

Giving Voice to the First Peoples and Running with the Coyote: The Example of the Oral Traditions and Storytelling

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In giving voice to the First Peoples and running with the Coyote, consider the example of the following three processes in the act of storytelling.

A. Techniques of Telling - deictics, voice, body language, repetition, re-membered, a "skeleton" to be given muscle and form by the storyteller without adding or deleting any of the bones

B. Orality and Literacy

Orality as exemplified in Tribal, Indigenous Cultures, such as the Mardu Australian Aborigine, the Crow American Indian, or Chukchi of Siberia

Literacy as exemplified in Euro-American Culture

Keep in mind the **technological development** of **literacy** itself. Cruciform was developed by the Sumerians around 2800 BCE, which was fundamentally a series of pictographs, used for recording ideas and numbers associated with economic transactions. Semitic languages, such as Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew and Phoenician, around 1500 BCE, developed consonants, and Greeks around 500 BCE first to add vowels to language. Carbon 14 dating, place the Dead Sea Scrolls (900 documents on papyrus and animal skin, including the entire Hebrew Bible) around 335 BCE - 107 BCE

Three levels of interface:

1. The Physiological Experience as mediated through each mode:

orality - an auditory experience that **involuntary unifies** the listener in an event as a **transitory, evanescent process**, conceptualizing that **event** as reality

literacy - the reader **voluntarily engages objects** on a page as if permanent representations, conceptualizing an **objectified and separated concreteness** in reality

. 2. The ways Meaning/Knowledge are elicited, organized, stored and communicated as mediated through each mode:

orality - pervasively embedded in socially **experiential situations** (as engaged in stories, ritual, dance, song, regalia, art, architecture, landscape), and **contextualized in interpersonal dynamics** (terse, minimized use of function words such as prepositions and conjunctions, variation in intonation, personal pronouns are indistinguishable)

literacy - **formalized and decontextualized**, and **non-socially, non-experiential** (books, computer)

3. The ways Organized/Stored –

Orality - pervasively embedded in experiences (as engage stories, ritual, dance, song, regalia, art, architecture, landscape)

Literacy- non-experiential (books, computer)

Orality spawns a participatory, non-dualistic engagement in a reality that is understood as continually unfolding, as “becoming,” while literacy tends to render you as “subject,” an estranged viewer of a reality fixed as an “object.”

3. The Power in Words - goodbye, a name, a wow, *dashussua*

Example of “Chipmunk and Snake” and Coyote and the Green Spot – “*Shush taways talee, chacha taways talee, Shush taways talee, chacha taways talee.*”

All three dimensions coalesce to transform the listener into a participant in the Creation Time and Place (Smith’s “Dreaming” and “Eternal Time”) - “**to run with the Coyote,**” as Cliff SiJohn would say, to travel the world of the First Peoples/Animal Peoples in the “**canoe**” of the unfolding story.

The oral traditions are thus at once **didactic**, passing on pragmatic skills, teaching values, and disseminating identities, as well as **entertaining**, bringing a smile or a tear and rendering the difficult times less so, as Vic Charlo said, “helping lighten the load and make things more accessible.” But in addition, the oral traditions also **perpetuate the world. Run with the Coyote, renewing the creation of the world.**

As all phenomena is spatially and temporarily interconnected (see B.2.a., in kinship – *ashammaléaxia*) and potentially endowed with “medicine” (see B.1., *súumesh/wéyekin*), when the expressions (symbols/words in a story or a ceremony) of the Creator and Animal Peoples are properly brought forth, so too is their inherent transformative power. Hence, in the act of telling Coyote’s story, as in donning dance regalia or singing a *súumesh* song, the oral traditions also perpetuate the world, reinvigorating life and meaning into the landscape and all of its varied beings. The Creation time is traveled, a camas field nurtured, and an illness healed. Reality and the oral traditions are one and the same. “Stories make the world.”

The oral traditions, however, are **not fundamentally explanatory** in nature. Because Coyote did such and such, that is why ! 1. Such would presuppose that the stories were inventions of human curiosity, created by man to explain what he could not understand, and thus not be creations of the First Peoples, i.e., accounts of their actions. 2. Such would presuppose that the stories are earnest but feeble attempts by pre-scientific minds to understand the world, but are inevitably fantasies and false, and certainly not what is most real and true. And 3. such would presuppose a separate world out there (Cartesian dualism) that needed explaining, and certainly not an interconnected phenomenal world within which one is a part.

For further discussion see:

Frey, Rodney. 1995. *Stories That Make the World: Oral Literature of the Indian Peoples of the Inland Northwest*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. Pp. 141-147.

Goody, Jack. 1987. *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ong, Walter. 1982. *Orality and Literacy: The technologizing of the world*. New York: Methuen.

