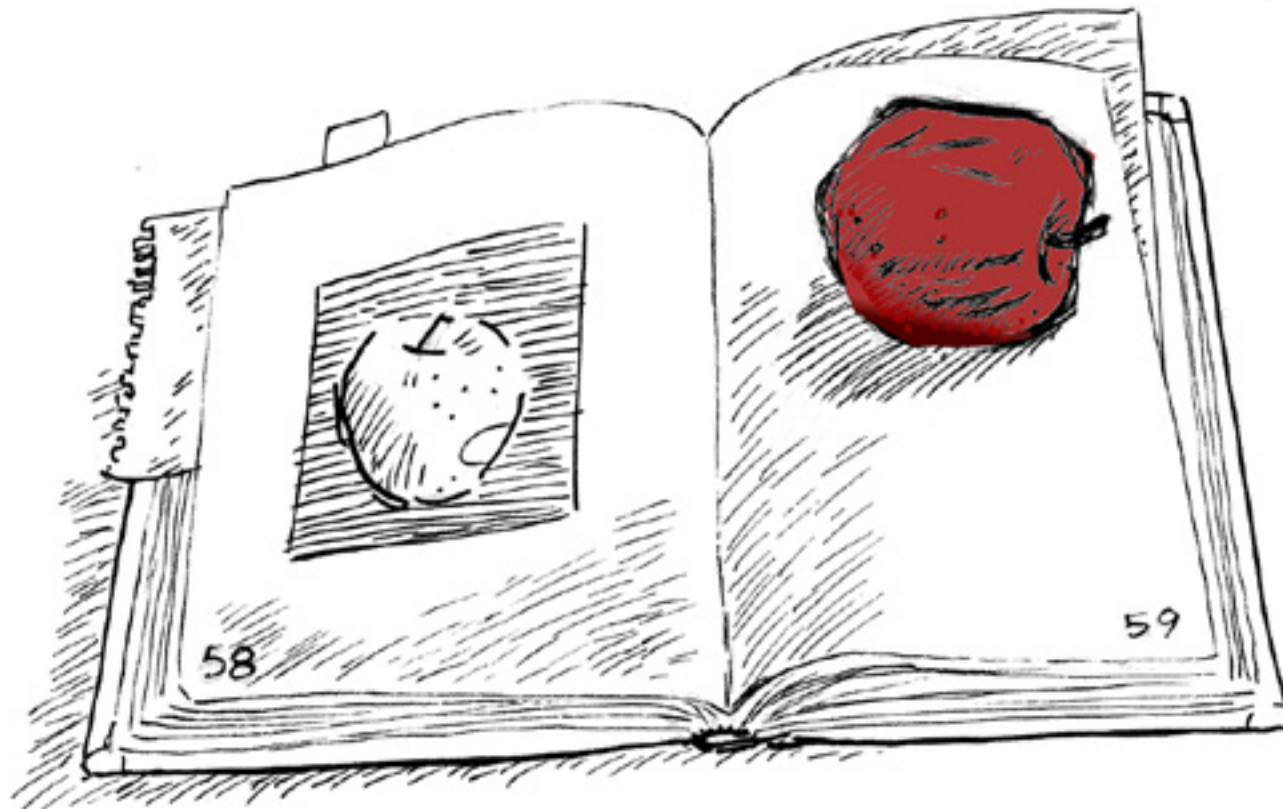


Native American Folktales



overview

- The First Americans themselves are a diverse collection of various social groups.
- These groups are made up of networking tribes of unique people.
- Most origin myths related by the different bands do have common attributes:
 1. often show the people emerging from out of the land itself; some explain that their ancestors arrived out of a labyrinth-like cave underground
 2. some tribes say the first people emerged from lake-beds to settle in nearby territories
 3. all of these stories establish a divisional hierarchy of nature and human
 4. all of these are anonymous stories told in an oral tradition, passed down from generation to generation
 5. very few First Americans developed written form of communication in North America

overview

The system of oral traditions strengthened social knowledge for their individual structured cultures.

These traditions include:

- myths
- rituals
- songs
- poems
- prayers
- parables
- legends
- narratives

Lincoln, Kenneth. *Native American Renaissance*. Berkeley: U of Ca Press. 1983. Print.

overview

To complicated matters: when white Europeans began the process of removing First Americans out of their territories, the natives were forced to relinquish their languages, their society structures, their religions, their oral traditions as well as their land. Many stories have been lost and entire cultures erased due to Spanish and English settlement policies—but also because *the people themselves did not want to have their culture bond by the printed word.*

In a manner of speaking, Native languages exist as a living, spiritual, *and* meditative practice. Those who were able to maintain their ancestral histories and folk tales did not want to translate their beliefs into English: an aspect of the holiness of the prayer would be lost. The living word, the spoken phrase, would become static and penned up. The original intentions of a love chant or death prayer would be lost.

overview

- The oral tales more often were chants, performance pieces, art recitations.
- Extreme amounts of cultural meanings are lost in the appropriations.

Critic Kenneth Lincoln proposes, the reality of the song-poems is altered since the original word does not lie flat on the page—the spoken word may be visually presented in one line of text, or broken into stanzas and restricted to form.

The original First American poems and stories were created specifically by an unknown author.

- The intentions was to leave the works anonymous.
- No one could “own” the work, nor own the idea.
- The idea itself “found” the chanter.
- The song-poem was intended for the tribe and for nature. Through performance the poet, or story-teller gives the song, prayer, chant, story back to the world.
- **The spoken word is a living thing; language is a sacred idea.**

overview

Story Tellers themselves serve as:

- historians, record keepers
- educators of natural history and science
- a source of culture; a physical representation of art
- a means to establish sense of self for a collection of people
- educators of traditional customs

Myth • Fable • Parable • Folktale

Myth: is a religious teaching—the culture which developed these stories viewed them as a truth, as a religious mystery to explain how a god or goddess became a deity.

Fable: allegory with an explicit moral presented to reader at closing of story.

Parable: is a brief story, based in realistic terms and contain an explicit teaching of morality or philosophy. In other words, can deal with religious morality or cultural expectations. Magical situations do not happen in parables.

Folk-Tale, Fairy Tale: based on fantasy and magical situations.

These stories *can* teach a moral lesson, but are *not required* to teach a lesson.

- More entertainment rather than a religious, moralistic teaching.
- Are based on children's notions of the world as divided into black and white.
- Prepares children for the violent world of their times.

Specific Folktale Characteristics

- magical creatures abound
- magical situations frequent
- protagonists down-trodden: orphan, stepchild, cast-out prince, prodigal son
- protagonist goes through psychological, physical, spiritual transformation
- protagonist must prove worthiness before transformation; must earn title
- protagonist is pure good
- antagonist is pure evil } no in-between grey areas
- extreme violence, gruesome situations
- pattern numbers
 - > in the Old World Europe the people used three as a pattern:
 - three tasks, three wishes, three journeys, due to Judeo-Christian influences
 - > in the New World, the pattern was set as four (sometimes five or seven)
 - perhaps due to the four principal directions of North, South, East, West
 - > some tribes associate specific deities with these cardinal points

Animal Guides

Animal spirits or inanimate object spirits exist everywhere, some in disguise, some in plain sight.

- It is the aim of humanity to recognize the spirit and to gain its good will in order to benefit their lives.
- An element of the supernatural exists in everything, including human-made objects. These spirits are present in everyday waking life interacting with humans.
- Each tribe often designed their own Trickster animal spirit; cycles of stories involve a specific hero-character who tricks a higher authority into action.

Spirit World || Real World

