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Simon Ortiz

#### FROM AN INTERVIEW

Why do you write? Who do you write for?

Because Indians always tell a story. The only way to continue is to tell a story and that's what Coyote says. The only way to continue is to tell a story and there is no other way. Your children will not survive unless you tell something about them — how they were born, how they came to this certain place, how they continued.

Who do you write for besides yourself?

For my son, for my wife, for my mother and my father and my grandparents and then reverse order that way so that I may have a good journey on my way back home.

#### TELLING ABOUT COYOTE

Old Coyote...

"If he hand't looked back,  
everything would have been okay  
....like he wasn't supposed to,  
but he did,  
and as soon as he did, he lost all his power, his strength."  
Never will learn will you.

".... you know, Coyote  
is in the origin and all the way  
through... he's the cause  
of the trouble, the hard times  
that things have...."

"Yet, he came so close  
to having it easy.

But he said,

"Things are too easy...."  
of course, he was mainly bragging,  
shooting his mouth.  
The existential Man,  
a Dostoevsky Coyote.

"He was on his way to Zuni  
to get married on that Saturday,  
and on the way there,  
he ran across a gambling party,  
a number of other animals were there.

He sat in  
for a while, you know, pretty sure,  
you know like he is, he would win  
something.

But he lost  
everything. Everything.  
And that included his skin, his fur,  
which was the subject of envy  
for all the other animals around.  
Coyote had the prettiest,  
the glossiest, the softest fur  
that ever was. And he lost that.

So some mice,  
finding him shivering in the cold  
beside a rock, felt sorry for him.  
'This poor thing, beloved,'  
they said, and they got together  
just some old scraps of fur  
and glued them on Coyote with pinon pitch.  
And he's had that motley fur ever since,  
you know, the one that looks like  
scraps of an old coat, that one."

Coyote, old man, wanderer,  
where you going, man? Look up  
and see the sun. Scorned,  
an old raggy blanket at the back of the closet.  
nobody wants.

"At this conference of all the animals,  
there was a bird with the purest  
white feathers. The feathers were like,  
ah... like the sun was shining on it  
all the time, but you could look at it,  
and you wouldn't be hurt by the glare;  
it was easy to look at,  
and he was Crow. He was sitting  
at one side of the fire,  
and the fire was being fed large pine logs,  
and Crow was sitting downwind

from the fire, the wind was blowing that way  
....and Coyote was there;  
he was envious of Crow because  
all the animals were saying, Wow,  
look at that Crow, man, just look at him,  
admiring him. Coyote began to scheme,  
he kept on throwing logs into the fire,  
and the wind kept blowing,  
all night long...  
....Let's see, the conference was about  
deciding the seasons,  
when they should take place,  
and it took a long time to decide that....  
And when it was over, Crow was covered  
entirely with soot, the blackest soot  
from the pine logs,  
and he's been like that since then."  
"Oh yes, that was the conference  
when Winter was decided that it should  
take place when Dog's hair got long.  
Dog said, 'I think Winter should take place  
when my hair gets long.' And  
it was agreed that it would. I guess  
since no one else offered a better reason."

Who? Coyote?

O, O yes, last time...  
when was it... I saw him was somewhere  
between Muskogee and Tulsa,  
heading for Tulsa I guess, just trucking along.  
He was heading into some oakbrush thicket,  
just over the hill was a creek. Probably  
get to Tulsa in a couple of days,  
drink a little wine,  
diddle with the Pawnee babes,  
sleep beside the Arkansas River,  
listen to it for a little while,  
... hope it don't rain,  
hope the river don't rise.  
He'll be back. Don't worry.

THEY COME AROUND, THE WOLVES —  
AND COYOTE AND CROW, TOO

I told you about those wolves.  
You must talk with them,  
meeting them someplace, mountain trail,  
desert, or at your campfire,  
and call them Uncle or Brother,  
but never Cousin or In-law.

"I am happy that you recognized us  
and called us by what we used to be called,"  
my Uncle said.

He was sitting there  
with his hands together,  
met my eyes and then dropped them to his hands,  
being humble.

"We come around, but we have a bad reputation,"  
my Uncle said.

"I'm glad you came," I said.

He smiled, but his eyes were sad.

"Are you my friend?" asked Coyote.

"One can't be too choosey," said Crow.

"I used to be so pretty  
and everyone liked me.

My voice especially.

Everyone would stop to listen," said Crow.

Coyote was silent.

"I was the admiration of everyone," said Crow.

Coyote was silent.

"I would sing and sing. Mocking Bird

and even Parrot were jealous of me.

My feathers would shine and shine," said Crow.

Coyote was silent.

"Are you sleeping," Crow asked,  
thinking Coyote wasn't listening.

"No," Coyote said.

"Did you hear what I just said?" asked Crow.

"Yes," said Coyote.

And Crow waited for Coyote's comment.

When it didn't come, he decided to sing.

"Caw, caw, caw," Crow sang.

"Stop," Coyote said.  
Crow waited for the favorable comment.  
He closed his eyes and made ready to bow.

Coyote silently crept away.

#### THE TEACHERS: CROW & COYOTE

Old man, beloved,  
tell me about Coyote and Crow.

"Coyote and Crow were fools."

"Yes."

"But, when you listen carefully and look,  
they teach you more than the most foolish  
of fools and also of the most intelligent.  
Hear and see."

"Yes."

Coyote was the swiftest of all  
the living creatures, but  
he bragged too much.  
Crow was the prettiest of all  
the birds, but he too thought  
too much of himself.  
And too often.

"That's what you should remember."

Old wise man, tell me about my teachers.

"Crow."

"Coyote."

Yes.

Of patterned energies; and first, Buckminster Fuller on knots. He grasps and tenses an invisible rope, on which we are to understand a common overhand knot, two 360° rotations in intersecting planes, each passed through the other:



Pull, and whatever your effort each lobe of the knot makes it impossible that the other shall disappear. It is a self-interfering pattern. Slacken, and its structure hangs open for analysis, but suffers no topological impairment. Slide the knot along the rope: you are sliding rope through the knot. Slide through it, if you have them spliced in sequence, hemp rope, cotton rope, nylon rope. The knot is indifferent to these transactions. The knot is neither hemp nor cotton nor nylon: is not the rope. The knot is a patterned integrity. The rope renders it visible. No member of Fuller's audience has ever objected (he remarks) that throughout this exposition he has been holding no rope at all, so accessible to the mind is a patterned integrity, visible or no, once the senses have taught us its contours.

Imagine, next, the metabolic flow that passes through a man and is not the man: some hundred tons of solids, liquids and gases serving to render a single man corporeal during the seventy years he persists, a patterned integrity, a knot through which pass the swift strands of simultaneous ecological cycles, recycling transformations of solar energy. At any given moment the knotted materials weigh perhaps 160 pounds. (And "Things," wrote Ernest Fenollosa about 1904, are "cross-sections cut through actions, snapshots.")

So far Buckminster Fuller (1967). Now Ezra Pound (1914) on the poetic image: "... a radiant node or cluster; ... what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing." A patterned integrity accessible to the mind; topologically stable; subject to variations of intensity; brought into the domain of the senses by a particular interaction of words. "In decency one can only call it a vortex. . . . Nomina sunt consequentia rerum." For the vortex is not the water but a patterned energy made visible by the water.

—Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era (1971)