

# Nez Perce Coyote Tales



## The Myth Cycle

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in collaboration with  
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## INTRODUCTION

*all myths to  
preserved in English?*

IN 1962, fewer than two hundred Nez Perce were fluent in their language. By 1994, fewer than thirty spoke their language fluently. Thus the Nez Perce oral tradition, which is responsible for preservation of the myths of these people, is rapidly disappearing. In order to preserve at least a portion of this tradition, we have assembled the largest collection of those myths that concern Coyote—the most complex character in Nez Perce mythology.

The activities of the characters, the imparted values, and the physical culture described in these myths allude mainly to Nez Perce culture of aboriginal times. In aboriginal times, the Nez Perce occupied approximately 13 million acres located in what is now north-central Idaho, southeastern Washington, and northeastern Oregon. Nez Perce territory included the Clearwater and portions of the Salmon River and Snake River drainages. This area has many mountains, rivers, and deep canyons that provided a wide variety of resources and protection from invaders. The river valleys also provided grazing areas and protection from extreme cold in winter. Traditional food plants included camas bulbs, bitterroot, wild carrot, wild onion, several varieties of berries, sunflower seed, pine nuts, moss, and bark. Food animals included salmon and other fish, elk, deer, moose, mountain goats and sheep, bear, small game, and birds. The Nez Perce seasonally migrated throughout their territory in order to take advantage of various resources. Additional resources were acquired on expeditions to what is now southern Idaho, eastern Oregon and Washington, down the Columbia River, and even into the northern Great Plains for buffalo. Mobility was greatly enhanced after the adoption of the horse, and the Nez Perce became greatly renowned for their large herds and selective breeding.

The aboriginal Nez Perce lived primarily in small settlements of thirty to two hundred individuals. These villages were politically unified into bands that, in turn, were organized into composite bands. This pattern of political organization was largely the result of the location of the villages along streams and tributary systems. Villages were identified with the smaller feeder streams, bands with the larger tributaries, and composite bands with larger rivers. A typical village was made up of several related extended families usually led by

one headman (generally the eldest able man, occasionally a shaman) whose powers were sharply limited by village elders who elected him. The headman's duties were to demonstrate exemplary behavior, act as spokesman for the village, mediate intravillage disputes, and attend to the general welfare of village members. Women did not speak in most council proceedings but normally influenced their male relatives to achieve their goals. The elected band leader was usually the leader of the largest village in the group and was often assisted by prominent warriors. Composite band councils were composed of band leaders but tended to be led by prominent warriors who elected a temporary leader. This type of organization facilitated large operations such as buffalo hunting ventures into the Great Plains. The head chief system in which the entire tribe was represented by a permanent leader was a product of later treaties and the reservation system that emerged after A.D. 1840.

Most older relatives took part in training children. Nez Perce children developed close ties with grandparents who typically cared for them after weaning. In contrast to a more formal relationship maintained with their parents, children could joke with and tease grandparents whom they tended to regard as equals. A grandfather would usually direct a boy's first attempts at hunting, fishing, sweatbathing, and horse riding; a grandmother would usually direct a girl's first root digging or berry picking. Grandparents also spent many hours recounting myths, which were a primary means of educating the young. Siblings and cousins were regarded as brothers and sisters, and aunts and uncles were called by terms also used for father and mother. By the age of six, boys and girls were making substantial contributions to family subsistence. At adolescence, children of both sexes were sent out to seek tutelary spirits in vision quests.

Marriages were arranged by family heads, and childhood betrothals were common. Families would decide if the couple were compatible in terms of personality, relative wealth, and social prestige. Marriage between known relatives, even distant cousins, was forbidden. Marriage of more than one son into a family was common. Sororal polygyny, or a man marrying two or more sisters, was not uncommon. The levirate and sororate (the option to marry the eldest brother of the groom or a sister of the bride in the event of their death) were also observed. Couples lived with the parents from whom they could expect to gain the most, usually those of the groom.

The traditional Nez Perce believed that humans and natural objects had souls, without which they ceased to exist. Tutelary spirits differ from souls in that they are acquired during life and are rarely lost. Heaven and hell were concepts brought by Christian missionaries, but there were earlier conceptions of an afterlife. Shamans were people who demonstrated particularly strong

supernatural powers during medicine dances and in healing, and they performed various ceremonial services in the community.

Nez Perce culture has undergone rapid transformation since first contact with Euroamericans, but Nez Perce myths are quite conservative and reveal few new materials. For example, although horses played a large role in shaping Nez Perce life after about A.D. 1700, horses do not appear as characters in the narratives, are rarely mentioned, and even then appear only as minor details. The values associated with the behavior and activities of mythical characters in particular contexts as well as the physical culture described in the narratives allude with few exceptions\* to traditional Nez Perce culture of the prehorse era. Nez Perce myths do not directly or systematically reflect traditional Nez Perce culture in a typical structural-functional manner. Instead, the myths form a semi-independent sector of Nez Perce culture and depict a distinct reality whose construction is based on its own rules, some of which are revealed in our following interpretation. In our view, Nez Perce mythology is not necessarily a function or an outgrowth of any other sector of Nez Perce culture. Likewise, it has survived largely unchanged despite massive changes in other sections of Nez Perce culture.

Like myths from other cultures, Nez Perce myths impart basic values and beliefs and provide moral instruction. They help explain the creation of the world and its inhabitants, the origin of rituals and customs, and the meaning of birth, death, and other natural occurrences. Myths are mechanisms for educating children, for stimulating social interaction and cohesion, and for amusement. Nez Perce myths were traditionally recounted by elders during winter. They are inhabited by a cast of characters that include animals, plants, rocks, rivers, celestial bodies, and other figures who behaved like humans in a pre-cultural era before humans were created. These characters share much in common with the tutelary spirits that Nez Perce individuals traditionally acquired during vision quests. Tutelary spirits could confer special powers and abilities to those who observed proper rituals and taboos, or they could cause misfortune and death to those who violated taboos. The Nez Perce believe that although the animals became mute after humans arrived, they could still reveal their full power to humans in visions and dreams. The behavior of animal characters in myths also instructed children in proper behavior and taught them practical lessons, such as the habits of animals, the location of food and other resources, how to use implements and tools, and the geography of their territory. Some

\*Exceptions include a flintlock gun, smallpox, horses, white people and black people, but these remain insufficient to contradict our assertion that the myth corpus is overwhelmingly conservative and reflects pre-contact culture.

explain the origins of animals, environmental features, customs, and so forth. Others emphasize the positive or negative outcomes of various types of behavior, reinforcing the prized values of honesty, justice, bravery, generosity, self-discipline, and self-reliance.

Narratives that include Coyote make up more than half of the entire existing corpus of Nez Perce myths, reflecting the importance the Nez Perce assign to Coyote. Because Coyote created them, they consider themselves to be the children of Coyote—*layé'yem mamáyac*.<sup>\*</sup> There are many other mythical characters inhabiting the world in which Coyote's adventures take place (see Table 1), but he is the most complex in Nez Perce mythology. Few other characters manifest a survival capacity equal to his. He represents and expresses many of the most basic human drives: lust for power, hunger for food, and unrestrained desire for sexual gratification. These drives motivate his actions in most of the myths in which he is a principal actor. His methods for satisfying these drives often include deception, evasion, trickery, and disguise. His actions are often destructive and disruptive of the social life of his mythical associates, yet he seems to be aware that his activities may benefit the human beings whom he is soon to create.

Coyote and the other mythical actors are a prehuman combination of animal, human, and superhuman qualities. We should not expect their behavior to be entirely human, and we should not assume that these actors directly reflect traditional Nez Perce culture. Coyote acts largely on his immediate urges and impulses and is only marginally social in the human sense, which helps to explain his amoral actions that conflict sharply with traditional Nez Perce behavior. It is also worthwhile to note several other things about Nez Perce Coyote. He is not a god in the Euroamerican sense; he is not a hero in the sense used by Joseph Campbell; he is not a creator in the sense of Jehovah; and he is not merely a picaresque figure. The term trickster-transformer, often applied to Coyote, also omits several important aspects of his character, because he is not only the perpetrator of tricks but also the victim of tricks perpetrated on him by others. His role as a transformer has been exaggerated, especially in view of his motives, which are self-centered.

What follows is a comprehensive collection of Nez Perce Coyote myths with an interpretive section illustrating Coyote's character based on his relationships with other mythic characters. Readers who wish to review the texts in the Nez Perce orthography are encouraged to consult the original publications. The former title of this volume refers to the narrative "Coyote and Monster," which ends with Coyote creating the Nez Perce and other tribes from the parts of the slain monster. We present "Coyote and Monster" first, because it shows the importance of Coyote in Nez Perce cosmology; however, it could have been presented last because the other myths occur in the time before human beings are created.

Table 1: Principal Characters in the Nez Perce Coyote Cycle

Air People	Elder Brother	Pinion Bird
Bald Eagle	Elk	Porcupine
Bat	Excrement Children	Prairie Chicken
Black Bear	Fir People	Raccoon
Black Brush Pheasant	Fish Hawk	Racer Snake
Blackfeet	Flathcad	Rattlesnake
Black-tailed Buck	Flint Man	Raven
Blindworm	Fox	Robin
Bluejay	Frog	Rock
Blue Racer Snake	Goat	Salmon
Bobcat	Golden Eagle	Sea Monster
Bobolink	Goose	Shadow People
Brown Bear	Gopher	Sioux
Buffalo	Grasshopper	Skulls
Butterfly	Grizzly Bear	Snowshoe Rabbit
Cannibal	Hummingbird	Spiders
Cayuse	Jackrabbit	Sun
Chinook salmon	Killer Baby	Sunflower
Cicéqi	Land People	Swallow
Cixcixicim	Lynx	Swan
Coeur d'Alene	Magpie	Turtle
Coldweather People	Marten	Wáscó People
Cougar	Meadowlark	Wármweather People
Cow Elk	Mistoyno	Wáter Woman
Crane	Monster	Wáyácaynwá'yacáyn
Crawfish	Moon	Wéasel
Cricket	Mosquito	White Bull
Crow	Mountain Goat	White Duck
Curlw	Mountain Sheep	White Mountain
Cut-Out-of-Belly Boy	Mouse	Rabbit
Death Spirit	Muskkrat	White-tailed Buck
Deer Tick	Mussel-Shell Woman	Wolf
Disobedient Boy	Night Owl	Women at the
Duck	Otter	Headwaters
Duck Man	Owl	Woodpecker
Eagle	Pend d'Oreilles	Worm
Elbow Baby	Pine Squirrel	Worm People

\*Our writing of Nez Perce words does not always conform with the method employed by linguists.



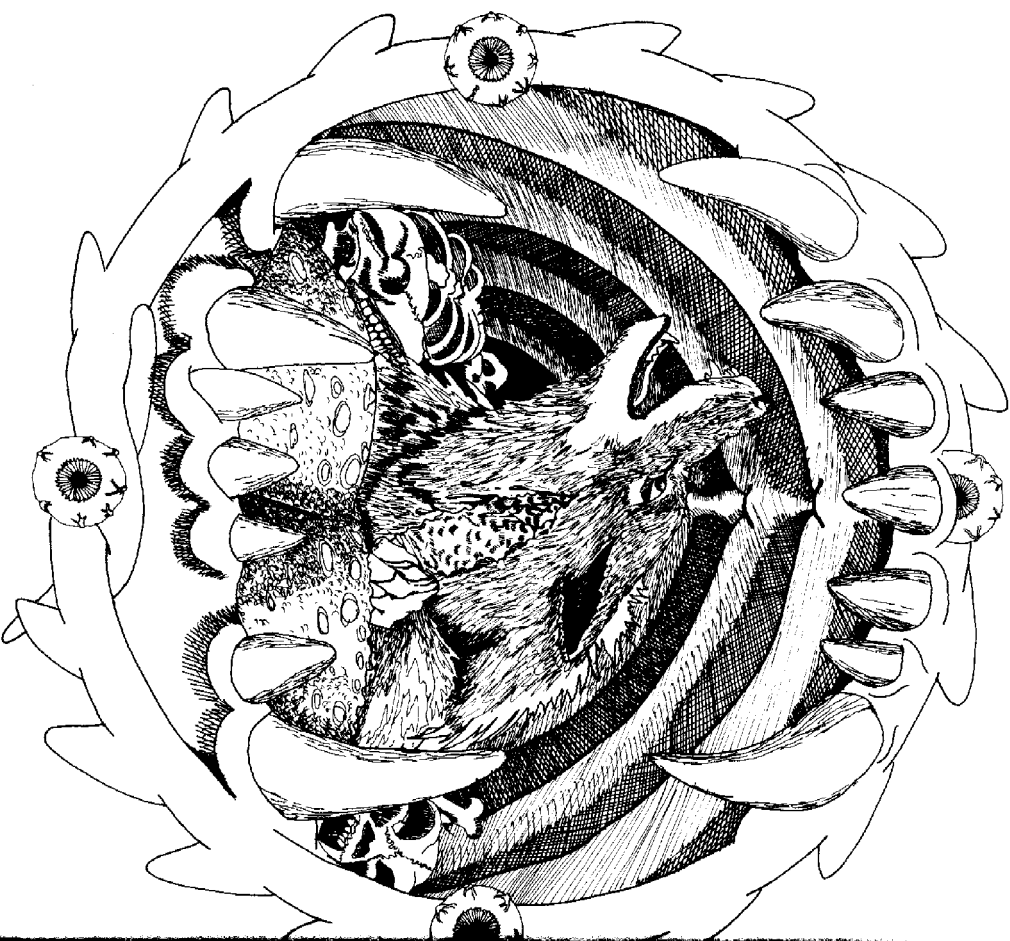


COYOTE AND MONSTER

COYOTE WAS BUILDING a fish-ladder by tearing down the waterfall at Celilo, so that salmon could go upstream for the people to catch. He was busily engaged at this when someone shouted to him, "Why are you bothering with that? All the people are gone; the monster has done them in." "Well," said Coyote to himself "then I'll stop doing this, because I was doing it for the people, and now I'll go along too." From there he went along upstream, by the way of the Salmon River country. Going along he stepped on the leg of a meadowlark and broke it. The meadowlark in a temper shouted, "*Limna, limna, limna!* What chance do you have of finding the people the way you are going along!" Coyote then asked, "My aunt! Please tell me about it. Afterward I will make you a leg of brushwood." So the meadowlark told him, "All the people have already been swallowed by the monster." Coyote then replied, "Yes, that is where I, too, am going."

From there he traveled on. Along the way he took a good bath, saying to himself, "Lest I make myself repulsive to his taste," and then he dressed himself all up: "Lest he will vomit me up or spit me out." Then he tied himself with [very long ropes] to three mountains. From there he came along up and over ridges. Suddenly, behold, he saw a great head. He quickly hid himself in the grass and gazed at it. Never before in his life had he seen anything like it; never such a large thing—away off somewhere melting into the horizon was its gigantic body.

Coyote shouted to him, "Oh Monster, we are going to inhale each other!" The big eyes of the monster roved, looking all over for Coyote but did not find him because Coyote's body was painted with clay to achieve a perfect protective coloring in the grass. Coyote had on his back a pack consisting of five stone knives, some pure pitch, and a flint fire-making set. Presently Coyote shook the grass to and fro and shouted again, "Monster! We are going to inhale each



*Coyote severs Monster's heart with his flint knife.*

(Recited by *Wayi'itapuk*, originally published in Phinney, 1934. See also "Iliswewitsix, The Kamiah Monster," in Spinden, 1908.)

other." Suddenly the monster saw the swaying grass and replied, "Oh you Coyote, you swallow me first then; you inhale first." So Coyote tried. Powerfully and noisily he drew in his breath, but the great monster just swayed and quivered. Then Coyote said, "Now you inhale me, for you have already swallowed all the people, so swallow me too lest I become lonely."

The monster inhaled like a mighty wind, which carried Coyote along just like that; but as Coyote went he left in his wake great canna roots and great serviceberries, saying, "Here the people will find them and will be glad, for only a short time away is the coming of the human race." He almost got caught on one of the ropes, but he quickly cut it with his knife.

Thus he dashed right into the monster's mouth. From there he walked down the throat of the monster. Along the way he saw bones scattered about and he thought to himself, "It is to be seen that many people have been dying." As he went along he saw some boys and he said to them, "Where is his heart? Come along and show me!" Then, as they were all going along, the bear rushed out furiously at him. "So!" Coyote said to him, "You make yourself ferocious only to me," and he kicked the bear on the nose. As they continued, the rattlesnake bristled at him in fury, "So! Only toward me you are vicious—we are nothing but dung." Then he kicked the rattlesnake on the head and flattened it. Going on he met the brown bear who greeted him, "I see he [the monster] selected you for the last. So! I'd like to see you save your people [derogatory diatribe]."

All along the people hailed Coyote and stopped him. He told the boys, "Pick up some wood." His erstwhile friend Fox hailed him from the side, "Such a dangerous fellow [the monster], what are you going to do to him?" "So!" replied Coyote. "You too hurry along and look for wood."

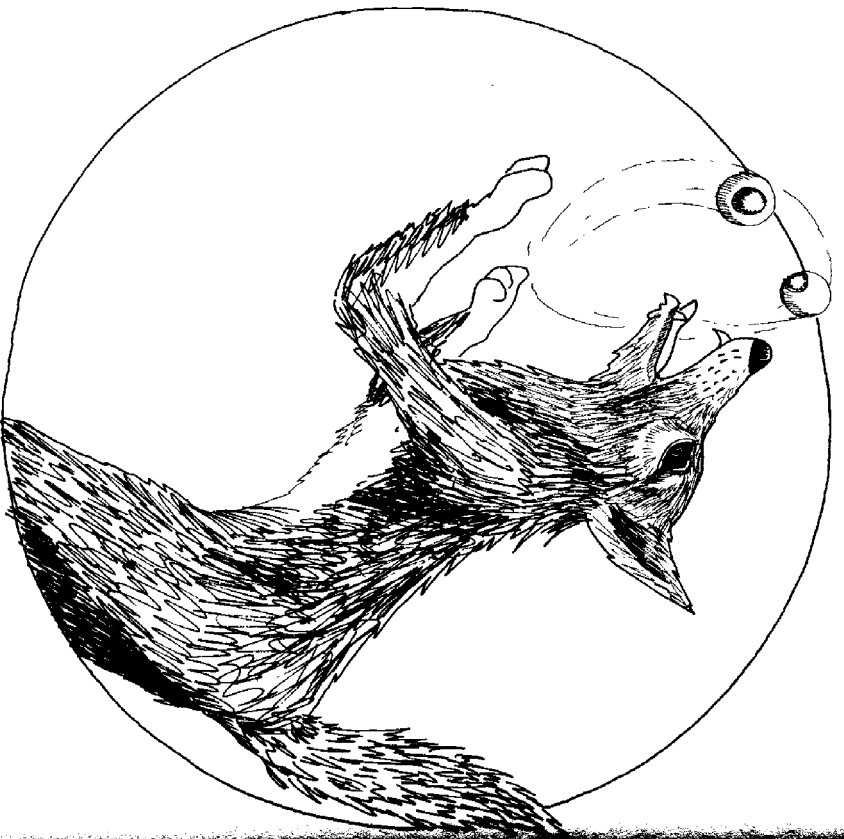
Presently Coyote arrived at the heart and he cut off slabs of fat and threw them to the people. "Imagine you being hungry under such conditions! Grease your mouths with this." And Coyote started a fire with his flint and shortly smoke appeared from the monster's nose, ears, eyes, and anus. The monster then said, "Oh you, Coyote, that's why I was afraid of you. Oh you, Coyote, let me cast you out." And Coyote replied, "Yes, and later let it be said, 'He who was cast out is officiating in the distribution of salmon.'" "Well then, go out through the nose," Coyote replied, "And will not they say the same?" And the monster said, "Well then, go out through the ears," to which Coyote replied, "And let it be said, 'Here is ear-wax officiating in the distribution of food.'" "Ha, ha, ha! Oh you, Coyote! This is why I feared you; then go out through the anus." And Coyote replied, "And let people say, 'Feces are officiating in the distribution of food.'" His fire was still burning near the heart and the monster began to writhe in pain. Coyote began cutting away on the heart, and very shortly he broke the stone knife. Immediately he took another and in a short time this one also

broke and Coyote said to all the people, "Gather up all the bones and carry them to the eyes, ears, mouth, and anus; pile them up and when he falls dead kick all the bones outside." Then with another knife he began cutting away at the heart. The third knife he broke and the fourth, leaving only one. He told the people, "All right, get yourselves ready because as soon as he falls dead each one will go out of the opening most convenient. Take the old women and old men close to the openings so that they may get out easily."

The heart hung by only a very small piece of muscle and Coyote was cutting away on it with his last stone knife. The monster's heart was still barely hanging when Coyote's last knife broke; Coyote threw himself on the heart and hung on, just barely tearing it loose with his hands. In his death convulsions the monster opened all the openings of his body and the people kicked the bones outside and went out. Coyote, too, went out. The monster fell dead and the anus began to close. But the muskrat was still inside. Just as the anus closed he squeezed out, barely getting his body through. But alas! his tail was caught; he pulled and it was bare when he pulled it out; all the tail hair had been peeled right off. Coyote scolded him, "Now what were you doing; you had to think up something to do at the last moment. You're always behind in everything."

Then he told the people, "Gather up all the bones and arrange them well." They did this, whereupon Coyote added, "Now we are going to carve the monster." Coyote then smeared blood on his hands, sprinkled this blood on the bones, and suddenly there came to life again all those who had died while inside the monster. They carved the great monster and Coyote began dealing out portions of the body to various parts of the country all over the land: toward the sunrise, toward the sunset, toward the warmth, toward the cold, and by that act destined and renaming the various peoples—Coeur d'Alene, Cayuse, Pend Oreilles, Flathead, Blackfeet, Crow, Sioux, and all the others. He consumed the entire body of the monster in this distribution to various lands far and wide. Nothing more remained of the great monster.

Fox came up and said to Coyote, "What is the meaning of this, Coyote? You have distributed all of the body to faraway lands but have given yourself nothing for this immediate locality." "Well," snorted Coyote, "and did you tell me that before? Why didn't you tell me that a while ago before it was too late? I was engrossed to the exclusion of thinking. You should have told me that in the first place." And he turned to the people and said, "Bring me some water with which to wash my hands." They brought him water and he washed his hands and now with the bloody washwater he sprinkled the local regions saying, "You may be little people but you will be powerful. Even though you will be little people because I have deprived you, nevertheless you will be very, very, manly. Only a short time away is the coming of the human race."



... he cut his eyes out and juggled them several times.

## HOW COYOTE LOST HIS EYES

ONCE UPON A TIME when Coyote was wandering around crossing over a ridge, he came upon a man dancing on only one leg. The other leg he carried over his shoulder. Coyote was astonished to see such a thing, and he marveled greatly at it. Then Coyote went over the ridge and cutting off one of his own legs, he also began to dance. Then he heard someone singing as he danced.

The first man had a feeling that there was someone else dancing, and when he spotted Coyote he promptly cut off Coyote's other leg and threw him into the river.

Coyote floated down the river one bend and a half. There Maggie was flying up the river with his wings gleaming in the sun. "Oh, there is Coyote floating around. I wonder if he has some eye fat." Maggie landed on Coyote and began pecking his eye fat. This awoke Coyote and he stormed angrily at Maggie, "Damn it! Your pecking woke me up just as I was helping the women cross the river!" "You weren't taking any women across the river," Maggie retorted. "You were killed here by the old-time killer."

With that Coyote proceeded upstream and hit his hip, and his excrement children came out. As he was drying himself, the children began fighting with each other, and Coyote told them, "Look out, you will poke out each other's eyes," and he told them to go back in. But he blocked out the youngest, Cicéqi, and asked him, "How can I revenge myself?"

Cicéqi replied, "There is an old-time killer who dances around and always kills, and he is Grasshopper. Whatever he does he always takes off his leg and puts it back again. You should go there then and cut his other leg off."

And that is what Coyote did, and he killed Grasshopper. Then Coyote said, "Ah! No longer will they say that he is a killer. People are coming soon, and the

(Recited by Walters; originally published in Aoki and Walker, 1989. For versions related to various segments of this narrative, see Wilson's "How Coyote Lost His Eyes" in the same volume; "Coyote and Curlew" in Phinney, 1934; "Up a Creek" and "Kaistainomios or Elbow Baby" in Spinden, 1908.)



human beings will say, 'This is Grasshopper; who lost his legs, and will cre around.' You won't kill anyone."

From there Coyote went on over another ridge. All of a sudden he came upon a man who was juggling his eyes. The man would throw them up, shouting, "My eyes fit!" and they would come right back into their sockets. Coyote was amazed to see such a thing, and he started doing it too. He went over the ridge, and he cut his eyes out and juggled them several times.

Then the other one had a feeling that someone was imitating and mocking him. "So! It's Coyote who is doing it!" he stormed. He took a stick and hooked one of Coyote's eyes away. Coyote hollered for his eye to come back, but to no avail. Coyote thought to himself, "Maybe it's waiting for the other eye." So he threw the other one up, and the man hooked this one also.

So Coyote became blind and hollow-eyed. He groped around till he came to a pile of rocks. "Oh! Excuse me for scattering your biscuit roots around Grandchildren," he apologized. "Oh, never mind, we're just a pile of rocks," answered the rocks.

Coyote stumbled into some brush. "Oh! Forgive me for breaking up your house," he apologized again. The brushes answered: "We're just old brushes here!"

In this way Coyote groped his way around until finally he became hungry. He felt around for some food, but there was nothing. He rested for a while to cool off. As he did so he heard a bird singing, "Empty eyes, empty eyes," the bird mocked.

"Oh!" mourned Coyote, "that makes me long for the place where I heard that song before." He named the place where he had heard the bird. "You're making me so lonesome. Come closer and say it."

The bird got closer. "Say it here, right beside me," Coyote coaxed it. The Curlew Bird did, and instantly Coyote grabbed the bird and yanked its eyes out. He threw the eyes into his own sockets, and into Curlew's eyes he threw some thickened clots of blood. That's why the bird's eyes are red.

Coyote could see again with Curlew's eyes, even though they were small. He could search for things again, and he ate whatever he could find. He traveled around this way for a while, until he heard Owl hooting. "That owl has bigger eyes," thought Coyote. He went up to Owl and said, "Ah, how I long for the days! I remember once when we were camping, I heard the hooting of an owl. You make me feel so lonesome. Come closer and hoot again."

So Owl did just that, getting closer and closer at Coyote's urging. When he was close enough, Coyote caught him, yanked his eyes out, and put Curlew's eyes into Owl's sockets, with Owl's eyes in his own. Suddenly he saw a little better, and he moved on.

As he went along he began hearing the sound of someone pounding. He went into the place where the sound was coming from, and there was an old woman, named Mistryno, pounding. "Where are they?" asked Coyote. "Oh, the grandchildren? They have gone to a party where lots of people are having fun playing with Coyote's eyes. When they come back, they'll eat this." She was pounding sunflower biscuits, mixing the grease in as she did so. She gave some of the biscuits to Coyote, and when he finished eating he made up his mind to kill her. He clubbed her to death and she collapsed in his arms.

Careful not to get any blood on his clothes, he put on the old woman's clothes. After transforming himself into the image of the old woman, he hid her body away. Then he ate up all the biscuits she had been pounding for the children, so he had to make some more. While he was pounding more biscuits, he heard the sound of children returning. He quickly lay with his face down, moaning and groaning. "Grandma! What happened?" the children cried. "Oh, it pains me where he shot me," Coyote moaned. "It's the wound I got when I was shot in the war in the old days, the pain comes back to me now! I couldn't pound more for you."

"Oh, never mind, we'll do it ourselves," the children offered. "You just rest, Grandma, and lie with your face down." They told him, "The people at the dance said, 'You come now.'" "Carry me over there, Grandchildren," Coyote asked. They carried him over.

When morning came, everyone was off again to the party that had been going on the night before. Throngs of people came, all having a great time dancing with Coyote's eyes. The oldest granddaughter carried Coyote along to the party. Coyote asked her to lower him a little. She did so, and Coyote took advantage of the position to copulate with her. The girl felt something strange and put him down. The girls took turns carrying Coyote. The same thing occurred with all three of them. But when it came to the youngest one, she told the others, "This is Coyote! I wouldn't carry him for anything!"

Finally they got to where all the festivities were going on. Lots of people were dancing with Coyote's eyes. Suddenly Coyote burst out, "Let me do it too, Grandchildren! Let me dance with the eyes!" They handed him the eyes and he danced back and forth with them. Then he spied an open door, through which he dashed out. "Heavens!" the girls exclaimed. "I wonder why he took the eyes away." Coyote was perched high up above the crowd, and he told them, "Hail! You thought that I was Mistryno, the old lady, dancing here. I got my eyesight back from you. I also copulated with all the girls, except the youngest, who rejected me. I don't know if she'll have a baby or not, but you should name these children who will be born."

This is how Coyote got his eyes back.

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COYOTE AND THE  
SHADOW PEOPLE

COYOTE AND HIS WIFE were living together. His wife became ill. She died. Then Coyote became very, very lonely. He did nothing but weep for his wife. The death spirit came to him and said, "Coyote, do you pine for your wife?" "Yes, friend, I long for her most painfully," replied Coyote. "I could take you to the place where your wife has gone, but I tell you, you must do everything just exactly as I say; not once are you to disregard my commands and do something else." "Yes," replied Coyote, "yes, friend, and what would I do? I will do everything you say." The ghost told him, "Yes. Now let us go." Coyote added, "Yes, let us be on our way."

They went. The spirit said to Coyote again, "You must do whatever I say. Do not disobey." "Yes, yes, friend. I have been pining so deeply and why should I not heed you?" Coyote could not see the spirit clearly. He appeared to be only a shadow. They started out and went along over a plain. "Oh, there are many horses; it looks like a roundup," exclaimed the ghost. "Yes," replied Coyote, though he really saw none. "Yes, there are many horses."

They had arrived near the place of the dead. The ghost knew that Coyote could see nothing, but he said, "Oh look, such quantities of serviceberries! Let us pick some to eat. Now when you see me reach up, you too will reach up and when I bend the limb down you too will pull your hands down." "Yes," Coyote said to him, "I'll do just as you tell me." The ghost reached up and bent the branch down and Coyote did the same. Although he could see no berries he imitated the ghost in putting his hand to and from his mouth in the manner

(Recited by *Wáyi'látpu*, originally published in Phinney, 1934.)



*The spirit said, "Your wife will be with you, but you must never, never touch her."*

of eating. Thus they picked and ate berries. Coyote watched him carefully and initiated every action. When the ghost would put his hand into his mouth, Coyote did the same. "Such good serviceberries these are," commented the ghost. "Yes, friend, it is good that we have found them," agreed Coyote. "Now, let us go."

And they went on. "We are about to arrive," the ghost told him. "There is a long, very, very long lodge. Your wife is there somewhere. Just wait and let me ask someone." In a little while, the ghost returned and said to Coyote, "Yes, they have told me where your wife is. We are coming to a door through which we will enter. You will do in every way exactly what you see me do. I will take hold of the door flap, raise it up, and, bending low, will enter. Then you too will take hold of the door flap and do the same." They proceeded to enter in this manner.

It happened that Coyote's wife was sitting right near the entrance. The ghost said to Coyote, "Sit here beside your wife." They both sat. The ghost added, "Your wife is going now to prepare food for us." Coyote could see nothing, except that he was sitting on an open prairie with nothing in sight; yet he could feel the presence of the shadow. "Now she has prepared our food. Let us eat." The ghost reached down and then brought his hand to his mouth. Coyote could see nothing but the prairie dust. They ate. Coyote imitated all the movements of his companion.

When they had finished and the woman had apparently put the food away, the ghost said to Coyote, "You stay here. I must go around to see some people." He went out, but he returned soon. "Here conditions are different from those you have in the land of the living. When it gets dark here it has dawned in your land and when it dawns for us it is growing dark for you." It began to grow dark and Coyote seemed to hear people whispering, talking in faint tones, all around him. Then darkness set in. Oh, Coyote saw many fires in a longhouse. He saw that he was in a very, very large lodge, and there were many fires burning. He saw various people. They seemed to have shadow-like forms, but he was able to recognize different persons. He saw his wife sitting by his side. He was overjoyed and he joyfully greeted all his old friends who had died long ago. How happy he was! He marched down the aisles between the fires, going here and there, and he talked with the people. He did this throughout the night. Now he could see the doorway through which his friend and he had entered.

At last it began to dawn and his friend came to him and said, "Coyote, our night is falling and in a little while you will not see us. But you must stay right here. Do not go anywhere at all. Stay right here and then in the evening you will see all these people again." "Yes, friend. Where could I possibly go? I will spend the day here." The dawn came and Coyote found himself alone sitting

in the middle of a prairie. He spent the day there, just dying from the heat, parching from the heat, thirsting from the heat. Coyote stayed there several days. He would suffer through the day but always at night he would make merry in the great lodge.

One day his ghost friend came to him and said, "Tomorrow you will go home. You will take your wife with you." "Yes, friend, but I like it here so much. I am having a good time and I should like to remain here." "Yes," the ghost replied, "nevertheless, you will go tomorrow, and you must guard against your inclination to do foolish things. Do not yield to any queer notions. I will advise you now what you are to do. There are five mountains. You will travel for five days. Your wife will be with you but you must never, never touch her. Do not let any strange impulses possess you. You may talk to her but never touch her. Only after you have crossed and descended from the fifth mountain, you may do whatever you like." "Yes, friend," replied Coyote.

When dawn came again, Coyote and his wife started. At first it seemed to him as if he were going alone, yet he was dimly aware of his wife's presence as she walked behind. They crossed one mountain and, now, Coyote could feel more definitely the presence of his wife; like a shadow she seemed. They went on and crossed the second mountain. They camped at night at the foot of each mountain. They had a little conical lodge, which they would set up each night. Coyote's wife would sit on one side of the fire and he on the other. Her form appeared clearer and clearer. The death spirit, who had sent them, now began to count the days and to figure the distance Coyote and his wife had covered. "I hope that he will do everything right and take his wife through to the world beyond," he kept saying to himself.

Coyote and his wife were spending their last night, their fourth camping; on the next day, she would again assume fully the character of a living person. They were camping for the last time and Coyote could see her very clearly as if she were a real person who sat opposite him. He could see her face and body very clearly; but he only looked and dared not touch her. But suddenly a joyous impulse seized him; the joy of having his wife again overwhelmed him. He jumped to his feet and rushed over to embrace her. His wife cried out, "Stop! Stop! Coyote! Do not touch me. Stop!" Her warning had no effect. Coyote rushed over to his wife and just as he touched her body she vanished. She disappeared—returned to the shadowland.

When the death spirit learned of Coyote's folly, he became deeply angry. "You inveterate doer of this kind of thing! I told you not to do anything foolish. You, Coyote, were about to establish the practice of returning from death. Only a short time from now the human race will arrive, but you have spoiled everything and established for them death as it is."

Coyote wept and wept. He decided, "Tomorrow I shall return to see them again." He started back the following morning and as he went along he began to recognize the places where his spirit friend and he had passed before. He found the place where the ghost had seen the herd of horses, and now he began to do the same things they had done on their way to the shadowland. "Oh, look at the horses; it looks like a roundup." He went on until he came to the place where the ghost had found the serviceberries. "Oh, such choice service berries! Let us pick and eat some." He went through the motions of picking and eating berries.

He went on and finally came to the place where the long lodge had stood. He said to himself, "Now, when I take hold of the door flap and raise it up, you must do the same." Coyote remembered all the little things his friend had done. He saw the spot where he had sat before. He went there, sat down, and said, "Now your wife has brought us food. Let us eat." He went through the motions of eating again. Darkness fell, and Coyote listened for the voices and he looked all around. He looked here and there, but nothing appeared. Coyote sat there in the middle of the prairie. He sat there all night but the lodge didn't appear again and the ghost never returned to him.



*The fire landed and scooped up Coyote with a sizzling sound.*

## ELBOW BABY

COYOTE WAS LIVING on the north side of the stream. He had five daughters, and Fox had five daughters, too. They all lived in one place, and they spent the winter there in their winter quarters.

One day Coyote developed a boil on his elbow, and he thought, "What is this?" It grew enormous. "Maybe it's a boil!" It pained him all the time, and then one day it burst open. He had been touching it, and then, poof! it opened and a boy fell out. "My!" said Coyote. "It's a baby boy. Thanks!" He made a baby board for him and took care of him. He gave him food—soup made of all sorts of things.

The boy kept growing, and then one day, Coyote went to his daughters and said to them, "Come take care of your brother while I'm busy cutting wood and such." They took care of him. Many times he told them to care for the baby. Then one day Coyote was again busy doing something by himself, he was catching mice. Perhaps the daughters were tickling the baby or doing something—he had gotten very big; he hadn't yet started to walk but he wasn't small. They tickled him, and he laughed. His half-sisters laughed, "Oh, how sweetly he laughs." They tickled him again and again. They kept on tickling him. Finally he became limp, and he dropped dead. He had become exhausted from laughing. They were scared. They wrapped him up and left him there, and they went home.

Coyote arrived home saying, "My child, my sonny boy, where is he?" And he came in and saw him motionless. He went to him and felt him. "Oh, he's cold. Oh, is he dead?" He picked up his baby and held it in his arms. "Oh, son, what happened?" Then he lamented, "Oh! My child, my child, my son. He was going to be a rich man! My child was going to be a young chief. My child, my child, my child. He was going to be a rich man! He was going to be a young chief!"

(Revised by Wilson; originally published in Aoki and Walker, 1989. See also "Coyote and Elbow-Child" in Phinney, 1934; and "Katsinamiotis, or Elbow Baby" in Spinden, 1908.)

He cried. He wore himself out crying. Finally he dried his tears, and he took the child. "I will lay him to rest in some good place." He took him up on the hill where a bridge comes ashore across the river. From there he carried the child a little ways up the hill and buried him.

When Coyote came down from there, he planned. "I wonder how I can avenge his death?" He was angry. "How shall I get even with and punish my daughters? Fox's daughters were there also. He planned, and one day he said, "I'm ready now. I'll go when they are sleeping at night, when they are dead to the world. Then I'll destroy them. I will get rid of them." He waited until midnight, and he got close to them as they were sleeping. There was an opening—in the winter quarters they climbed up to the opening on top to get out. He blocked the opening with logs that were firm and strong, and there he stood. Then he urinated on them, drip, drip. Finally the level of the liquid inside rose. Then he sensed them running around scared below him. The water was getting deeper, and then they started to quiet down. The youngest one dashed up the ladder made of a little pine log with twigs. "Oh, I'm blocked in," she thought. "Coyote is standing on the other side." The girl was strong, and she pushed the logs. Coyote was knocked over backward. She told him, "I will come back. Now I'm going where the sun sets. One day in the fall I shall come. I will come back and see you people." That's what Coyote heard as she went away.

Coyote went home, and he told Fox what he had done to his daughters. Fox became sad for his daughters were also in the crowd. Then they moved from that camp in order to weather the winter. They made their winter lodgings, and they cut wood for winter use. They got ready. They got lots of wood, for it was late in the fall. They were content, for luckily they had food and whatever they had gathered. They said, "We will comfortably spend the winter here."

One day they heard the noise of wind coming. "What could that be?" said Coyote. "It's loud, just like thunder." The wind was blowing, and it made a loud noise. Then they saw a fire. The wind was coming with fire. They heard it coming, and a young girl was singing, "I'm going to scoop up the hateful old man in fire. I'm going to jump over the cute old man. I'm going to scoop up the hateful old man in fire. I'm going to jump over the cute old man." "Listen," Coyote said, "do you hear that? She says she'll jump over the good old man with fire. That's me, the good old man. You, Fox, are the bad old man. She is going to take you." Fox thought to himself, "Nothing doing. But let him think that." The fire landed and scooped up Coyote with a sizzling sound. It took him a little way. He was completely burned up. It jumped over Fox. Coyote's daughter was traveling on it. And Fox was left alone now that Coyote had burned up. Then Fox bunched his things together, thinking, "This is where I'm going to winter alone."

The winter came and Fox lived there. It became spring, and the grass grew this high. Now it was late spring, and Fox was lonesome. He walked out to where poor Coyote had burned. He went around chanting, "I wonder if my friend's jawbone was left by the fire. I wonder if my friend's jawbone was left by the fire." All at once Fox heard a fast chattering, mocking him. It mocked him again and again. He went in the direction of the sound, and there was a gaping mouth, yawning at him, just bones. He went over to it, and he stepped over it. That was the custom of the people of the legend days. Then Coyote got up. Oh, the poor thing was so weak. Poor Coyote was so weak that his friend could hardly brace him up. He put his friend to bed, and he cared for him and gave him food. Finally Coyote got strong, and they started to live with the same people. "Oh, thank you!" Coyote said. His strength came back to him, and he went looking for mice. Again they lived together for a long time. That's all.





## 7

## MUSSEL-SHELL KILLERS

COYOTE WENT UPRIVER. I am going to tell the story the way my ancestors used to tell it, even though some of the words are not proper for polite hearing. Nevertheless, I am going to tell it that way.

Coyote went upriver. Suddenly he heard someone calling him. "I wonder where she is." "Come and sleep with me," she said. "What is she saying?" Coyote went down to the water where Mussel-Shell Woman was opening and shutting it. Coyote was taken in. Mussel-Shell Woman grabbed him. No matter how much Coyote cried, it was no use. Mussel-Shell just squeezed tighter. Thus Coyote was squeezed to death.

"Oh, it's nobody, just Coyote," Mussel-Shell Woman said. Then she threw him in the water, and Coyote drifted down one bend and a half. Then he drifted ashore. Magpie was flying by there. "Oh! That's Coyote. Why is he lying ashore there? It's just like him." Then Magpie flew down to him and started to peck at Coyote's eye fat. He woke Coyote up. Coyote said to him, "You are disturbing me. I was helping girls across at the head of creeks, and you spoiled it for me." "There isn't anyone anywhere. Just upriver from here, a Mussel-Shell killed you," Magpie said. "Don't pay any attention to her and keep going. Pass by and keep going."

In this way Coyote continued upriver. He hit his hip, and his excrement children ran out. They started to play, but Coyote said to them, "Come in, come in." He asked the youngest, "What shall I do?" The youngest answered, "She is just a killer from long ago. Don't pay any attention to her. Just keep going, and she will give up. You will be able to go on." Then he went back in.

Soon Coyote heard, "You there! Come this way and sleep with me." Coyote didn't pay any attention to her. Nevertheless, she caught up with him, as Coyote was passing by.

Then he heard something splash, and it splashed and stuck to his face. He grabbed it and threw it away, and he heard a splash again. He grabbed the thing, saying, "Now, I'm going to eat it. What is this thing?" Then he roasted it and ate it. Suddenly all his teeth fell out. He became thirsty, and when he drank, his teeth suddenly fell out. I am connecting this to the story I told about the five goose brothers and their sister. The brothers told their sister, "Whoever comes, he will be your husband." To that story I am adding this. That's all.

(Revised by Wilson; originally published in Aoki and Walker, 1989. See also Waters's "Warmweather and Coldweather" in the same volume and "Coyote's Wars" in Spinden, 1917.)