

REVIEWS



Arapaho Stories, Songs, and Prayers: A Bilingual Anthology. By Andrew Cowell, Alonso Moss Sr., and William J. C’Hair. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014. 576 pages. \$55.00 cloth; \$55.00 electronic text.

Drawn from both published and unpublished works, this compilation offers detailed retranscriptions and retranslations of Arapaho stories, songs, and prayers that were originally collected from the first half of the twentieth century by researchers such as Cleaver Warden, George Dorsey, Alfred Kroeber, George A. Dorsey, Truman Michelson, Natalie Curtis, Albert Gatschet, and James Mooney. Over the intervening decades since their collection, few of these original texts have been so extensively and intensively reexamined and reworked and with use of a consistent orthography. Moreover, this collection provides more robust translations, linguistic analyses, and explications.

One of the pressing challenges today in many Native American communities is repatriating, assessing, resuscitating, and interpreting scattered pieces of recorded culture and language. While there has been much discussion and controversy over the past several decades about “repatriation” of material culture, reclaiming textual material has been less emphasized. This collected work breaks ground by rendering the texts of fifty-one stories, seventy-five songs, and five prayers in the contemporary Arapaho orthography that Zdenek Salzman first devised in the early 1980s and which Northern Arapaho educators and scholars subsequently revised.

Along with other recent works organized by Andrew Cowell, *Arapaho Stories, Songs, and Prayers* is part of the new wave of the most detailed, in-depth, and comprehensive linguistic studies of the Arapaho language ever undertaken. Coauthors Alonso Moss and William C’Hair contribute a wealth of linguistic and cultural wisdom. Over the past three decades of researching, teaching, and leading language-revitalization programs in the Northern Arapaho community, these two Arapaho scholars have become well-versed in both oral and literate ways of experiencing and knowing the Arapaho language, not only as code and lexicon, but in and of its rich pragmatic, ethnosemantic, and ethnopoetic contexts. Rare in their knowledge, both Moss and C’Hair were raised as fluent speakers who, learning to use and teach the written form, have studied the language extensively both through written works and local, oral paths of learning.

This work thus represents a great leap forward in its dialogue between emic and etic perspectives. While this dialogue is now a prescribed and productive methodology of collaboration between academic researchers and indigenous scholars, it remains most often unrealized. Some collaboration today is merely nominal or transient for the sake of perfunctorily serving ethical imperatives, but I can attest that the collaboration on this volume is deep, genuine, and of long duration. Here informants fully participate in dialogue, whereas earlier researchers generally relied on informants only as sources of evidence, or translators

at most. Indeed, there may have been many engaged discussions with folks like Cleaver Warden, whose portrait adorns the cover, but those discussions were rarely acknowledged or preserved in either published works or unpublished field notes.

The tendency for each new researcher who visits either of the two tribes to collect yet more new texts and lexical lists without fully referencing, comparing, or even acknowledging previous works has been one of the great ironies in the history of linguistic and ethnographic research of Arapaho language and culture. This same problem also applies to many language-revitalization projects carried out over the past thirty years on the Northern Arapaho community of the Wind River Reservation. The authors are part of a concerted effort to bring all of these pieces together. Thus *Arapaho Stories, Songs, and Prayers* refines the raw materials and establishes trailheads for many future paths of inquiry that will compare and cross-reference linguistic evidence, narratives, and cultural forms.

As the author and his consultants realize, early linguistic analyses only scratched the surface of the Arapaho language. Early researchers were often provided a laundry list of items to collect by their advisers that only included a narrow range of forms that often were locally irrelevant or in actuality rarely used. The translations and transcriptions are invaluable as a foundation for further advancing linguistic understandings of the grammatical particularities of Arapaho narrative forms. Occasionally, the introductions and retranslations of the texts also address some of the big and enduring questions in the study of Arapaho culture and language.

Some of the richest material for specialized, advanced scholars of the language and culture are provided by the explanatory footnotes throughout. We learn a great deal more about the elusive trickster Nih'oo3oo, for example. The volume also exudes respect for the intrinsic value of Arapaho narrative works; as the author notes, their value is comparable to that of ancient texts from classical traditions. It further respects the individual, unique voices of Arapaho storytellers who provided this oral literature for the human stock of knowledge. Arapaho consultants, past and present, have always been immensely generous in sharing their knowledge, largely because they realized that parts of their language and culture were indeed disappearing and that literate forms of knowledge would preserve them for future generations.

The authors are well aware of the vastness of this literature and of the limits of their efforts here. Though they make it quite clear that this volume does not offer full interpretations of the texts, throughout are some valuable interpretive insights. Some of these texts, or versions of them, have played a role in folklore studies (e.g., Dundes, Reichard, and Thompson) as well as myth analyses such as Lévi-Strauss's *Mythologiques*, especially the *Origin of Table Manners*. None of these studies considers all of the linguistic details that this work provides, nor does any of them offer a complete, contextually thick analysis that draws on the entire body of cultural evidence. Although the binary division of labor between linguistic analysis and full textual analysis remains to be mediated, *Arapaho Stories, Songs, and Prayers* is a major step in that direction.

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