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The Plains Indian Clowns, their Contraries and related Phenomena

Vienna, Austria 2010

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Introduction

Have you ever heard of Indian clowns or the *contraries* of the Plains Indians? Popular concepts of the North American Indian and, in particular, the Plains Indian leave no room for humor and laughter. The Indian is portrayed as a mounted brave wearing magnificent regalia and a war bonnet, or as a taciturn stoic, silent without tears or smile. For centuries, travel accounts, children's literature, Western novels and Hollywood films have propagated these rigid stereotypes. They deny Indians a sense of wit and a love for humor. These ideas of Indians are entirely misleading.

In reality, native North American cultures were surprisingly rich in organizations and traditions that were committed to laughter, clowning and acting in a foolish manner. Some of the best-known examples are from the Inuit of the Arctic region and the Pueblo Indians of the Southwest, but clowning and ceremonial foolishness were widespread on the Plains. The clowns of the Plains Indians are ceremonial clowns since they performed primarily during rituals, dances and feasts. When Lakota Indians first saw European clowns, they instantly identified them with their own term for clowns, *heyoka*. In addition to ceremonial clowns, several Plains tribes recognized certain persons to be "crazy warriors" and others to be "*contraries*." The *contraries* were individuals devoted to an extraordinary life-style, in which they consistently did the opposite of what others routinely did. In adhering to the principle of contrary behavior in all seriousness, the *contrary* turned everyday routines and social conventions into their opposites. On a certain level, the *contrary* showed antagonism to his society. The "crazy warriors" were men who purposely abided by contrary, foolish or crazy principles in battle. Plains society thus harbored an unusual and wide array of foolishness and clowning.

In this essay, which draws on information gleaned from published and unpublished accounts, I seek to focus on the *contraries*, the clowns and related groups of the historical Plains Indians. The first authors to allude to the Plains clowns and *contraries* were pioneers, missionaries and ethnologists working among the Indian tribes in the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, for example James R. Murie, George A. Dorsey, Robert H. Lowie, George B. Grinnell, Gideon H. Pond. A fuller account of the clowns, *contraries* and early references to them in the literature is contained in Plant (1994).

Important academic contributions to the study of North American Indian clowns and related groups were made by two American anthropologists of the mid-20th century, Julian Steward and Verne Ray. In 1929, Steward submitted his doctoral thesis at the University of California in Berkeley on the topic of clowning in native North America. Robert Lowie and Alfred Kroeber were members of the examination committee. A year later, Steward published the article, "The

Ceremonial Buffoon of the American Indian," in which he further discussed contrary behavior. Steward was the first to use the phrase *contrary behavior* to describe the most dominant and characterizing traits of the clowns of the Plains Indians. These two traits were *inverse speech* and *acting by opposites*.[1] Steward viewed contrary behavior primarily as a comic device, a perspective that is challenged in this paper.

Ray initially became interested in contrary behavior through his own research on the Bluejay Dancer in tribes of the southeastern Plateau region. This dancer impersonated the mythological Bluejay Spirit for the duration of the winter ceremonial season and displayed foolish and anti-natural behavior. [2] Ray sought to clarify the historical distribution pattern of these behaviors in traditional North American ceremonialism.[3] He differentiated a third attribute in the contrary complex of the Plains: *reverse reaction*, which will be explained below. Steward and Ray aimed jointly to examine American Indian clowning and related phenomena; however, no publication resulted. Both considered contrary behavior in a broad sense, such that the concept included “anti-natural” and “unnatural” behavior, as in the Bluejay Character of the Plateau region, the Fire Dancers of the Plains and the Pomo ghost-clown of California.

Contrary behavior is used here in a narrower sense and refers to actions that arise from the stipulation or compulsion to act by opposites, whether in ceremony, ritual, on the warpath or in everyday life. Contrary behavior of the Plains *contraries* was always accompanied by the practice of “talking backwards” (*inverse speech*), in which one says the opposite of what one means. “No!” for example, expresses “Yes!” The utterance “Grandfather, go away!” becomes an invitation for him to come. *Reverse reaction* is further attribute in the contrary complex of the Plains. It represents a shortened form of contrary behavior, in which one understands the opposite of what one was told and reacts with the opposite behavior to instructions, commands or requests. To communicate with persons, who were *contraries*, one intentionally inverted the statement. For example, a grandmother, who wants her (*contrary*) grandson to gather firewood, would say to him, “Do not bring any more wood, we have plenty for the night!” *Reverse reaction* in combination with inverse speech was an abbreviated form of contrary behavior mainly used in military and dance societies.

This composition concentrates on historical sidelights of Plains Indian life and is not focused on the thriving practice of *heyoka* rituals and clowning of today, in particular among contemporary Lakota (Sioux). It is divided into four parts. Part (1) summarizes much of the available historical information on the ceremonial clowns of the Plains Indians. Part (2) is devoted to the individual *contraries* and part (3) to the reverse reaction warriors. Part (4) focuses on the ceremonial fool of the Mandan.

1. Ceremonial Clowns on the Plains

All sorts of humor and laughter permeated Plains society. Verbal jokes, practical jokes, wittiness, puns and pranks were widely enjoyed. They afforded amusement and brightened up camp life. Pranksters were long and affectionately remembered, such as Little Hawk, a Cheyenne, who once hid all the arrows in the camp during wartime. Comical occurrences were greatly applauded, and monuments were erected on the prairie to commemorate particularly humorous incidents.[4]

The clowns and buffoons of the Plains, in contrast to the individual *contraries*, were ceremonial performers who after the performance removed their masks, headbands and costumes and resumed a normal life. They were unique in that inverse speech and contrary action were the predominant tools of their trade. They are termed *contrary-clowns*. Contrary behavior was an important comic device for them, in addition to other methods and techniques of clowning, such as exaggeration, imitation, absurdity, foolishness, inappropriateness, cleverness and wit. The clowns of the Plains belonged to different kinds of organizations (age-graded societies, dream cults), which served social or shamanistic duties. A *dream cult* was a loose association of persons together with their beliefs and rituals that revolved around the same animal or spirit, which was encountered in a vision quest or supernatural dream. In contrast, a *society* was a more formally organized institution with important social and religious duties, as in the military, medicine and dance societies.

Many of the clown organizations practiced fire ritualism; however, fire was not an essential element for all groups. Fire ritualism was widespread on the Plains; there were Hot Dances, Fire Dances, Fire Walks and Hot Kettle Tricks. The dances sometimes called “tricks” since secret herbal preparations were applied to protect the skin against scalding water or hot embers. One medication was made from the root of *Malvastrum coccineum* (prairie mallow, Malvaceae) and another from dried leaves of *Dasiphora fructicosa* (Rosaceae).[5] The tricks and feats of magic were displays of shamanistic of power put on by a “trick-doctor.” The Plains clown replaced the magic and levity of the trick-ceremony with humor and thus transformed the shamanistic Trick-Doctor into a Clown-Doctor. The “trick-doctors,” like the clowns, formed an intrinsic part of ceremonies by inspiring awe and sacred amusement.

The clowns of the Arapaho and Atsina belonged to age-graded societies (and are treated in parts 1.1 - 1.2), while the clowns of the Sioux (Lakota and Santee) in part 1.2 had membership in dream cults. The clowns of the Plains Cree, Plains Ojibwa, Assiniboin and Cheyenne were at the same time medicine-men who employed contrary techniques in their shamanistic practices. They are spoken of as *clown-doctors* or *clown-shamans* (parts 1.3 - 1.4). Little is known about the clowns of the Ponca Indians (part 1.5); presumably, they

acted by *contraries* and held their own ceremonies. The clowns of the Absarokee (part 1.6) were an exception to the dominant trend on the Plains. They came the closest to putting on a pure clown performance without the surrounding social framework of a permanent organization.

1.1. Contrary-Clowns of the Arapaho and Atsina

The ceremonial clowns of the Arapaho and Atsina (Gros Ventre) were called the "Crazy Men" or "Crazy Dancers." They were the clowns in the latter half of the six-day ceremony, called the Crazy Dance or Crazy Lodge. Both these Algonquian-speaking peoples organized their important societies in a consecutive series according to age groups (i.e., the "age-graded" societies). The Crazy Dance (*hahankanwu* or *ahakanena*) of the Arapaho marked the third adult ceremony and consisted of men of about 40 to 50 years or older who were no longer expected to go to war. Among the Atsina, the Crazy Dance (*hahantyanwu*) was the second men's society. When a new group acquired the dance, several older men, called "grandfathers," were secured to serve as directors and instructors to the ceremony.[6]

Midway though the ceremony, the Crazy Dancers put on a spectacular Fire Trample dance, in which they extinguished a blazing fire by stamping on it with their bare feet. The Atsina clowns additionally put on the Flight of Arrows dance, at the conclusion of which they simultaneously shot their arrows as high up as they could. The clowns never tried to avoid the arrows as they fell back down and no one was ever hit. After the dances, the crazy period began. For the remaining days of the ceremony, the Crazy Dancers paraded as clowns and had the unbridled liberty to annoy anyone who was not within the safe confines of the tents and, in general, to do whatever they wished. Only the ceremonial grandfathers were exempt from annoyance.[7]

The Crazy Dancers used several herbal preparations. They rubbed one onto the skin to prevent burns during the fire dances. Another, the root of the poisonous wild parsnip, assisted in the ceremonial sexual licentiousness of the dancers. Their wives obtained the third medicine, which prevented tiredness in the dancers, from the "grandfathers" in a nighttime ceremony in which the grandfathers were required to practice sexual restraint.[8]

Figure 1. Arapaho Crazy Dancer in full regalia. In the early stages of the ceremony, the choreography differed from other Arapaho dances in that the dancers held one hand over their eyes and extended the other hand out and slightly down. As yet, nothing "crazy" happened in the ceremony. (Kroeber 1902-1907, plate 35).

The Crazy Dancers used inverse speech and performed contrary antics. They effortlessly carried a heavy load, such as a full-grown dog, as if it were weightless; but to carry a puppy, they acted as if it were exceedingly heavy. To look at a person, they would put their head to the ground and pretend to look with their buttocks. They tossed buffalo dung into the tents and yelled "food!" They imitated animals, hunted buffalo chips, danced on lodge poles and shot backwards with bows and arrows. Arrows that fell in plain sight, they could not find; but if they fell in thick brush or tall grass, they could locate them at once.[9]

An essential part of the regalia worn by the Arapaho Crazy Dancers was a headband with a cluster of owl-feathers attached to the front. The clowns behaved in a crazy fashion, as long as they were wearing the owl-feather headband. The removal of the headband made them rational again.[10]

Figure 2. Headband worn by an Atsina Crazy Dancer. Attached to it is an owl skin with an owl beak. (Kroeber 1908, figure 36).

The Arapaho clown with the highest degree was the "white crazy man" or "white fool" (*nankhahankan*). He was painted entirely with white clay. Generally, there was only a single White Fool, occasionally two. He possessed strong "medicine" powers and was permitted sexual freedom during the ceremony. He carried a whistle and shot at spectators with soft tipped arrows. The White Fools, too, enjoyed the liberty to accost any non-participant they wished, and as a result, the people dreaded them.[11]

The White Fool clown is represented in Arapaho narratives about "Lime Crazy" or the "White Painted Fool" (*haaatinahankan*). Further, the Crazy Dance itself was also called the "Lime-Crazy" society. In the myths, Lime Crazy was portrayed as a good-for-nothing idler whose

sexual excess and habitual laziness provoked jealousy and scorn. He thus presented the reverse image of his well-adjusted older brother, Big Chief, who forged plans to eradicate Lime Crazy.[12]

Mythological accounts of the origin of the Arapaho ceremonial lodges, including the Crazy Lodge, varied. Some myths attribute the lodges to the First Man or to a sacred buffalo bull (*waxacou*), others to *Nihaca*.[13] *Nihaca* was the traditional trickster figure of numerous tales and sometimes earth-maker and culture hero. ("Culture heroes" were mythical figures who originated tribal institutions and ceremonies.)

1.2. Contrary-Clowns of the Lakota and Santee

The historical ceremonial clowns of the Lakota and Santee, possibly also the Yankton and Yanktonai (all four tribes are divisions of the Sioux), belonged to the Heyoka dream cult. Other dream cults were the Elk Dreamers, the Black-Tailed Deer cult and the Berdache.

The Heyoka dream cult was closely associated with the supernatural Thunder Beings or Thunderbirds. A dream or vision of a dangerous form of them obligated one to become Heyoka. Like other spiritual people of the Lakota and Santee, the dreamers must act out the obligations, which arise from the dream or vision experience. The minimum requirement for a member was to sponsor a Heyoka ceremony and to play the role of a clown who gets others to laugh at him on his own expense. The lesson in humiliation felt by the dancer before his people was an important step in becoming a spiritual person. If Heyoka dreamers neglected to perform the ceremony, they were often plagued by a great fear of thunder or of being struck by lightning, as was the experience of Black Elk (Lakota) in his youth.[14]

In preparation for a Heyoka ceremony, the clowns put up an old, smoke-darkened tipi (a contrary lodge) in the middle of the camp circle.[15] The ceremony centered around the Hot-Water or Meat-Removal rite in which the dancers took dog meat out of a boiling kettle of water with their bare hands. The Hot-Water rite was a *wakan* feat, a serious display of supernatural power.

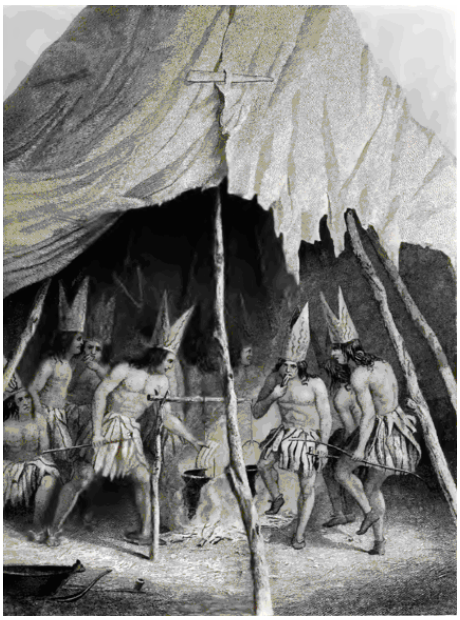


Figure 3. Heyoka feast of the Santee. One dancer removes a piece of meat from the kettle with his bare hands. Their dual pointed conical headdresses were made of birch bark and streaked with paint to represent lightning. Lithography by Seth Eastman (in Eastman 1853a, plate 32).

After the meat was cooked and distributed, the clowning part of the ceremony began. The clowns would splash hot broth over themselves, complain that the broth was cold, play with the pots, knock them about, put them over their heads and chase each other. A special clown, who carried a crooked bow and arrows, danced between the beats of the song and out of time. The musical accompaniment was uncoordinated or the sound muted because the drumheads were deliberately loosened. The clowns sang together producing an unprecedented "riot of voices," since each sang their own individual song. Their songs were based on their own supernatural dream experience. Such practice was not known from other cults or societies.[16]

The clowns had a marvelous repertoire of tricks and stunts. They executed complicated sleight-of-hand rope tricks and could shoot a pin at 25 yards distance with an arrow. To step over a mud puddle, they proceeded with great gesture and pantomime as if traversing a wide river.[17] On occasion, the clowns shot steel-pointed arrows into the air causing the spectators to run away to avoid being hit by them as they fell back to the ground. The arrows, however, were innocently tipped with rawhide.[18] This stunt was practiced in several variations by other Plains tribes (Arapaho, Atsina, Absarokee, Kiowa-Apache and possibly Assiniboin). Only the Heyoka clowns, however, let it be known afterward that the arrows were soft-tipped, so that everyone knew they had been fooled.

Figure 4. Activities of a Heyoka feast. The upper four figures collect "clown weed." Meat is cooked inside the tipi, and pieces of meat hang outside on a stand. Two dancers wear dual pointed headdresses with jagged lines that represent lightning. They carry bows and arrows with harmless tips. Several figures dance around the sacred stone in the middle and shake their deer-hoof rattles. Modified after drawing by a Santee artist (in Eastman 1853b, plate 36).

Some Heyoka members were regarded as powerful medicine-men. They doctored people according to their individual talents, caused rain, found lost articles, cured snow blindness, helped others find sexual gratification, protected others from lightning and forecasted events.[19] Heyoka medicine-men used their supernatural powers in a straightforward manner to affect cures and alleviate complaints. Their activities showed no relation to typical Heyoka traits, such as deceiving, fooling, clowning, talking backwards or acting in a contrary manner.

In the origin myths of the Lakota, the seven sacred rites, which form the core of their religion, were presented to them along with the sacred pipe by the mythic figure, White Buffalo Calf Woman. She taught them how to perform the Sweat Lodge, the Vision Quest, the Sun Dance and other important tribal institutions. However, the Heyoka ceremony or the Hot Water rite was not among the original rites.[20] The Heyoka tradition must have been acquired separately.

1.3. Contrary-Clowns and Contrary-Shamans of the Plains Cree, Plains Ojibwa and Assiniboin

The ceremonial clowns of the Northern Plains were also known as the "Cannibal Clowns" or "Cannibal Dancers." They belonged to associations with various designations: the Cannibal Cult, Cannibal Dance, Masked Dance or Fools Dance. The Plains Cree named their clown group the *wetigokan*, the Plains Ojibwa *windigokan* and the Assiniboin *wintgogax*.[21] Although the names for the organizations are

related to the Northern Algonquian term for the Cannibal spirit, *windigo*, neither cannibalism nor cannibal characters figured in the cult.[22]

In addition to being ceremonial clowns who practiced inverse speech and contrary action throughout their dances, the cannibal dancers used absurd and contrary tactics in their function as shaman specialists. The leader of the cult was one who had a supernatural dream or vision of the Skeleton Being, *paguk* (at least among the Plains Ojibwa), which empowered him to be the initiator of the ceremony that lasted one to several days. For the ceremony, he drafted about ten men to be clown associates. They set up an old and tattered tipi (a contrary lodge) in the center of the camp. The costumes were designed to look as horrible and ragged as possible. The clowns wore masks with tubular noses, the leggings might be non-matching and their clothes turned inside out.[23]

To secure meat for the feast, the clowns sometimes set out on foot to hunt buffalo. After slaying an animal, they would dance around it, approaching it with displays of fear. Back at camp, the clowns staged absurd pantomimes of the hunt (mock hunting). In these skits, they stalked the fallen buffalo or strips of meat hung out to dry, as if they were wild buffalo. With elaborate gestures, they signaled to each other to lie down and crawl on their bellies. They would get up, peep, crouch and again crawl until they were absurdly close to the meat and shoot at it with their bows and arrows.[24]

Figure 6. Assiniboin Clown wearing leather mask (Lowie 1909, plate 3).

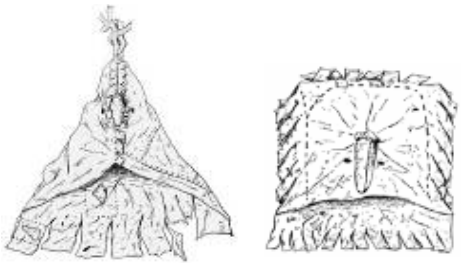


Figure 5. Plains Ojibwa Clown masks. Tiny eye-slits contrast with the long crooked noses that are sewed on and stuffed with grass. (Skinner 1914c, figure 6).

The clowns would be terrified of stumps, or flee suddenly from dogs. One clown stood out in particular: the humpback clown. He would continue to dance in his comic way after the song had stopped, looking up in apparent confusion on discovering that he alone was dancing. The clowns afforded the camp a tremendous spectacle and always attracted a huge and dense crowd of onlookers.[25]

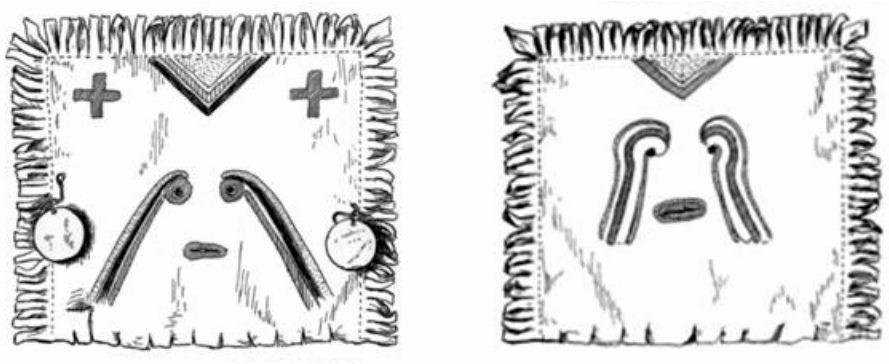
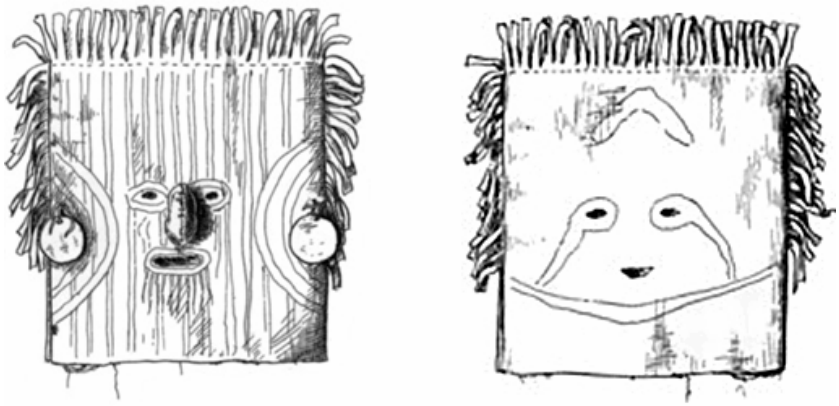


Figure 7. Two double-faced masks of Assiniboin Clowns. Front sides (left) and back sides (right) were made from canvas strips sewed together and fringed along the margins. Tin disks on the front sides represent earrings. (Lowie 1909, figures 15-17).



The leader of the clown organizations, at least among the Plains Ojibwa and Plains Cree, was a specialist in the removal of demons that caused illness or infection. His method of curing combined contrary behavior, inverse speech and (possibly) laughter and humor. The *contrary-shaman* is an appropriate term for him. He would call on a patient if one said to him “Don’t let our friend get well, tell him to die at once.” Thereupon, the contrary-shaman would bring his troop of clowns into the lodge of the patient and perform the exorcism rites. With ludicrous movements, the clowns approached the sick, while pounding their rattles, singing, whistling and dancing. They came up and looked at the patient, became startled and ran away frightened. If the contrary-shaman announced that the sufferer would die, it meant that recovery was certain to occur by the next day.[26]

1.4. Contrary-Clowns and Clown-Doctors of the Cheyenne

The ceremonial clowns of the Cheyenne were members of the “Contrary Society” (*hohnuhka*),[27] the same word that was applied to the individual *contraries*. Both the individual *contraries* and the Contrary Society members bore supernatural relationships to the Thunder spirit and adhered to the principle of contrary behavior.

The clowns of the Contrary Society performed a comical version of the Hot Water ritual and took part in the Massaum ceremony. The Contrary Society was one of several Cheyenne medicine organizations. Its permanent members held their own ceremonies on an infrequent basis. Non-members that had pledged to take part for one reason or another earlier in the year, e.g. for the recovery of a sick child, a successful war expedition, were invited to participate. The clowns erected an inverted tipi with the covering on the inside, the poles on the outside, and the smoke-hole faced the direction opposite to convention (a contrary lodge). They smoked an inverted pipe in which the stem was inserted into the opening of the bowl, and the tobacco was stuffed into the hole meant for the stem.[28]

In their performances, the men and women clowns danced irregularly and clumsily, kicking and quarreling among themselves, butting backwards into others, overly dramatizing their motions and turning backward somersaults. Their antics were greeted by the spectators with loud laughter.[29]

The religious part of the Hot Water ceremony centered on the boiling of dog meat in a kettle of water as an offering to the Thunder Being. The clowns plunged their hands into the hot broth, rubbed soup on their chests, and pretended to enjoy themselves, to the great delight of the crowds. When the meat was cooked, the dancers snatched morsels out from the boiling soup with their bare hands and distributed them to the spectators.[30]

The other major public performance of the Contrary Society was in the Massaum, one of the most picturesque and amusing ceremonies on the Plains. The mythical culture hero, Sweet Medicine, had taught the Massaum ceremony to the people so that all the animals would be created. The ceremony was a reenactment of mythical occurrences. The clowns set up the contrary lodge inside the camp circle, and on the final day of the ceremony, they acted the part of *crazy hunters* (*emhoniu*). They did things contrary to ceremonial order, and armed with their tiny bows and arrows they hunted the Animal Dancers of other societies. The performance of the clowns was essential for the proceedings of the ceremony. In fact, the word Massaum is related to the Cheyenne term *massane* meaning foolish or crazy.[31]

The medicine-men of the Contrary Society treated illnesses and wounds with contrary protocol, humor and laughter. They could be considered *clown-doctors* or *clown-shamans*. They administered treatment and gave blessings during the Massaum ceremony, as did other shamanistic groups. The Deer Doctors and Buffalo Doctors, for example, would charge up to the patients, but the Clown-Doctors were scared by the patients and ran away. Slowly they would come back, walking on tiptoe as quietly as possible. Again, they would become scared and run away. Finally, they administered their treatment by vaulting high in the air over the patient.[32]

1.5. Clowns of the Ponca

The Heyoka dream cult of the Dakota-Siouan was adopted by the neighboring Ponca, who held the dance in the spring. The dancers used backward speech, took food from boiling kettles and poured boiling water over themselves.[33]

Entirely distinct from the Heyoka of the Ponca were the clowns of the "Mad-Men-Imitators" or "Those-Who-Imitate-Mad-Men" cult (*thanigratha* or *danibdada*).[34] They may have been contrary-clowns. However, information on the cult is meager and little can be said about the dream requirement, ceremonies and membership. We do not know if they acted by opposites, practiced inverse speech or if they were just "fun-makers," foolhardy and mischievous without much social or ceremonial significance.

What is known is that they were famous for their ridiculous stunts. To cross a stream without getting wet, people would customarily remove the moccasin and legging from one leg to hop across the stream bare foot. The Ponca Mad-Man, however, forded streams "by hopping on the clad leg and carefully protecting the bare one from moisture."[35] This stunt, in which common practice becomes inverted, was known among the Sioux,[36] where it appears in the context of contrary behavior.

1.6. Clowns of the Absarokee

The clowns of the Absarokee were called the *akbarusacaria*, which possibly means "woman-impersonator."[37] They may have been the only ritual clowns on the Plains who did not rely on inverse speech or contrary behavior, except perhaps for the Ponca Mad Men.

Once a year in the spring, someone would decide to put on a clown show and would take the initiative and get his friends together. They attired themselves secretly and donned masks in order not to be recognized readily. After they disguised themselves, they approached the camp on a miserable looking horse, which they had abducted for the purpose. To conceal fully their identity, they altered their voices cleverly. The crowd of onlookers tried to figure out who the actors were and asked leading questions. If a clown was identified, the performance stopped immediately, which sometimes occurred as soon as they rode into camp.

Figure 8. A young Absarokee clown in disguise on horse (Lowie 1913b, figure 7).

Figure 9. Absarokee clown in full costume with leather mask and shield (Lowie 1913b, figure 6).

Their performances resembled a comedy routine highlighted with quick wit, horsemanship and flare. They were noted for their equestrian antics. To dismount a horse, they would intentionally fall off and pretend to be seriously hurt. To get on the horse, they would purposely overleap it and fall off the other side. One clown would continue dancing without noticing that the song had stopped. As their name implies, one masqueraded as a pregnant woman. Sexual escapades were played out and the clowns shot harmless arrows to “frighten” spectators.

In contrast to other Plains clowns, the *akbarusacaria* performed no fire rites and had no religious or shamanistic duties. The clowns required no supernatural sponsorship, dream or vision. They were not a permanent organization with special duties and seem to have no mythological background. They resembled pure clowns more so than the other Plains clowns in that they lacked inverse speech and contrary behavior.

2. Contraries on the Plains

The *contraries* of the Plains Indians were individuals committed to doing the opposite of what others conventionally do, not merely in ceremony or when on the warpath, but on a permanent and daily basis. They were not always comedians or clowns whose job was not to lighten up austere camp life. Often they acted as antagonists to their own people.

Individual *contraries* were known from, at least, six Plains tribes. Three groups of *contraries* are differentiated: 1) The *contraries* belonging to the *heyoka-hohnuhka* complex of the Lakota, Santee and Cheyenne; 2) The *contraries* of the Caddoan speaking Pawnee and Arikaree; and 3) The *contraries* of the Comanche.

The *contraries* of the *heyoka-hohnuhka* complex of the Lakota, Santee and Cheyenne share several similarities. Their names are identical with their respective parent organizations, which were the societies dedicated to clowning. In addition, the *contraries* of the *heyoka-hohnuhka* complex belonged to dream cults. Many young men seeking spiritual meaning would undertake a vision quest. The experienced vision would be faithfully communicated to sacred elders, who were appointed to interpret its content and to provide advice on the future course of action. To live by the truth of the vision, even if it meant that one would become a *contrary*, was essential.

The dream or vision, which eventually would lead to membership in the contrary cult, had something to do with Thunder, the Thunderbird or the Winged One. However, not any dream or vision of Thunder would necessarily lead to becoming a Heyoka. Much depended on the details of the vision and what form of the Thunderbird was seen. The Thunderbird was a leading deity in most Plains religions. Many warriors obtained war medicine, protection and help from the supernatural Thunderbird without becoming Heyoka.[38]

Parallel to the contrary cults of the *heyoka-hohnuhka* complex, was the Berdache tradition, which like that of the individual *contraries*, sanctioned a socially acceptable alternative for those who, for whatever reason, could not conform to the typical male role. The “Berdache,” a European designation, was a man who assumed the role of a woman in dress, work, marriage and use of speech (“woman’s talk”). Among the Cheyenne, they were known as “halfmen/halfwomen” (*heemaneh*), since they were acquainted with both the male and female realms of existence.[39]

The *contraries* of the *heyoka-hohnuhka* complex were characterized by their close association to their respective clown societies and their membership in loosely organized dream cults centering on the Thunder Being. The institution of dream cults that sanctioned the *contraries* and

Berdache falls entirely within the ceremonial and religious pattern of the Cheyenne, Lakota and Santee.

The *contraries* of the Caddoan speaking peoples (Pawnee and Arikaree) and the Comanche differed from the *heyoka-hohnuhka contraries* in peripheral characters. They had no reference to the Thunderbird. They formed no part of a dream cult or society. Membership was by self-appointment. Names were used for the *contraries* in each tribe that referred to foolishness. The Caddoan *contraries* did not possess a medicine bundle and thus fall outside the ceremonial and religious pattern of the Pawnee and Arikaree. In fact, they disobeyed religious prescriptions. In the narratives of the Pawnee and Arikaree, the *contraries* are identified with the mythical Children of the Sun, who were homeless misfits possessing great powers but disrespectful of sacred animals.

Although the Comanche lacked the intricate ceremonialism (societies, dream cults, tribal dances) typical for most Plains Indians, among them was an association for the *contraries*. Parallel to them was a group of extremely brave men, called Large Red Buffalo Meat (*pia rekap ekapit*). These dauntless men were expected to act quietly and to practice uncommunicativeness (*naiimeapaiet*) (Lowie 1915 p.812). Mythological records for either the *contraries* or the Large Red Buffalo Meat of the Comanche are not known.

The *contraries* were unique and unprecedented; they existed in no other culture. At least, five Plains tribes had traditions in which men practiced vocational contrariness. They will be described for the Lakota and Santee (part 2.1), Cheyenne (2.2), Arikaree (2.3), Pawnee (2.4) and Comanche (2.5).

2.1. Contraries of the Lakota and Santee

Among the Lakota and Santee (possibly also the Yankton and Yanktonai), two kinds of *Heyoka* existed: the ceremonial clowns who belonged to the Heyoka cult and the individual crazy or foolish clowns.[40] Most Heyoka were satisfied with sponsoring a single clown feast, whereas others went beyond the minimum requirements and took on Heyoka-like attributes as a vocation. They were the *contrary Heyoka* or *individual Heyoka*.

To have to become a *contrary* Heyoka was considered a dreaded misfortune. Each lived alone in a depilated tipi and wore “foolish” clothing. They usually remained unmarried. However, sometimes contrary courtship led to marriage. Once, a young Heyoka man wooed a woman by pushing her away (to show that he was fond of her) and saying “Don't come with me,” (meaning that she should accompany him). She followed him and became his wife.[41]

When receiving a gift, the contrary Heyoka expressed thankfulness in reverse manner, for example, by hitting or kicking the donor and discarding the goods. Once, the sister of a Heyoka wanted to honor her brother by giving him a pair of decorated moccasins that she had made. Instead of wearing them, the Heyoka cooked them over a blazing fire.[42]

During extraordinarily hot or cold weather, the Heyoka substituted the behavior typical for one extreme with that of the other. During the hottest days of the summer, he might set up an awning to shade himself from the scorching sun, constructing it with meticulous care, only to sit beside the shade in the sun. In the worst winter storm, the Heyoka might sit naked behind a shelter of bushes to protect himself from the sun and gently fan himself as if perspiring from heat.[43] The blizzard dance, too, was an outstanding feat of contrary behavior and clowning. In the coldest winter blizzards, the Heyoka would prance about naked complaining only of the mosquitoes (i.e., the snowflakes).

Gideon Pond, a Congregational missionary among the Santee in Minnesota, aptly summarized the main features of the solitary Heyoka, in 1854.

> The traits of the Heyoka are the opposite of nature, i.e. they express joy by sighs and groans, and sorrow by laughter; they shiver when warm, and pant and perspire when cold; they feel perfect assurance in danger, and are terrified when safe; falsehood, to them, is truth, and truth is falsehood; good is their evil, and evil their good.[44]

For the most part, the Lakota did not recognize Heyoka in the great collection of deities. However, among the Santee, a persistent and compelling force behind the Heyoka's behavior was a supernatural or *wakan* Heyoka, who gave instructions. Santee Heyoka had their own guardian spirit-clown that was accessible only to them. The manifestations of the supernatural Clowns were thus seemingly endless: as a giant, a two-faced man holding a bow streaked with red lightning and a deer hoof rattle, a man with enormous ears carrying a yellow bow or a man with a flute.[45]

Figure 10. Representation of a supernatural Heyoka spirit in his lodge. Around his neck, he wears a very long whistle or flute. In one hand, he holds a deer-hoof rattle and, in the other, a bow and arrow outfitted with a frog arrowhead. His pet bird emanates from his dual pointed headdress. He hangs elk and bird ornaments below (i.e., over) the doorway. The wavy lines around the lodge represent lightening. Drawn in 1840 by White Deer (Santee), in Schoolcraft (1852, plate 55).

Many contrary Heyoka were compelled by their spirit-clown to lie about the hunt and deceive others against the Heyoka's own wishes. Such predicaments were humiliating to the Heyoka. One man who was Heyoka was forced to assert to his family that he killed four moose (when he had not killed any). They all went out to find the moose, and instead found four rabbits. Everyone laughed at the Heyoka; the moment was embarrassing for him. At other times, the hunting methods of the Heyoka were astoundingly successful. One Heyoka was seen sitting backward on his horse during a buffalo chase, and all were amazed that he had killed several buffalo.[46]

Some Heyoka persons were instructed by their *wakan* Clown to go about camp singing all the time, to carry only a knife or stick into battle, to join a war party entirely naked, or even to murder a member of one's own tribe.[47]

The individual Heyoka were not war leaders, but they would accompany war parties, typically making no prior announcement of their intention.[48] One Heyoka, who was bedecked only with feathers, joined a war party. When the enemy was sighted, his comrades decided to retreat and gave the call to turn back. Since he was Heyoka, he understood the opposite of everything that was said to him. Instead of fleeing, he charged forward, and enemy shots killed him. The tragic event was symbolized in Lakota calendars (i.e. *winter counts*) for the year 1787-1788 and is known as the "Left-the-heyoka-man-behind winter."[49]

Figure 11. Calendar symbols for the Heyoka Clown who was deserted by his comrades in battle. The event was depicted in two different winter calendars both for the year 1787-1788. Winter count of The-Flame (left, Mallery 1886, plate VII) and Battiste Good (right, Mallery 1893, figure 344).

Sometimes, a Heyoka warrior was killed in battle because he suddenly changed sides and shot at his friends, who became confused and would shoot back.[50] On one occasion when the signal to charge the enemy was given, the Heyoka warrior ran in the opposite direction of the charge. To everyone's puzzlement, he arrived at the enemy first.[51]

2.2. Contraries of the Cheyenne

The Cheyenne called their individual *contraries hohnuhka*, the same name as their clown society (the “Contrary Society”). The individual *contraries* were a loosely organized group of individuals bound by certain beliefs. At any one time, few men were *contraries*; there were never more than four or five.[52]

A supernatural dream or vision experience, which centered on the Thunder spirits, Thunderbirds or the Thunder-Bow was necessary before becoming a *contrary*. The dreamer could then purchase the right to carry a Thunder-Bow from one who was a practicing *contrary*. He paid horses, weapons, clothing or robes. Generally, one could only quit the contrary career and be relieved of the burden when another asked for the Thunder-Bow and thereby took over the office and the responsibilities of being a *contrary*.[53]

The Thunder-Bow was a bow-spear about eight-feet long and fitted with a sharp flint spearhead at one end to form a lance. The bow always remained strung. Furthermore, it bestowed the keeper great power and stamina in battle or while on the march.[54] Like other sacred objects of the Cheyenne, such as the Sacred Arrows and the Sacred Hat, the Thunder-Bow was renewed annually in the Sacred Arrows Ceremony. The bow was also carried by warriors of the military society, the Bow-String Warriors.

The Contrary Society, Bowstring Warrior Society and the individual *contraries* were three different Cheyenne organizations. They have

been erroneously regarded as the same, starting with Dorsey who confused the inverted or Bow-String Warriors with the solitary *contraries*. Hoebel in his classic work on the Cheyenne united all three groups. Much confusion in the literature on the identities of these groups was cleared up by Karen Petersen's article on the Cheyenne warrior societies.[55]

Figure 12. Cheyenne Bow-String Warrior draped in a red buffalo robe. He holds a Thunder-Bow that is decorated with owl and magpie feathers. Like the Bow-String Warriors, the *contraries* carried a Thunder-Bow. Drawn by a Cheyenne artist, in Dorsey (1905, plate x).

The role of the contrary warrior in battle was to blow his whistle and charge when his comrades retreated. If he were carrying the Thunder-Bow into battle, he would lead the charge alone. When he switched the Thunder-Bow from his left to his right hand from behind his back, the signal would be given for the other warriors to follow his charge.[56]

The life of the solitary *contrary* was said to be lonely and terrible. The *contrary* pitched his tipi away from the camp and spent his time alone, often on a distant hill, contemplating things. Dorsey observed, “They are the philosophers among their people.” Their food was cooked separately and they ate apart from others. The *contrary* was not permitted to joke or have a good time with others. People could visit them, but could not stay long. They were treated with formality and respect. If asked to go, they came. The host had to clear things away to accommodate a *contrary* appropriately, since he could neither rest nor recline on a bed, only on bare ground. If invited, he left. If asked to ride, he walked. When traveling, he could not use the path but had to walk off to the side in the brush.[57]

Cheyenne *Contraries* were generally unmarried, however if married they spoke to their wives with inverted speech.[58] Some believed that the power of the Thunder-Bow was diminished if the owner was married. After they ceased to be *contraries*, they could return to a normal life and marry if they wished.

The Hollywood film, *Little Big Man* (1970), offered glimpses into the fictive life of a Cheyenne *contrary*, Younger Bear. He could be seen riding his horse backward, and on another occasion, he took a bath in the sand and dried off in the river.[59]

The Cheyenne Stump Horn was once asked to speculate what the legal consequences would have been, had a *contrary* killed a tribesman. Such a case was not known to have arisen, but clearly had the Cheyenne Council of 44 Chiefs told the *contrary* that he must leave the tribe, it would be taken not as banishment but as an invitation to stay. If they told him to give the family of the dead some horses as a form of compensation, the *contrary* would understand that the family did not want anything. The Council would have had to phrase its decree inversely and say, “Those people don't want you to send them any horses. They don’t like your horses. They want you to keep them all.” If two particularly good horses should be sent, the Council would have to say, “Don't send those two nice grays you have. They hate those terrible nags.”[60]

2.3. Contraries of the Arikaree

The Arikaree called their *contraries* the Foolish Men or Foolish Ones *(sakhunu*). They were self-appointed men or boys who in an initiation ceremony would receive instruction from an existing *contrary* regarding the mysteries of being a Foolish One. The young novice was made to drink a solution, after which he was considered dangerous. The people were warned to watch out for their children for if a child were to be frightened by the Foolish One and say, “Don't shoot me!” the Foolish One would not hesitate to shoot at the child.[61]

The Foolish Men probably numbered no more than two in a village at any time. They seem to have been companions. One was said to have died out of grief after his comrade was killed in battle. During the day, they played at their wheel game or went about blowing whistles and singing their song of death, “I am not afraid of anything except the Heavens.”[62]

In battle, the Arikaree *contraries* were oblivious to danger. If one were asleep, when the enemy attacked the village, waking him was not permitted. Therefore, on one occasion, White Ear, who was one of two young Arikaree men who were *contraries*, was not aroused when enemy warriors were sighted. His comrade, however, was awake and had marched into the midst of the engagement singing merrily and blowing his whistle. He shot one of his precious black arrows at the enemy and set out to recover it, walking casually amid the enemy, who shot at him several times killing him. When White Ear arrived at the battle scene, he did exactly as his comrade; he discharged an arrow at the enemy and went among them to retrieve it. He, too, was struck by an enemy’s arrow and was seriously but not fatally wounded.[63]

2.4. Contraries of the Pawnee

The Skidi Pawnee referred to their *contraries* as the “Children of the Sun” or “Children of the Iruska” (*iruska ipirau*). The name *iruska* may have reference to the old Iruska medicine society. The *contraries* were

also called *saaro* or *saru*, a term used by elders when speaking to children to point out that they are acting in a childish or foolish manner. Indeed, the Children of the Sun had a mischievous element about them and tended toward foolishness. However, little is known about their organization. There were up to six to seven members, mostly young men. The two oldest were the most powerful.[64]

The tradition of the *contraries* were handed down to the Skidi Pawnee by the mythological Blackbird. Therefore, the members painted themselves black and wore the skin of a blackbird on their head.[65]

Frequently, the Pawnee *contraries* went about the village in pairs and spoke inversely with each other. If someone said to them, “Do not go after water,” they would immediately depart to fetch water saying to each other, “Let us not go after water.”[66]

Their favorite pastimes were sitting around playing a wheel game and going about singing merrily and generally being unconcerned with the world. They never married and were disinterested in women. They sought to kill any strange or mysterious animal, which others feared.[67]

If an enemy attacked the village, the Pawnee *contraries* continued to play their wheel game. Someone had to come and say, “Do not go out to fight.” Then they would immediately jump up and rush out to the fighting. In battle, they carried a quiver filled with valuable arrows made from dogwood. In a strange performance like that of the Arikaree, the *contrary* would walk toward the enemy, and without taking aim, simply shoot an arrow in the enemy's direction. He then marched into the midst of the enemy to search for his highly prized arrow. Whenever they shot an arrow, they went to retrieve it. On finding it, they would return and proceed to repeat the act (provided they were still alive or not wounded).[68]

In the mythologies of the Pawnee and Arikaree, the Children of the Sun were mischievous youths with no home or family, living in the wilderness, literally, under the sun. They would simply help themselves to any food they found and, in general, did what they wanted to do. In mythological times, the villages of the Pawnee and Arikaree were once plagued by an attack of snakes because the *contraries* had interpreted matters inversely and violated observances set up to respect the sacred red snake by shooting it to pieces.[69]

2.5. Contraries of the Comanche

Comanche society lacked the intricate ceremonial life of other Plains tribes. There were no warrior societies, no police groups to control the communal hunts, no Sun Dance (at least, not until 1874) and no marriage ceremony. However, they did have *contraries*.[70]

The *contraries* of the Comanche were named *pukutsi*, which referred to foolhardiness, especially in battle, and meant as much as “crazy warrior.” The *pukutsi* were self-appointed; anyone brave and daring enough could become a *contrary*. They delighted in being mischievous and disobedient according to the principle of opposites. If asked to fetch water, they would bring fire. They smeared ashes or white paint over themselves and went about camp singing all the time. In cold weather, they complained of the heat and removed their clothing.

The *pukutsi-contraries* did not marry, and women tended to avoid them. Their method of courtship was self-defeating. One *contrary* composed love songs, but sang them in isolated places where they could not be heard.

The *contrary* of the Comanche was a “no-flight” or “sash” warrior. He wore a long sash over his shoulder and rolled up under his arm. In battle, the sash was unrolled and staked to the ground with an arrow, and he was obliged to stand on that spot. Instead of fighting from this defensive stance, he held a bow in one hand, shook a buffalo-scrotum rattle in the other, and sang resolutely until victory or death came. He was severely forbidden to release himself; only a comrade could free him.

The term of the Comanche *contrary* lasted for years. If he had not died in battle and he attained prestige owing to conspicuous acts of bravery, then a respectable middle-aged man could terminate his career by taking away his rattle. Former *contraries* were important men in their family and village.

3. Reverse Reaction Warriors

The warpath was an important station in traditional Plains manhood. War honors increased one’s rank and status. Military ambitions were intense, and men strove continually to surpass the achievements of others. Bravery obligations, in particular, regarding commands to charge and hold ground, were demanded of many Plains warriors that went beyond raw courage and that stood outside the coup system of counting military honors.

The *no-flight warrior* was an outstanding example of such a bravery obligation. He tethered himself to the ground at a particularly precarious location in the fight and was committed to stand and either fight or encourage his comrades. No matter how extreme the danger, he was not allowed to retreat even if the others had abandoned him. Such were the Crazy Dogs of the Pawnee and the Dog Soldiers of the Cheyenne. The Crow Lance warriors of the Pawnee were obligated to bind themselves together with a buffalo skin rope when under enemy attack; if one was killed, the rest dragged the body about with them.[71]

The *advance warrior* represented another outstanding example of a bravery obligation. He was committed to charge at the foe in a direct approach at any cost, not stopping, retreating or hiding until he engaged the enemy. Such were the Dogs of the Oglala (Lakota); they always fought to the end, as did the warriors of the Omaha Make-No-Flight Society and the leader of the Crazy Dogs of the Absarokee.[72] The four leaders of the Club-Men Society of the Arapaho were required to ride forward and strike the enemy with their clubs and then ride back.[73]

Many bravery vows were transformed into pledges of outright foolhardiness. When the Brave Dogs of the Blackfeet (advance warriors) approached the enemy, they never turned back, regardless of the consequences. However, their duty was not to fight, but to sing and dance their songs while standing in front of the enemy.[74] Often, the behavioral rules were extended to non-military occasions, in particular during dance ceremonies and when on the march. The Cheyenne Crazy Dogs were obliged to continue dancing in the direction ordered by their ceremonial leader until he commanded them otherwise, even if it meant to march into the river.[75]

In an incident recorded by Lewis and Clark, the advance warriors of a Yankton organization, who numbered about twenty extremely well respected men, were crossing the frozen Missouri River in February 1805, when a gaping air-hole appeared in the ice straight ahead in the path of the warriors. The opening in the ice could have been avoided by walking around it, but since their duty was to advance toward the enemy in a direct and undeviating line, the first advance warrior marched straight on right into the hole. He disappeared under the ice, never to be seen again. The rest of his group would have followed him, but were hindered and finally had to be dragged around the hole.[76]

This part describes the military and dance organizations that practiced reverse reaction with respect to commands, requests and instructions during their ceremonies and warfare. The warriors and particularly the leaders of these societies were usually married men with military honors. They inverted the meaning of battle commands and responded accordingly. The order to retreat signified “Charge!” They could only fall back, when commanded to attack. The practice of using reverse commands in battle was not associated with humor. Reverse reaction warriors represent an abbreviated form of the *contraries*. They will be discussed for the Hidatsa, Kiowa-Apache, Kiowa and Plains Shoshone (parts 3.1 - 3.4). The Absarokee, too, had a group that was devoted to contrary behavior, although the group was less formally organized (part 3.5).

Figure 13. Initiation of a Dog Soldier symbolized on a Yanktonai calendar for the year 1846. He carries a deer-hoof rattle and wears a long collar scarf. (Mooney 1898, figure 96).

3.1. Hidatsa

The Real Dog (*macukaike*) of the Hidatsa practiced an abbreviated form of contrary behavior. He was the leading officer of the Dog Society, an important organization for mature men with war experience. The society belonged to the series of age-graded societies and membership was customarily offered to the next age-group in a big transfer ceremony. Each Hidatsa village had a Dog Society with four officers, as well as the rank and file members, i.e., the "Dogs." The Real Dog was usually a middle-aged married man of good judgment and high repute. He was obliged to use inverse speech and to do the opposite of what was requested of him, even with his wife and family. If she said to him, "Come, Real Dog," then he would turn and go away. If she told him not to come, then he would race up to her.[77]

The Real Dog relinquished his office in the transfer ceremony to a new occupant. The retiring Real Dog prayed (converse prayer) for the short life, immediate death and eternal dissatisfaction of the new leader. The other three officers of the society and the "Dogs," addressed the Real Dog with inverse speech. All officers were distinguished by their magnificent magpie feather headdress made well known from the brilliant watercolor portrait of *Pehriska-Ruhpa* completed by the Swiss artist Karl Bodmer.[78]

In addition to speech reversal and reverse reaction, another element in the Real Dogs' behavior was dog imitation, a feature that was widespread in Plains ceremonialism. The "Dogs" of the society had rites of sexual license, meat stealing and howling. One Real Dog was known to walk bare foot about the village and the woods in the winter carrying only a whistle and a flint knife, yet his feet never froze.[79] The same feat was performed by the Heyoka of the Lakota, however, in the context of clownery and contrariness. As dogs need to be taken care of, the Real Dog was assigned an attendant to look after him, to dress him for dances and to accompany him into battle. The attendant acted as an interpreter and using speech reversal communicated the commands meant for the other warriors to the Real Dog. If the general command was to retreat, the attendant told the Real Dog, "Go now!" or "Go ahead, and jump at the enemies!" If the attendant said, "Well, there is great danger," or "Come back, don't go near the enemies!"—the Real Dog would advance.[80]

One officer of the Dog society represented *Yellow Dog*, the mythical figure who instituted the various dog societies of the Hidatsa, including the custom of “backward speech.” Further, Yellow Dog instructed Real Dog to act as he wishes and regard nothing as sacred.[81]

In village life, the consequences of such behavior could be tragically fatal. Once, a Real Dog ignored the prescriptions of the medicine-men, who were preparing a counterattack on the enemy for the next day. At that time, the Hidatsa people did not know how to address the Real Dog correctly and he had no attendant. Thus, no one was able to prevent him from violating the orders of the medicine-men. The Real Dog took from the food offerings and said, “Tomorrow is the day for me to die, I do not care whose food this is. If I want it, I'll have it.” At daybreak the next day, the Real Dog rushed straight into the enemy’s encampment before the Hidatsa warriors attacked. Later his body was found all cut to pieces.[82]

3.2. Plains Shoshone

All members of the “Yellow Noses” society of the Plains Shoshone were deeply committed to backward speech (*nanoma ponait*) and reverse compliance in not only ceremonies and war activities, but when addressed as a group and possibly even in their own family.[83] They were a military organization and additionally served to police communal hunts and marches. They may have applied the contrary principle in ordinary circumstances. If a Yellow Nose dropped something, he was not allowed to pick it up; yet, others could take ownership of it. A thirsty Yellow Nose would say, “Don't give me a cup of water” and mean the opposite. If a woman wished to marry a Yellow Nose, she knew that his refusal meant acceptance and vice versa. The first whites to encounter the Shoshone asked the Yellow Noses if they desired to be friends. The Yellow Noses replied, “No!” In battle, the Yellow Noses acted in unison using backward commands. If directed to charge, none would move. If the chief called out, “Don't charge the enemy,” they would answer, “No, we shall not charge,” and launch an attack.[84]

3.3. Kiowa

The *Kaitsenko* Society (*koitsenko*, *qoitsenko*) was one of several military societies with bravery obligations, but the only one that used inverse speech during their ceremonies and in battle.[85] All members were men of the highest military order and served to police the communal buffalo hunts. The meaning of the society’s name is uncertain: Real Dogs, Principal Dogs, Chief Dogs or Horses. Often, they were simply referred to as “Dogs” or “Dog Soldiers.” The society had a leader and up to ten members. Initiation occurred during the Sun Dance by presentation of a pipe. In ceremony, the dancers were painted red, and they wore bone whistles.

Figure 14. Calendar symbols depicting initiation into the *Kaitsenko* Society. The candidates dance in front of the medicine lodge during the summer Sun Dance. Each wears a headdress and a long sash. Kiowa calendar count for the summer of 1846 (left), for summer of 1848 (right) (Mooney 1898, figures 95, 100).

Aside from inverse speech, no examples of reverse battle commands or reverse compliance to instruction are known. The *Kaitsenko* soldiers were "sash" warriors. In battle, one might anchor himself to the ground by fastening the free end of his long black scarf into the earth with an arrow. Regardless of the danger, he was under solemn oath never to retreat. His duty was to stand there with his reddened dewclaw rattles and sing the death-song of his society. "O sun, you remain forever, but we *Kaitsenko* must die. O earth, you remain forever, but we *Kaitsenko* must die." He could only be released from his station if someone withdrew the arrow, which held the sash.

3.4. Kiowa-Apache

The *Klintidie* society of the Kiowa-Apache was a men's society with 10 to 16 members.[86] It contained only the bravest and oldest men still capable of fighting. New members would be asked to join the meetings, which lasted one to four days. Although being a member was honorable, many men were reluctant to join and would leave camp for the duration of the meetings.

At their dance gatherings and when in battle, the *Klintidie* were committed to inverse speech and reverse compliance to commands, instructions and requests. On one occasion the dancers were all painted and dressed for a dance gathering, when they had to march straight into the creek because someone said to them, "Don't dance in that water!"

Of the four leaders, the most outstanding was the Owl-Man (or Ghost-Man). The owl was revered to be the most mysterious and the most sacred spirit-animal, even more so than the buffalo. The word for owl also means "spirit" or "ghost." The Owl-Man was dressed in full regalia, and he prayed for the health and happiness of all. He had the privilege to engage in sexual intercourse with any woman during the public ceremony. Women who knew of his customs could avoid his approaches by saying to him, "Do it to me." In that case, he could not touch them.

In battle, certain warriors of the society took a stand at a dangerous spot by driving an arrow through the free end of their sash. They could not retreat or release themselves. Only another warrior could release them by pulling out the arrow and telling them to stay there. If the Kiowa-Apache were losing a fight and a general call for retreat was sent out, the *Klintidie* warriors had to charge. Only if someone noticed their predicament and commanded them to charge could they retreat.

3.5. Absarokee

The Absarokee had two associations called Crazy Dogs. One was a military society with rank and file members and four officers; the other was a cult or club that used inverse speech. To differentiate them, the first were called the long Crazy Dogs (*micge wara'axe hatskite*) because of their long tradition, and the latter the Crazy-Dogs-Wishing-to-Die (*micge wara'axe akcewiuk*).[87] The Crazy-Dogs-Wishing-to-Die amounted to a club for death-seeking young men, who, for various reasons, no longer wished to live. The motive to declare oneself a member, at least in several cases, was personal (insurmountable grief, weariness of life). All practiced inverse speech, and they were expected to do the opposite of what they said. They showed a deliberate indifference for life and limb that would lead to their death. Anyone who would adhere to the death pledge could announce that he was a Crazy-Dog-Wishing-to-Die. Usually, only one or two persons declared themselves in the course of a year to be Crazy-Dogs-Wishing-to-Die. However, in some years, no one volunteered and in other years up to five or more would.

During the day, the Crazy-Dogs-Wishing-to-Die rode about camp on their horses. They wore a sash, carried a rattle, and danced and sang their distinctive songs (death songs) proclaiming that they were here for only a short period and that all women were invited to visit them.[88] Elderly women cheered lustily when the Crazy-Dogs-Wishing-to-Die rode by in camp. At night, women, including married women, visited the Crazy-Dog-Wishing-to-Die to comfort them. One of them, Spotted Rabbit, was said to be the most handsome Absarokee who ever lived.[89]

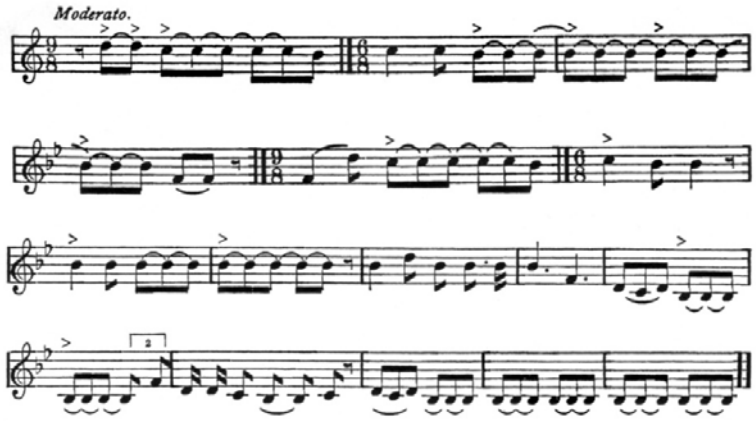


Figure 15. Music to a song sung by a Crazy-Dog-Wishing-to-Die. "I am merely staying on earth for a time; all women look upon me!" (Recorded by Curtis 1909a:13).

People had to stand clear of the Crazy-Dogs-Wishing-to-Die when they rode through camp for they might shoot at anything. One shot himself in the foot with a Hudson's Bay horse-pistol. Another rode off a cliff with his horse. However, most Crazy-Dogs-Wishing-to-Die awaited the season's first opportunity to make their foolish charge at the enemy. If, by lucky circumstance, he survived his attack, he ceased to be a Crazy-Dog-Wishing-to-Die.[90]

The family of a Crazy-Dog-Wishing-to-Die would attempt to dissuade the candidate, but without success. If he acted cowardly and refused to sacrifice himself at the critical moment in battle, he would become a laughingstock and fall into disrespect. One Crazy-Dog-Wishing-to-Die lost heart and cried at the decisive moment when he was to fulfill his pledge to die. His friend, Hillside, reminded him of his vow and shoved him along, admonishing him to go on and die.[91]

A famous Crazy-Dog-Wishing-to-Die, who was alive while Lowie was working with the Absarokee, was Young Cottontail Rabbit. He became a Crazy-Dog-Wishing-to-Die because he had been shot in the knee when he was young and, therefore, could not go afoot on war parties. He was envious of other young warriors and wished to be dead, even though the entire camp loved and admired him. He was handsome and rode a vigorous horse. He did not participate in camp activities like marching or hunting instead, he went about singing or dancing, and he spoke "backwards." The women particularly liked him. When enemy warriors were discovered and driven back to their fortification, Young Cottontail Rabbit recklessly rushed up to the breastwork of the enemy and shot inside at them. They shot back and he fell. It rained violently all night and Young Cottontail Rabbit lay dead in the rainwater. His people could not recover his body until daybreak. They wrapped him up and carried him back to camp. Everyone cried and mourned his

death. His body was placed on a four-pole scaffold and the camp moved on without him.[92]

4. Fools and Foolishness on the Plains

Historical Plains society was interspersed with many forms of "foolishness" and "craziness." Native words used to identify the clowns and *contraries* are most often translated as "foolish" or "crazy." These terms are not intended in a derogatory manner, and they were widely used in other contexts. Many of the extremes to which the ambitious Plains warrior resorted were called "crazy," "reckless" or "foolish." In addition to war craziness and foolish warriors, Plains culture knew "love craziness." The words *foolish* and *crazy* also depicted exaggerated conditions or extremely wrong persons, such as women with improper sexual behavior and cruel despotic men. The terms were also part of the names of numerous individuals; examples are Fool Chief, Crazy Mule, Crazy Horse, Crazy Bear, Foolish Woman and Fools Crow.

The roles played by the ceremonial and mythological figures, such as the sacred Clown Hunters of the Cheyenne Massaum ceremony and the Okipa Fool of the Mandan (discussed in part 4.1) further show that foolish and irrational elements were deeply established in Plains religion.

4.1. Ceremonial Fool of the Mandan

The Okipa Fool (*Okeheede)* was a mythological figure who was impersonated by an actor during the largest and most colorful annual religious ceremony of the Mandan—the Okipa. He was neither a *contrary* nor entirely a clown. The complexity of the figure is reflected by the variety of names assigned to him in translations, e.g. the owl, Evil Spirit, Foolish One, clown, a monster or devil.[93]

The Okipa Fool turned his excessive sexual energy into sacred amusement. He bursts into the ceremony during the proceedings of the all-important Bull Dance. He provides for the highest excitement by running about uncontrolled and chaotically. He was entirely naked and painted pitch black using pounded charcoal and bear's grease, except for several small white rings over his body. He was outfitted with a most distinguishing utensil, a colossal wooden phallus suspended between his legs that he could raise and lower since it was tied with a string to a long staff, which he held over the ground before him. He would play mischief on the women spectators and desperately rush at them with the phallus raised.[94]

The Okipa Fool was necessary to ensure the welfare of the people. He His entered the ceremony during the all-important Bull Dance, which was a dramatization of the mythical occurrence of first attracting the

buffalo (and ensuring the winter food supply). The “disruption” of the dance by the Okipa Fool and his unrestrained sexuality were essential parts of the ceremony as attested to in origin myths of the Bull Dance. The yearly return of the buffalo was attributed to the Fool mounting and mating with the Bull dancers, which he acrobatically did while keeping in perfect time with the dance.[95]

The spiritual power of the Okipa Fool was transmitted through sexual intercourse. The women thus awaited opportunity to defeat the Okipa Fool and capture the symbol of his powers. The one who triumphed and took possession of the phallus made claims to powers of fertility and took over as the director the remaining ceremonies, including “Walking with the Buffalo Bulls,” a sex ceremony in which the squaws chose from the “buffaloes.”[96]

In the mythological accounts, Okipa Fool’s father was the Sun or a sun spirit, and his mother was a good young woman who never went out with men (solar impregnation). As a child, the Okipa Fool was black in color with white circles, always leaping and running about, even up the sides of the lodges. Because he killed sacred snakes and the Holy Woman, who lived in the ash thicket, conflicts arose and the culture hero, Lone Man, killed the Okipa Fool.[97] The Mandan worshipped and paid honor to the Okipa Fool since he was an ancient and powerful force who infused serious matters with foolishness.

Conclusion

The *contraries* are an extraordinary example of the richness of Plains Indian culture. The few individuals in several tribes, who were known as the *contraries*, were committed to doing the opposite of what others normally do in their society. To understand better the *contraries*, it is necessary to tease them apart from related Plains phenomena. In this essay, I have thus endeavored to formulate a classification that distinguishes the individual *contraries* from the ritual clowns, clown-doctors, contrary-shamans, reverse-action warriors and ceremonial fools.

The *contraries* are related to the ritual clowns, i.e. the *heyoka-hohnuhka* complex, but should not be lumped entirely with them. Clowns in many cultures serve to promote the maintenance of the social and ethical structure by playing out flagrant violations of it. Clowns cultivate creativity, open new social avenues and serve as emancipators of the downtrodden. After a performance, actors and clowns remove their masks and costumes and return to normal life. Not so, the *contraries*. The position of a *contrary* was full-time, he was not restricted to performances yet he was seriously bound to special rules of behavior. The term of an individual *contrary* lasted years if not forever, especially among the Lakota and Santee. Sometimes when the career of a *contrary* ended, the position would be replaced by a younger candidate. Ex-*contraries* could return to a normal life, achieve

social recognition and marry. While they were *contraries*, however, they were generally unmarried. The *contraries*, unlike the clowns, foolish warriors and ceremonial fools, had no special sexual privileges and never participated in public sex practices.

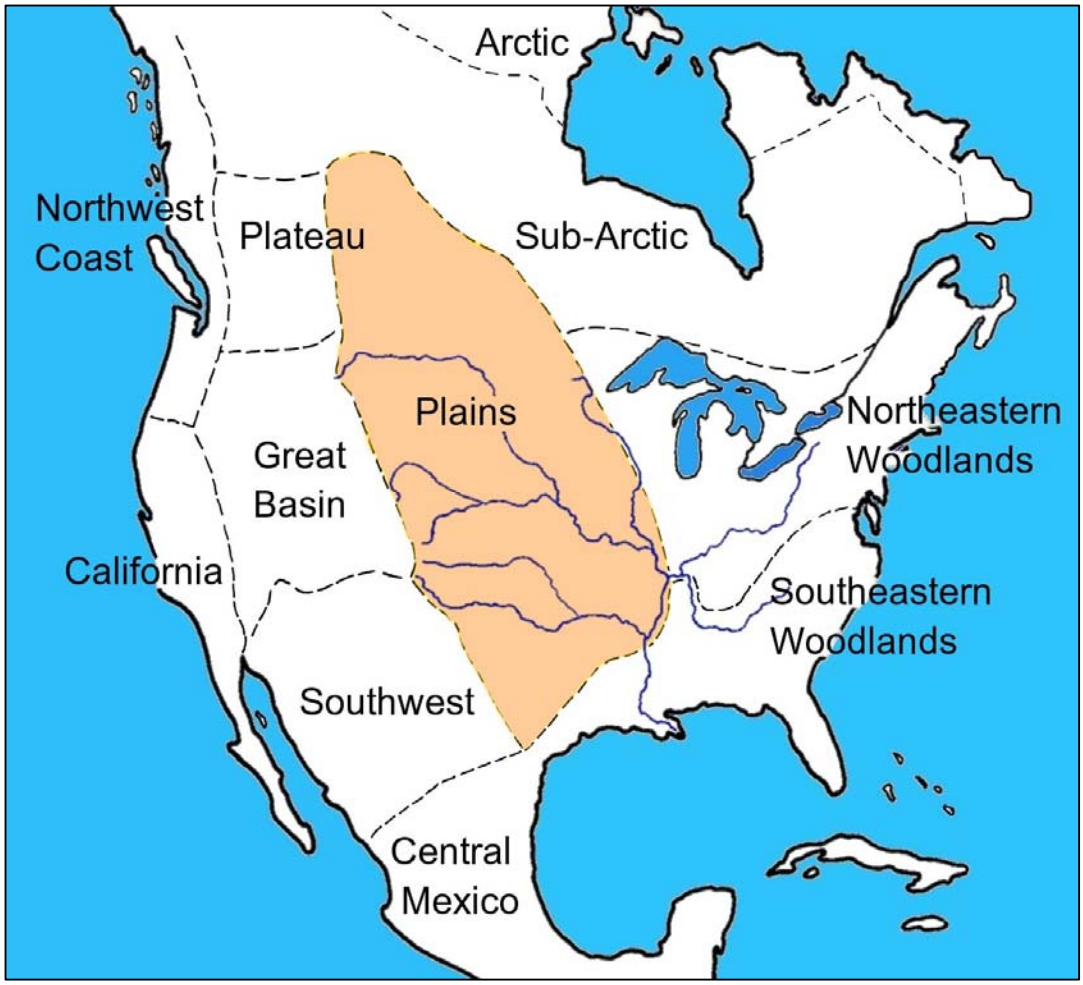
The *contraries* are similar to the foolhardy and crazy warriors of the Plains, but should not be mistaken for them. Their actions in battle were sometimes identical. The Comanche *contrary*, for example, was a sash-bearing “no-flight” warrior, who in the midst of a battle instead of fighting, shook his rattle and sang his songs. The actions of the Caddoan *contraries* in battle put their lives in direct danger. (By the way, these examples should dispel opinions that the *contrary* sought to escape tradition masculine obligations.) The Cheyenne *contrary* had special obligations in battle only when carrying the Thunder-Bow. The *contrary* Heyoka abided by his inner compulsion to act by opposites at all times, even in battle. In some cases, he even switched sides and shot at one’s own comrades!

The *contraries* have a logical affinity not only to Clowns, but also to the Trickster character. All admit to being disruptive, disrespectful, mischievous, counter-productive, absurd and taboo-breaking. Yet, the Plains *contraries* should not be viewed as the earthly descendent of the Plains trickster. Like the Clown, the Trickster is a cross-cultural category that has generated multiple suggestions for scholars. Tricksters, for example, reflect an early undifferentiated stage in the evolutionary development of human consciousness. They show the vagueness of religious boundaries, the limitations of the human condition, and the human tendency to err and be destructive. Certainly, the Trickster was the most popular folkloric character on the Plains to judge by the number of recorded fables. Particularly youngsters loved hearing tales of that ingenious, deceiving and cunning Coyote (or Spider or Rabbit) who was always doing things wrong. Trickster stories generally conveyed lessons of morality through negative example. Yet, in the oral traditions of the Absarokee, Arapaho and Lakota (as well as Winnebago and Ojibwa), the Trickster sometimes appears in human form and replaces the traditional world creator, culture hero and first man. In general, however, the Trickster played no part with the clown organizations, with Plains warfare or the *contraries*. Nor did the mythological background of the clowns and *contraries* rely on trickster tales. The principle of contrary behavior is far too restrictive for the Trickster. His talent was to deceive (i.e. fool) others purely for the sake of self-advantage. In doing so, he all too often became entrapped by his own scheming.

The diversity of the *contraries* prevents general statements regarding their relationship as a whole to the clown organizations, foolish warriors and ceremonial fools of the Plains. For example, only the contrary cults of the *heyoka-hohnuhka* complex were characterized by a close relationship to clown societies. The Arikaree and Pawnee had no clown organizations, and their *contraries* were probably rooted in mythologies

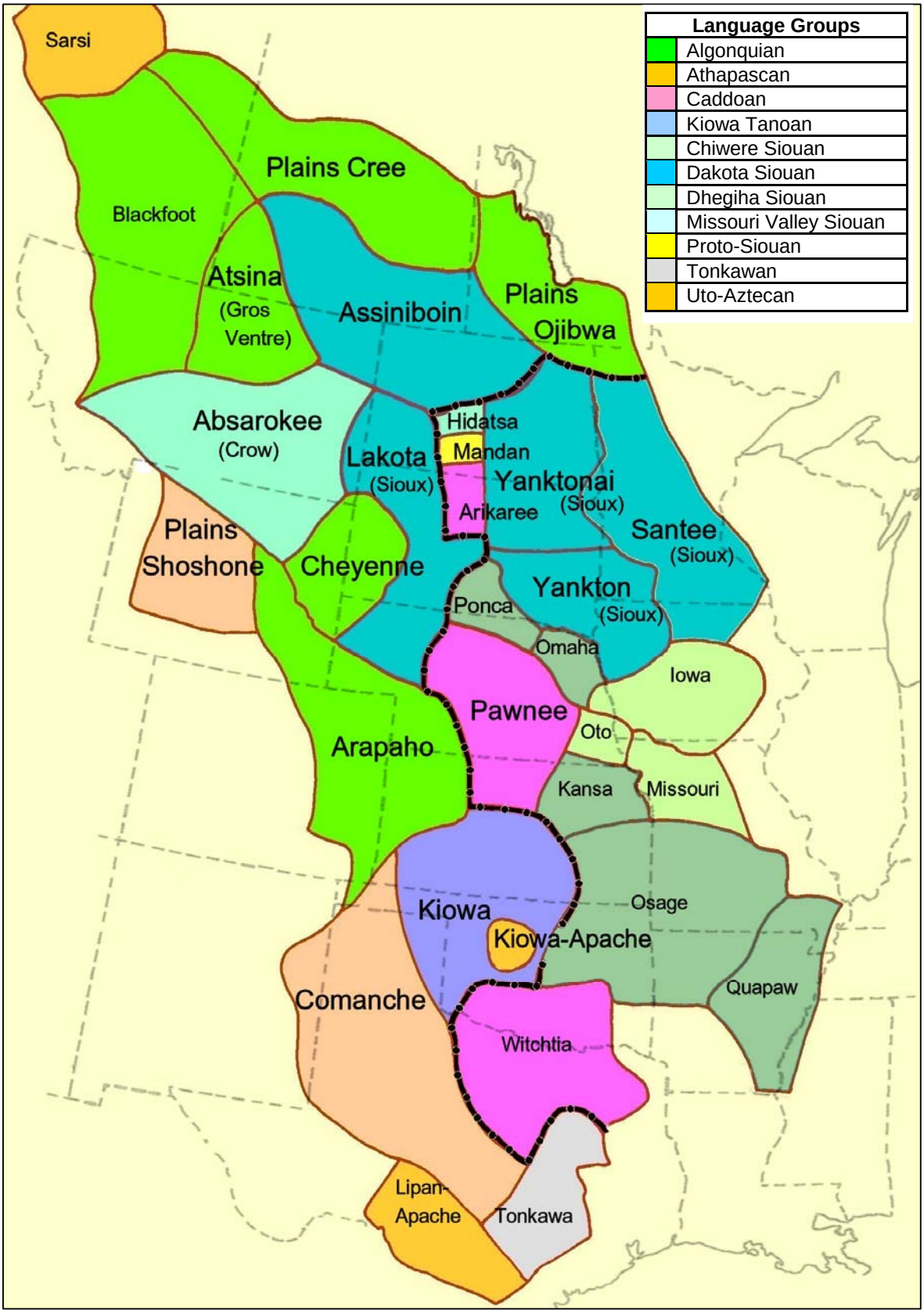
connected to the Okipa Fool myths of the Mandan. In their respective mythologies, they share several features. They were begotten by the Sun. They had a tendency to violate religious precepts by killing sacred animals. Further, they were foolish already in childhood and managed to persist in their practice into manhood.

In conclusion, the *contraries* are not to be identified as ritual clowns, earthly tricksters or foolish warriors. They were not part of society just for laughs, lessons or daringness. Only the *contraries* lived permanently by the contrary principle. The clowns, warriors and shaman, who practiced contrariness either did so temporarily or in abbreviated form. This composition thus sought to shed light on the *contraries* by disentangling them from related categories, such as Clowns, Fools, Tricksters. It is hoped that a significant step has been taken toward understanding the phenomenon of the Plains *contraries*.



Map 1. Native North American culture areas.

The Plains culture area covered the heartland of North America. Plains economy was primarily based on the buffalo. The culture area consisted of the nomadic bison hunters, who roamed the short-grass High Plains in the west, and the bison hunters on the tall-grass Prairie in the east who farmed, harvested maize and dwelt in villages.



Map 2. Approximate location of Plains Indian tribes ca. 1850.

Thick black line marks the separation of the nomadic tribes of the Plains in the west and Plains farmers in the east. Colors of tribes correspond to language groups (coded in box insert).

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[2] Ray (1937).
[3] Ray (1945).
[4] Stands In Timber and Liberty (1967:103-104n); Chamberlain (1907, p. 578).
[5] Grinnell (1923, p. 176-177, 205 fnt); Curtis (1911, p. 115 fnt); Howard (1954, p. 256).
[6] Arapaho: Kroeber (1902-1907, p. 154, 188, 229); Curtis (1911, p. 159); Mooney (1896, p. 986, 988). Atsina: Kroeber (1908, p. 241-250).
[7] Kroeber (1902-1907, p. 190, 192), (1908, p. 245).
[8] Kroeber (1908, p. 190-191, 193, 244).
[9] Kroeber (1902-1907, p. 188-196), (1908, p. 246 fnt).
[10] Kroeber (1902-1907, p. 188), (1908, p. 246 fnt).
[11] Dorsey and Kroeber (1903, p. 30 fnt); Kroeber (1902-1907, p. 188-191, 193, 227-229), (1908, p. 246 fnt); Mooney (1896, p. 1033).
[12] Dorsey (1904a, p. 339 fnt); Dorsey and Kroeber (1903, p. 18, 23-31); Lévi-Strauss (1981, p. 506).
[13] Dorsey and Kroeber (1903, p. 1-8, 13-21, 22-23).
[14] Neihardt (1979); Lowie (1913a, p. 114).
[15] Walker (1980, p. 155-157).
[16] Densmore (1918:167); Howard (1984, p. 171-173); Lowie (1913a:115, 117); Morgan (1959, p. 146); Wallis (1947:132-134, 138, 153); Wissler (1912:83 84).
[17] Brown (1979, p. 57); DeMallie (1984, p. 233-234); Lowie (1913a, p. 115); Neihardt (1979, p. 192); Wallis (1947, p. 111, 134).
[18] DeMallie (1984, p. 234).
[19] Dorsey (1894, p. 469); Hassrick (1964, p. 277); Howard (1984, p. 172 173); Lame Deer and Erdoes (1972, p. 237); Pond (1854, p. 645); Standing Bear (1933, p. 206 208); Walker (1980, p. 156); Wallis (1919, p. 325), (1947, p. 111, 118, 120, 140, 148, 166, 169, 171, etc.).
[20] Brown (1953); Powers (1987, p. 435).
[21] Plains Cree: Skinner (1914c, p. 528-529); Mandelbaum (1940, p. 274-275). Plains Ojibwa: Skinner (1914b, p. 500-505). Assiniboin Lowie (1909, p. 62-66).
[22] Mandelbaum (1940, p. 274), Lowie (1916b, p. 911-912), Skinner (1914b, p. 503-504). A point reiterated by Marano (1982, p. 407).
[23] Mandelbaum (1940, p. 274-275); Skinner (1914b, p. 500).
[24] Skinner (1914c, p. 528).
[25] Skinner (1914a, p. 317 fnt); Mandelbaum (1940, p. 275).
[26] Skinner (1914b, p. 501); (1914c, p. 529).
[27] Grinnell (1923, p. 204); Curtis (1911, p. 115, 130), (1930, p. 129-131, 134 fnt); Schlesier (1987); Mooney (1905-1907, p. 415); Stands In Timber and Liberty (1967, p. 58, 101).
[28] Grinnell (1923, p. 205-206); Mooney (1896, p. 1033).
[29] Grinnell (1923, p. 207-208).
[30] Grinnell (1923, p. 204, 208-209); Mooney (1896, p. 1033).
[31] Grinnell (1923, p. 285-336); Curtis (1930, p. 129-135).
[32] Grinnell (1923, p. 329-331); Stands In Timber and Liberty (1967, p. 101).
[33] Skinner (1915, p. 789).
[34] Skinner (1915, p. 789); Howard (1965, p. 124).
[35] Skinner (1915, p. 789).
[36] Standing Bear (1933, p. 210)
[37] This summary of the Absarokee clowns is based on Lowie (1913b, p. 207-208). In the literature the Absarokee are also known as the Crow Indians.
[38] Wissler (1907, p. 46-48); Walker (1980, p. 276); Dorsey (1894, p. 443); Taylor (1975, p. 38-42).
[39] Grinnell (1923, p. 39-44).

[40] Wissler (1912, p. 83); Wallis (1947, p. 111, 138, 170).
[41] Wallis (1947, p. 142).
[42] Hassrick (1964, p. 152), for other versions of this incident, see Brown (1979, p. 57) and Standing Bear (1933, p. 210).
[43] Deloria (1944, p. 53-54); Pond (1867, p. 45).
[44] Pond (1854, p. 645).
[45] Dorsey (1894, p. 468-471); Lowie (1913a, p. 113-117); Neill (1872, p. 268).
[46] Wallis (1947, p. 142).
[47] Walker (1980, p. 155-157, 277-278, 279-280); Wallis (1947, p. 135, 164-166, 170-174); Wissler (1912, p. 84-85).
[48] Wallis (1947, p. 140).
[49] Mallery (1886, p. 100), (1893, p. 466).
[50] Beckwith (1930, p. 357); Curtis (1908, p. 159, 168).
[51] Wallis (1947, p. 115).
[52] Grinnell (1923, p. 79-86).
[53] Grinnell (MS Folder # 333, p.143).
[54] Dorsey (1905, p. 24-25); Grinnell (1923, p. 86); Powell (1981, p. 39).
[55] Dorsey (1905, p. 15-30); Hoebel (1978, p. 23-24); Petersen (1964, p. 146-147).
[56] Dorsey (1905, p. 25); Grinnell (1923, p. 83); Powell (1981, p. 39).
[57] Dorsey (1905, p. 25); Grinnell (1923, p. 85-86).
[58] Dorsey (1905, p. 25).
[59] Based on the book by Thomas Berger (1964).
[60] Llewellyn and Hoebel (1941, p. 150).
[61] Lowie (1915a, p. 673-675); Parks (1991, p. 161-167, 936-938).
[62] Lowie (1915a, p. 673).
[63] Lowie (1915a, p. 673-674).
[64] Murie (1914, p. 579, 580-581); Dorsey (1904a, p. 24, 57-59, 339 fnt).
[65] Murie (1914, p. 580-581).
[66] Dorsey (1904a, p. 57-59).
[67] Murie (1914, p. 581).
[68] Murie (1914, p. 580-581); Dorsey (1904a, p. 59).
[69] Dorsey (1904a, p. 57-59), (1904b, p. 125-126).
[70] This summary of the Comanche *contraries* draws on accounts from Hoebel (1940, p. 33-34); Wallace and Hoebel (1952, p. 275-276); and Kardiner (1963, p. 62-63, 84-85, 88). In addition to the Sun Dance, the Mud Men clowns, *sekwitsit puhitsit*, were a late acquisition of the Comanche, probably acquired from their visits to the nearby Pueblos (Wallace and Hoebel 1952, p. 321-322).
[71] Murie (1914, p. 570-573, 580); Bent (MS).
[72] Wissler (1912, p. 54); Lowie (1913a, p. 193), (1916b, p. 889).
[73] Mooney (1896, p. 989).
[74] Wissler (1913, p. 397-399).
[75] Grinnell (1923, p. 790).
[76] Lewis and Clark (1965, p. 95-96). [Original Journals, vol. I, p. 130.]
[77] Lowie (1913c, p. 285-289).
[78] Lowie (1913c, p. 286, 289).
[79] Lowie (1913c, p. 288-290); Bowers (1965, p. 195).
[80] Lowie (1913c, p. 285, 288-289).
[81] Lowie (1913c, p. 285).
[82] Lowie (1913c, p. 289).
[83] Lowie (1915b, p. 813-815), (1924, p. 283).
[84] Lowie (1915b, p. 815).
[85] This account of the *Kaitsenko* is based on Lowie (1916a, p. 847-849); Mooney (1898, p. 287-288), (1907 p. 861-863); and Mayhill (1962, p. 329).
[86] This account of the *Klintidie* is based on McAllister (1937, p. 153-156).
[87] Accounts of the Crazy-Dogs-Wishing-to-Die are found in Lowie (1913b, p. 191, 193-196), (1918, p. 299-304), (1922a, p. 31-33) and Curtis (1909a, p. 13-14).
[88] Curtis (1909a, p. 13).

[89] Lowie (1913b, p. 196), (1917, p. 84), (1918, p. 299), (1922b, p. 267), (1935, p. 18, 331-332).
[90] Curtis (1909a, p. 14); Lowie (1913b, p. 194).
[91] Curtis (1909a, p. 13-14); Lowie (1935, p. 331).
[92] Lowie (1917, p. 84-85), (1935, p. 331-332).
[93] Catlin (1967, p. 59); Curtis (1909b, p. 48-50); Morgan (1959, p. 194-195); also spelled *Oxinhede* (Bowers 1950, p. 132, 152, 153), *Ochkih-Hedde* (Will and Spinden 1906, p. 133, 143) and *Ochkih-Hadda* (Maximilian 1841, p. 68, 91).
[94] Catlin (1967, p. 59-62).
[95] Bowers (1950, p. 156); Catlin (1842, p. 168), (1967, p. 84).
[96] Catlin (1967, p. 61, 69-71, 84-85); Bowers (1950, p. 131, 144-166, 348).
[97] Bowers (1950, p. 352); Catlin (1842, p.179 fnt), (1967, p. 73-74).

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