has become denigrated and diminished through Western historical influence; while the larger eye representing the literate Western tradition has assumed an overpowering position."

I'll let the story speak for itself now - it has much to say...

Long time ago when mountains were the size of salmon eggs, Coyote was going along, and saw that Rabbit was doing something. Now this Rabbit was a Twati, and Indian doctor, and as Coyote watched, Rabbit sang his spirit song, and the Rabbit's eyes flew out of his head and perched on a tree branch. Rabbit called out, "Whee-num, come here", and his eyes returned to their empty sockets. This greatly impressed Coyote, who immediately begged Rabbit to teach him how to do this. Rabbit said no. Coyote begged. Rabbit said no.

"Oh please," cried Coyote.

"No," replied Rabbit.

"But, it's such a wonderful trick! Teach me."

"No."

"But I'll do exactly as you say!"

"I will teach you", Rabbit said, "but you must never do this more than four times in one day, or something terrible will happen to you."

And so Rabbit taught Coyote his spirit song, and soon Coyote's eyes flew up and perched on a tree. "Whee-num! Come here!" called Coyote, and his eyes returned to him. Now Rabbit left, and Coyote kept practicing sending his eyes back and forth to the tree four times. Then he thought "I should show off this trick to the Human people. So Coyote went to the nearest Indian village, and called out for all the people to gather around him.

Coyote sang the Rabbit's song, and the crowd was impressed to see his eyes fly out of his head and perch on the branch of a tree.

"Whee-num!" Coyote called out for his eyes to return but they just sat there and looked down at him. The Indian people began to laugh. "Come here!" he called. His eyes just looked at him. "Whee-num!"

Just then a crow flew by, and spotting the eyes, thought they were berries. The crow swooped down and ate them. Now Coyote was blind and staggered out of the village, hoping to find new eyes.

He felt around the waters and bushes for eyes. He tried bubbles and huckleberries but the bubbles popped and the berries made everything look dark. Coyote was feeling really sorry for himself when he heard a little voice. "Why are you so sad" asked a little mouse. "My dear cousin, I've lost my eyes, I'm blind and I don't know what to do". "You poor thing", replied the mouse, "I have two eyes. I will share one with you." Mouse removed one of his eyes and handed it to Coyote. Now Coyote was much bigger than Mouse so the eye rolled around in the socket. The new eye was so small that it only let in a small amount of light. It was like looking at the world through a little hole. Coyote sobbed.

"Why are you crying, Coyote?" asked Buffalo in a deep voice. Coyote explained to his cousin that he could barely see with the eye that was so small. "Snawai Yunwai", he replied "You poor thing. I have two eyes so I will share one with you." Then Buffalo took out one of his eyes and handed it to Coyote. Now Buffaloes are much bigger than Coyotes, and when Coyote tried to squeeze the new eye into his socket it hung over the rest of his face. So large was the eye that it let in so much light, Coyote was nearly blinded by the glare. Everything looked twice as large as it ordinarily did.

And so, Coyote was forced to continue his journey, staggering about with his mismatched eyes.