Spring 2010


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In an attempt to add a Cheyenne voice to the voluminous literature published about this Great Plains Indian nation, Sibylle M. Schlesier has come together with William Wayne Red Hat, Jr. to produce a text that transcribes this Cheyenne Arrow Keeper’s multiple personal narratives, ranging in topics from his experiences in Vietnam to his religious role in his community to ruminations on Cheyenne history, culture, and oral tradition. As the daughter of anthropologist Karl Schlesier, Schlesier was in a unique position to collaborate with Red Hat, Jr., having known the Red Hat family from childhood. Since Red Hat, Jr. was the Cheyenne Arrow Keeper at the time Schlesier conducted her interviews, he could provide an important perspective about Cheyenne history and religion, including his people’s struggle to maintain their spiritual beliefs and practices as well as the ways in which religion has helped to sustain them.

After a short introduction reflecting on the ethical dilemmas surrounding the representation of Native voices by outsiders and offering a brief overview of the history of the Cheyenne people, Schlesier launches immediately into the transcriptions of Red Hat’s narratives. Her attempts to ensure that the book reflects Red Hat’s voice as authentically as possible are obvious in the way she includes relatively few footnotes, transcribes Red Hat’s words as directly as possible, and presents each recorded narrative or interview in chronological order in the book instead of arranging them topically. These stylistic choices demonstrate Schlesier’s aspiration to produce a Cheyenne text both useful and accountable to the community. She is careful not to reveal information, particularly about religious practices, that Cheyennes might not want to see in print. At the same time, both she and Red Hat clearly intend for this text to become a valuable cultural and religious resource for future Cheyenne generations.

Schlesier envisions this book as fitting into Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s project of decolonizing methodologies by providing Red Hat with the opportunity to tell his own story. She aims for Red Hat’s narratives to speak for themselves and, true to Native pedagogies, encourages the reader to draw his or her own conclusions with little illumination by way of her own interpretations. This emphasis leads the book to privilege a Cheyenne audience or a reader already intimately familiar with Cheyenne culture, religion, and history. Although the casual reader may struggle from a lack of the background information needed to understand the intentions or the wider implications of the majority of Red Hat’s narratives, for a scholar of Plains culture and history this book provides a rare and invaluable insider perspective about Cheyenne history, daily and religious life, and
philosophical thought as it is interpreted in the community today.

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