

William Wayne Red Hat, Jr.: Cheyenne Keeper of the Arrows. By William Wayne Red Hat Jr. Edited by Sibylle M. Schlesier. Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2008. 176 pages. \$21.95 cloth.

William Wayne Red Hat, Jr.: Cheyenne Keeper of the Arrows is an autobiography that weaves two interrelated stories together, which culminated in the publication of this book. One is the evolution of a decades-long relationship between two families that began as an anthropological fieldwork enterprise. In 1969, Karl Schlesier, the volume editor's father, began conducting advocacy anthropological research among the Southern Cheyenne. Throughout his anthropological career, Schlesier, along with his students, worked on numerous projects that would hopefully benefit the Southern Cheyenne. It was through his ethnological research that the Red Hat and Schlesier families' relations and experiences were conjoined. Initially working with William's late grandfather, who also was Arrow Keeper, Schlesier and his family developed a relationship that transcended the confines of a professional working association. It is this intimate social dynamic, the close bonds that often develop over time between anthropologists and members of communities they work with, that laid the foundation for Sibylle Schlesier to record, compile, and edit the social memories of William Wayne Red Hat Jr. The editor describes and acknowledges her experiences of that relationship in the introduction and occasionally in footnotes.

The book's centerpiece is the personal reflections, insights, and lessons that Red Hat imparts as the Arrow Keeper and a Southern Cheyenne living the "Cheyenne Way," a manner of living that often contrasts sharply with contemporary non-Indian life. Although each of the recorded narratives varies in topic, circumstances, and events, major cultural themes permeate and connect the work into a coherent whole. Red Hat, through his own words, speaks candidly about his personal life experiences, his role and responsibilities as the Keeper of Mahuts (the Sacred Arrows), and the challenges the Cheyenne currently face in practicing and perpetuating their cultural traditions.

Red Hat, in reflecting about his life and role as Arrow Keeper, skillfully connects the past with the present through intellectually connecting past knowledge with the present knowledge. He repeatedly reiterates his desire to maintain and perpetuate Cheyenne traditions and identity but fully acknowledges the challenges. Red Hat notes that everything from language loss, to chiefs not following proper ceremonial procedure, to living under an imposed tribal governmental structure, to the lure of making a living away from Southern Cheyenne communities poses difficulties to the "Cheyenne Way." However, as a spiritual leader, he draws on the past, the teachings of his ancestors, the cultural grounding he received from his relatives, and his personal life experiences not only to comprehend current problems but also to provide solutions in order to ensure a future for the Cheyenne people.

For Red Hat, the survival of the Cheyenne must come together, "turn around," and "go back to the old way," that is, follow the teachings set forth by Maheo and the Sacred Arrows, preserve Cheyenne oral histories, and strengthen the speaking of the language (131). These are, he believes, central

elements for the continuation of Cheyenne culture and identity. It is a body of mandates echoed by spiritual leaders worldwide, who must constantly battle against forces that threaten cultural identity. The book and the collaboration with the editor is an effort, however fragmentary or imperfect, viewed by Red Hat as a necessary means in order to ensure that some of the teachings will be assured for future generations.

Although the work is devoid of detailed descriptions and insights into the internal workings of Southern Cheyenne ritual and spiritual life, the author offers the reader in-depth insights into how Cheyenne religious beliefs and practices are acquired and applied daily in life. To acquire meaningful knowledge and understanding, one must earn it through experience and sacrifice in daily living following the "Cheyenne Way." As he relayed to Schlesier in chapter 6: "Just because you're Cheyenne, that doesn't instill you in a place. You have to earn it, you have to go through with it. It's a really hard way to let people down and tell them they have to start from the beginning" (53). Many of the book's chapters, largely because of the editor's respect for and understanding of the Cheyenne Way, carry the recurrent teachings or themes in his narratives. Selected chapter titles such as "You Have to Know These Things," "All of This Has to Be Learned," and "This Is How We Know That You Are Cheyenne" hint at the lessons contained within that recorded and transcribed narrative.

Throughout the work, the narratives reflect a deep mutual respect and understanding that developed between Red Hat and Sibylle Schlesier. The editor, explicitly and most often implicitly, demonstrates that deep respect for Red Hat's words and the cultural understanding he applies to his reminiscences, life experiences, and teachings. Apart from the introduction, to the editor's credit, there is little editorial interference in the narratives.

Those who read the book strictly as literature will discover that the largely unedited narratives challenge the reader to explore numerous topics, make broad cross-cultural linkages, and connect historical instances with current events. Like so many indigenous religious practitioners, Red Hat skillfully uses analogies, metaphors, and grounded fact to elucidate his major points, often arriving at those lessons in a nonlinear fashion. It is a departure from the standard linear progression of most autobiographical works.

Aside from its literary contribution, the book is an important addition to ethnographic literature. Although some readers who are intimately familiar with Cheyenne ethnography and history may lament the lost opportunity to footnote the volume extensively, they will note the continuities between past cultural traditions and historical events with contemporary practices and interpretations of historical events as recounted by Red Hat. Footnoting the volume extensively, in my opinion, would have obscured Red Hat's narratives and the work's intent. It is a treatise about learning, gaining knowledge, and acquiring an understanding of the world from a practitioner-centered perspective. If you desire to know more, as Red Hat encourages us, "You Have to Go Way Deep."

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Writing Indian, Native Conversations. By John Lloyd Purdy. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009. 302 pages. \$45.00 cloth.

In *Writing Indian, Native Conversations*, John Purdy offers within one book seventeen of his own previously published interviews and essays, edited, recombined, and spanning nearly twenty-five years. Purdy adroitly discusses works by “several prominent Native authors . . . the works that one may be relatively certain most scholars of Native literatures have read.” As he indicates in the introduction, the book attempts “an historical framework, of sorts, moving from the 1970s” (xvi–xvii). In this sense, the book serves as a complement to several other early literary histories that do the work of establishing a canon, such as Charles R. Larson’s *American Indian Fiction* (1978), Kenneth Lincoln’s *Native American Renaissance* (1983), and A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff’s comprehensive *American Indian Literatures* (1990).

Like Lincoln, Purdy asks his reader to consider what is specifically “Indian” about Native American literature, and he begins by positing “a four-part theory of elemental, structural traits of Native texts,” which he compactly summarizes as “differentiation, investigation, affirmation, and continuation” (xiii, xvi). As a connective, thematic thread, he argues, this theory helps explain how works by American Indians are somehow uniquely Native, and it enables a way into the fiction for “someone new to the canon but also for others with more experience” (xiii). He acknowledges that despite “the recent attempts to provide a ‘new’ and ‘unique’ critical theory” of American Indian literatures, he “would like to return to this old one and see what benefits may derive from it” (xvi). At the same time, he submits that his collection is not meant to offer the last word on the subject, that “criticism is or should be, an ongoing open discourse with as many voices and points of view as possible; if it is otherwise, the discourse is dead” (xiii–ix).

Within his larger, somewhat chronological framework, Purdy innovatively includes in each chapter an interview, meant to set the tone and themes for particular decades. For the chapter entitled “The 1970s,” he begins with his 1997 Paula Gunn Allen interview and moves on to discussions of N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, and Leslie Marmon Silko. He introduces “The 1980s” with his 2000 Simon Ortiz interview and follows up with a discussion of Welch again (*Winter in the Blood* [1974] and *Fools Crow* [1986]) and of Louise Erdrich and her first three Argus novels (*Love Medicine* [1984], *The Beet Queen* [1986], and *Tracks* [1988]). For “The 1990s,” he starts with a Sherman Alexie interview from 1997 and proceeds with discussions of Gerald Vizenor’s *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart* (1978) and Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993), as well as of three films. In “The New Millennium and Its Origins,” he turns to an interview with Louis Owens (first published in 1998), continues with Owens’s *Dark River* (1999), and concludes his discussion of the millennium’s origins with Darcy McNickle’s novel, *Surrounded* (1936; repr. 1977).

Given the wide range of publication dates of the essays and interviews reworked into the book as well as the numerous personal anecdotes Purdy offers, *Writing Indian* is—in addition to being a chronological overview of canonical works by American Indian writers—very much an overview of a

career. We join the author in his “first foray into the study of Native American literatures,” and we are with him again as he begins teaching his own Native American literature classes (x, 248–51). We travel with him to Germany, where, as a Fulbright professor at the University of Mannheim, he taught a course in Native literatures. We join him and his students in a National Endowment for the Humanities summer seminar. The reader even has coffee or lunch with him a couple times. Introducing an account of Owens’s visit to his seminar, for example, Purdy recalls, “I picked Louis up from his hotel, brought him to the seminar, and, after a cup of coffee, I introduced him” (220), or lunch: “Ironically (perhaps) I was completing the first draft of this section of the book, I stopped and took a break for lunch. My mail arrived, so I opened it while I ate. In the mail was a flier from a local bookstore with notice of a reading by James Howard Kunstler” (161). Purdy uses the midday repast anecdote to argue that Vizenor anticipates Kunstler’s news of the demise of the fossil-fuel age and the crash of globalism by about thirty years.

Such coffee breaks and reminiscences of classroom experiences lend themselves nicely to the informal and conversational tone of the book, but unfortunately the casualness makes for some unevenness. The author refers to Ortiz and Owens by their first names but refers more formally to the others he interviews, Alexie and Allen, for example. This casualness finds its way into the works cited as well, where William Bevis becomes Bill. Eventually the casualness even finds its way into the scholarship. To take one example: in a discussion of Victor Masayesva Jr.’s 1992 documentary about images of Indians in film, *Imagining Indians*, Purdy writes that “In Masayesva’s film he interviews a member of the Northern Cheyenne who played in the scene of a Cecil B. DeMille movie (I believe it was *Cheyenne River*) in which Gary Cooper and his troop are barricaded on a riverbank waiting for the attack” (173). According to the film’s credits, however, the DeMille film in which Cooper is barricaded is *The Plainsman* (1937) not *Cheyenne River*. Nor is there a film called *Cheyenne River* listed in any DeMille filmography that this reviewer can locate.

After casually acknowledging that he is not sure of the film’s title, Purdy reports on the interview in which an actor recalls the filming of the specific attack scene. Of the Cheyenne actor leading the attack, Purdy writes that “what he didn’t know at the time was that the film crew had rigged a trip wire under the water so that when Cooper and his troops ‘opened fire’ the horses of the Cheyenne out in front would be tripped” (173). In the documentary, however, the interviewee, Charles Sooktis, states unequivocally that Little Coyote, the “chief,” is warned about the trip wire, and that he nevertheless insists on riding in front. As Sooktis relates it, Little Coyote is thus one of the first to go down. The humor in the interview arises from Sooktis’s account of how Little Coyote insisted on riding out front, even though he had been warned and it meant falling and risking being trampled by the horses behind his own.

Though the casual and conversational approach is thus sometimes problematic in a scholarly book, it does lend readability to the collection. The book certainly offers several scholarly gems from the author’s career. As a one-volume overview of the last three decades of the twentieth century,

the collection may well be very useful in coursework for graduate and undergraduate students who would like to get a sense of who some of these authors are as well as to gain an understanding of some of the contexts in which they write. Readers will also certainly gain an appreciation for how the writer and the writer's context are connected. Purdy's book is thus a call "to read, reread, and reappraise the stories as stories, as provisional locations of imaginative interaction" (247).

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