"Wolf Warriors and Dog Feasts: Animal Metaphors in Plains Military Societies"

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WOLF WARRIORS AND DOG FEASTS: Animal Metaphors in Plains Military Societies

The present essay proposes to show how a comparative analysis of the symbolism and ceremonies connected with the warrior societies of the Plains can shed light on the shared ideological pattern underlying the diversification of specific details and the particular nature of the various cultural contexts. This common background to variable and heterogeneous surface phenomena accounts for the continuity of some basic principles recognizable in the Native systems of thought.

The names by which the warrior societies were known differed from one tribe to another; yet peoples of distinct linguistic stocks used substantially analogous designations, thus attesting to historical borrowing. Some of these names simply refer to a detail of the regalia or to some object regarded as emblematic of that society: the Half-Shaved Heads and the Hammer Owners of the Crow, or the Red Shield society of the Cheyenne. In other cases the designations were general terms simply denoting the warrior qualities of their members: the *cante tinza* (Braves) of the Oglala, or the *egahre* (Not-Afraid-to-Die) of the Ponca. Among the most widespread designations was that taking its name from the wolf or the dog, which was actually present in every group of the Plains area.

There was a Dog (or Wolf) society among the Oglala (Wissler 1912:52), a society of Dog-Men Warriors and of Wolf Warriors among the Cheyenne (G. A. Dorsey 1905:20ff.); a Dog Men society among the Arapaho (Mails 1973:200); the Dog-Liver Eaters among the Eastern Dakota (Lowie 1913a:124); the Big Dogs, the Crazy Dogs, the Crazy-Dogs-Wishing-to-Die, and the Little Dogs among the Crow (Lowie 1913b:175, 191ff., 199); the Dogs, Little Dogs, and Crazy Dogs among the Hidatsa and Mandan (Lowie 1913b:267, 280, 284, 302, 306, 317ff.); the Dogs, Brave Dogs, and All-Brave-Dogs among the Blackfoot (Wissler 1913:382, 395ff.); the Dogs among the Sarsi (Goddard 1914:467); the Wolf Lance society among the Pawnee, where there was also a society of Young Dogs (Murie 1914:577, 582ff.); other Young Dogs among the Arikara (Lowie 1915a:657); while the Ute (Lowie 1915b:823) and the Kiowa (Lowie 1916a:847) had societies taking their names from the dog. Among the Oglala there was a society named from the kit-fox (Wissler 1912:14), which also occurs among the Eastern Dakota (Lowie 1913a:105), the Crow, the Hidatsa and Mandan (Lowie 1913b:155, 253, 296), the Blackfoot (Wissler 1913:399), the Arikara (Lowie 1915a:666) and Ponca (Skinner 1915:787), while the Cheyenne had a Coyote society (G. A. Dorsey 1905:19).

Certainly, such a uniformity was due in part to a long process of diffusion and borrowing taking place throughout the Plains. But the persistence with which various species of *canidae* were connected with the warrior societies may imply a deeper significance. We will therefore have to look at the rich cultural symbolism of the peoples of the Plains and their warfare customs, to see whether the dog, the fox, the wolf, and the coyote were in some way related to one another, and whether there was a specific symbolical bond between these animals and warlike activities.

First of all a linguistic issue needs to be noted. As Lowie (1916b:897) has pointed out in connection with societies named after closely related animals, such as the wolf and fox or coyote, the precise meaning of the indigenous term was often not given by the interpreters, so that many translations are lacking in precision. The Omaha warrior dance reported by J. O. Dorsey (1884:323) as "Coyote Dance" (*mikasi watci*) is described by Fletcher and La Flesche (1911:416) as "Wolf Dance." Analogously, the Coyote society among the Cheyenne resembled in many respects the Fox society of the Arikara (Lowie 1916b:897). The problem, however, is not just one of finding the right translation, but rather a complex question of cultural classification as reflected in the particular terminological system of specific languages. For example, among the words in Lakota that may be glossed 'coyote' is *śunkmanitu*, whereas one of the terms for 'wolf' is *śunkmanitu tanka*, literally 'big coyote' (Buechel 1970:469).

The Native peoples certainly knew the animals well with which they shared the country, and they were able to accurately distinguish the species and varieties. But because of this knowledge of the animal world, they were also apt to observe the similarities in the characteristics and behavior of the wild canids, and they utilized these cognitions in the organization of their own symbolic universe. On the other hand, naturalists have observed a hybrid variety resulting from the interbreeding of wolves and coyotes, and have recognized an amazing multiplicity of subspecies of wolf, whose number has been identified by a taxonomist as twenty-three for North America only (Lopez 1978:13–15). This leaves us to wonder whether other cultures may not have, in a natural reality so complex and varied, come up with a classification which differs from that of Western natural science. Native taxonomies of the wild *canidae* may not have been determined by the need to establish zoological distinctions as accurately as possible, but by considerations based on analogic and symbolic connections.

Wolves and Warriors

Clark Wissler has emphasized the relationship between wolf imagery and war customs and its general diffusion on the Plains. He pointed to the Pawnee as the probable center for the development of this symbolic complex, where a fundamental mythological basis for the association between the wolf and warfare can be found (Wissler 1916:873–874). According to the tribal origin myth of the Skidi Pawnee, whose tribal name signifies 'wolf people' (G. A. Dorsey 1904:xiii; Murie 1981,

1:4), the wolf was sent to earth by a supernatural being, the Foolswolves Star (identified as Sirius by Chamberlain 1982:127ff.), and then was slain by men; this killing, the first to occur in the world, occasioned the origin of death and warfare, which at that time were still unknown (Murie 1914:561–563). On this occasion the lance bearers, one of the prominent offices in the warrior societies, were instituted. According to this mythical precedent, the Pawnee organized a war party as a kind of "wolf society": *araris taka* ('society of the white wolf'). The god of war was identified as the mythical wolf, hence to become a real warrior a Pawnee had to follow the ways of the wolf (Murie 1914:595; Lindig 1970:62). The sacred bundle that assured the Pawnee supernatural aid in war contained, among other ingredients, a wolf skin, and the members of a war party painted their faces and robes with white clay, which for the Pawnee was a symbol of the wolf (Murie 1914:596).

For the Plains peoples, body paint was more than simply a means of conveying a visual message to others; rather it was the core of a process by which the warrior "began to focus his own being upon his 'powers' and upon what he was to become in an intensified way for the time being" (Mails 1973:70). Thus, imitating the behavior of the wolf or wearing the skin of a wolf, the Plains warrior identified himself with the qualities and the powers of the animal, which were regarded as a source of strength and success in warfare. Pawnee scouts wore two white eagle feathers in their hair to resemble the ears of a wolf, and often wore wolfskin caps, rendering their appearance similar to that of wolves. On their return from a raid the warriors performed a wolf dance, in which all the young men could join (Murie 1914:596–597). Certainly, the Pawnee show in a particularly explicit and coherent way the symbolic and ritual relationship between wolf and warrior; nevertheless, we can find very similar customs among the other Plains groups.

An Oglala myth connected with the origin of the Chiefs society (*han skaska*) tells of a war party running across a gray wolf who predicted to the warriors their overcoming of the enemies. The Oglala scouts wore wolf skins and howled like wolves when they located the enemy (Wissler 1912:38–39, 91; Walker 1982:95). Catlin observed among the Iowa the use of war songs, "which they have ingeniously taken from the howling of a gang of wolves" (cited in Skinner 1915:687). This reminds us of the wolf songs performed by Pawnee warriors in preparation of a war expedition in which they imitated wolves in the dance and howled like wolves at the end of each song (Murie 1981, 1:139). Among the Ponca, too, the scouts "acted like wolves, stooping over and trotting and signaling by howling" (Skinner 1915:797). The same custom is found among the Plains Cree (Skinner 1914:521) and other tribes.

The skin of the wolf was an important element in the regalia of numerous Plains warrior societies. The coyote and the fox seem to have a similar symbolic connection with warlike activities, for on many occasions coyote or fox and wolf skins appear to have been used interchangeably in the warrior societies outfits (Lowie 1916b:897). Among the Oglala, in preparation of a war party, a pipe was consecrated and then wrapped up in a wolf skin; the lances carried by the *blotaunka* society officers were wrapped with wolf or coyote skins, ideally made by a man who had dreamed of a wolf (Wissler 192:55, 57), i.e. a man upon whom the wolf had conferred a special power appearing to him in a vision or dream. Similarly, among the Crow a wolf or coyote skin was the emblem of the office of scout during a war party: according to Lowie (1912:233), the wolf skin was really a part of the leader's medicine bundle; but he adds that if some of the scouts had seen a wolf in their visions, they could prepare wolf skins for their associates. The Cheyenne Coyote society took its name from the fact that its members emulated the coyote's endurance, cunning, and activity (G. A. Dorsey 1905:19). The Omaha also possessed a sacred bundle related to warfare, among the components of which figured a wolf skin. Before leaving, the participants of a war party celebrated a feast and performed the *mikaci* (wolf) dance, since the wolf was regarded as connected with war. The dance was imitative of the movements of the wolf and was intended as "an appeal to the wolf that the men might partake of his predatory character, of his ability to roam and not be homesick" (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911:416). According to the Pawnee, a successful warrior must have the ferocity of the bear, the drawing power of the mountain lion, the cunning of the wild cat, and the crafty, thieving traits of the wolf (Murie 1981, 1:45). The Plains Ojibwa had personal war charms, generally made from the skin of a fox, a wolf, or a coyote (Skinner 1914:493). These skins were worn with the animal's head falling over the owner's breast, and the tail dangling behind. A similar fashion of wearing wolf or coyote skins was widespread among the Plains tribes (Mails 1973:105, 108, 228 and *passim*).

The wide distribution of the wolf metaphor for warriors evidently derives from the animal's characteristics and behavior, which the Native peoples knew from careful observation. In particular, they esteemed the wolf's courage, strength, and tirelessness as a long-distance predator (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911:512). Many aspects of Plains Indian symbolism and ceremonialism reveal a particular relationship between the lifeways of the wolf and of man. The wolf competed with man in the hunting of herbivores and small animals, from which both gained their livelihood. Thus, the wolf becomes a role model for human activity: If man is to be successful in his undertakings, he must conform to the ways of the wolf.

Wolf, like man, is not simply an individual hunter, but often many animals cooperate in the social activity of slaughtering game; as a predator, the wolf supplies food not only for himself but also for his own family and defends his den as a brave warrior should defend his own village (Lopez 1978:104). The Plains Cree, for example, maintained that they learned from the wolf the method of driving out the buffalo on the ice, where they would fall and slip about so that they were easily killed. This practice was called "wolf pound," because they learned it by watching the wolves who made a ready prey of the buffalo when they got them on the ice (Skinner 1914:527).

The role of the wolf as keeper of all animals and as principal interlocutor of man in the hunting activity was particularly clear in the Massaum ceremony of the Cheyenne. In this ritual two characters made their appearance: *Maheone Honehe* or the Red Wolf, and *Evevšev Honehe* or the White Wolf, who impersonated the game keepers of the animals and controlled hunting by predators, including man (Schlesier 1987:98). According to Cheyenne traditions, after they had adopted the Massaum ceremony, which was revealed to *Motseyoef* (Sweet Medicine), a mythic hero, the two sacred wolves had been instructed by the *maiyun* or supernatural beings to teach the Cheyenne the way of hunting in the grasslands.

Thus, the wolves became the benefactors of the Cheyenne and the protectors of the animals, animal hunters emulated by human hunters. Consequently, during the game-calling ceremonies Cheyenne shamans addressed wolf songs to the wolf spirits, who were regarded as messengers of the world of wild animals (Schlesier 1987:82–83). These customs reveal how the wolf was conceived as a paradigmatic model for hunting and plundering activities. Strictly related to this complex probably was the way in which the hunters approached a buffalo herd wearing wolf skins and imitating the movements of wolves. Such a technique, observed for the first time among the Eastern Sioux by G. C. Beltrami in 1823 (Beltrami 1824:148; Comba in press), and then by George Catlin in the 1830s (Catlin 1973, 1:254, pl. 110), was presumably something more than a simple way for the hunters to conceal themselves.

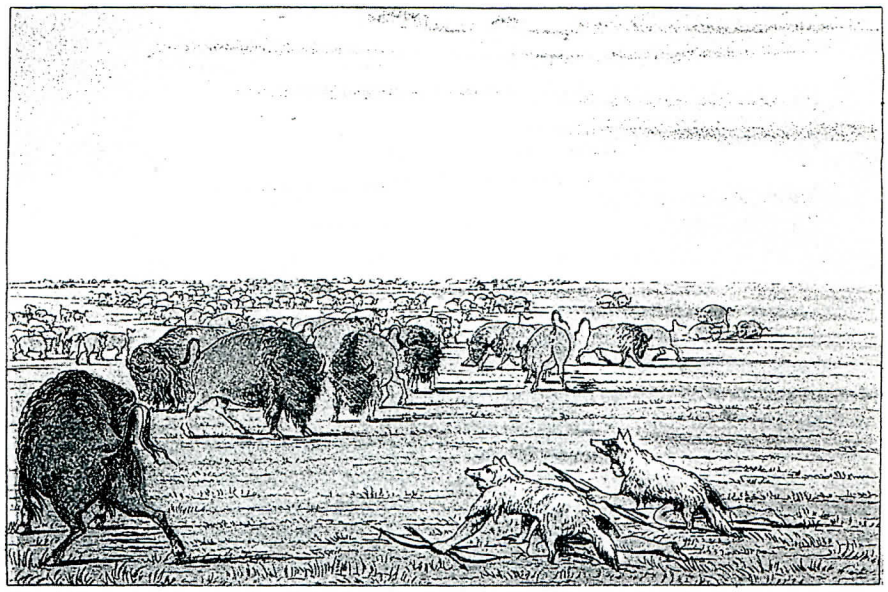

Fig. 1 Bison hunting on the Plains in wolf disguise. After George Catlin's *Letters and Notes* (London 1876), vol. 1, plate 110.

His character of predator, of silent, tireless, and determined hunter, made of the wolf an emblematic image of the warrior's qualities, and this image was thus transferred from the domain of the hunt to the context of the war complex of the Plains tribes. The destructive and plundering potentials of man were thus conceived in terms of the wolf metaphor (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911:171). The lances carried by the Hidatsa Kit-fox society officers were wrapped with wolf skin, which represented the strength of the wolf as an enemy, and were painted red in the upper half of the stick, thus representing the blood of the wolf's prey (Lowie 1913b:255). Here the warrior's activity was strictly related to the hunting abilities of the wolf. The visual representation of this relationship had less the purpose of conveying an idea through the symbolism of regalia, than that of turning the mysterious power kept by some particularly "powerful" animals to the warrior's own benefit.

The ceremonial and ritual practices as well as the relationship between man and animals experienced in the vision quest indicate that the distinction between man and animals was not conceived of as a clear-cut separation. Plains people often employed "metaphorical extensions" between humans and animals, thus treating non-human species as if they were humans. Such a metaphorical use of animals in reference to human behavior was based on a cosmological conception in which the interdependency of all life forms, including man, played a pivotal role (Powers 1986:151–152). The boundary between the human and the animal sphere could become more and more faint, permitting under certain circumstances an identification with the animal power (Schlesier 1987:12). The warrior's success in battle depended on his ability to acquire power from those beings which possessed the desired capabilities: strength, bravery, cunning, stamina, and contempt of danger. These qualities were shown particularly by the animals that depended on hunting and predation for their subsistence: foxes and coyotes, as well as wolves. The Oglala members of the *Tokala* (Kit-fox) society, which took its name from a variety of small and very fast gray fox (Buechel 1970:495), thought that they could be as active and wily on the warpath as this little animal was known to be, and they marked this metaphorical relationship by wearing a kit-fox skin (Wissler 1912:14, 16). The Kit-foxes of the Blackfoot also danced in imitation of the hunting behavior of the fox (Mails 1973:116).

A number of myths ascribe the foundation of a certain society to the intervention of an animal appearing in human form, who instructs the recipient in the rules, dances, and paraphernalia of the new society. In many cases, the animal donors were wolves, as among the Iowa (Skinner 1915:701), the Hidatsa (Lowie 1913b:285), and the Pawnee (Murie 1914:610), or foxes, as among the Oglala (Wissler 1912:23). The metaphorical relationship between wolf and warfare also explains why wolf skins and objects made of wolf, fox, or coyote skins were a widely shared feature of warrior society regalia, even when they did not take their names from this animal, as the Raven Bearers or the Black Soldiers of the Blackfoot (Wissler 1913:392, 409; Mails 1973:109), the *blotaunka* of the Oglala (Wissler 1912:57), the Half-Shaved Heads of the Hidatsa (Lowie 1913b:273), and so on.

From the record of a war expedition narrated by Ghost Head, a Lakota, as reported by Hassrick (1964:92), we gather that this warrior, having dreamed of the wolf, always took a wolf hide when he went on war parties. After having walked three or four days, the participants of the party stopped at dawn by a creek to make tobacco offerings to the wolves. "I took my wolf skin to a nearby hill," says Ghost Head, "and facing the Four Winds, called and cried to the wolves, asking them the whereabouts of the enemy" (Hassrick 1964:92–93). We suggest that it was from this kind of metaphorical relationship between man and wolf that the rich symbolism and ceremonialism related to the wolf so widespread among the warrior societies of the Plains originated. The fox and the coyote were, in this respect, associated with the wolf for their hunting and cunning qualities. Here, as in other situations, the Native peoples placed "much more emphasis on the way living creatures behave, sometimes seeing correlations between human and animal behavior," than on simply morphological criteria (Powers 1986:149).

Wolves and Dogs

While we can fairly understand the reason for the relationship in ritual symbolism of animals with behavioral characteristics so similar as wolf, fox, and coyote, we are puzzled by the relation which we find between wolf and dog. Despite a certain resemblance in the outward appearance of the two animals, their peculiar relationship to man seems to put them into two diametrically opposed categories. Nevertheless, the wide distribution of societies taking their names from the dog invites us to further investigate the symbolic connections existing between these two animals. This could help us to grasp some of the meaning of many celebrations performed by various tribes in connection with the feasts of the warrior societies.

According to the only extensive study of the traditional role of the dog in a Plains culture (Wilson 1924), the Hidatsa distinguished two varieties of dogs: one of medium size, known as "Plains-Indian dog," and one larger, called "Sioux dog." The former was generally similar to the coyote, while the Sioux dog with its gray hair, resembled the Plains wolf. Prince Maximilian observed how the Indian dogs differed very little from the wolves and stated that they were in part their descendants, since wolves often approached the Native habitations and mixed with the dogs. In the voice of dogs he did not recognize a proper barking but a howl like that of a wolf. Very similar observations were made by H. M. Brackenridge, who resided among the Arikara in 1811. He adds that the Indian dog "is nothing more than the domesticated wolf," and says that he has often mistaken wolves for Indian dogs in his wanderings through the prairies (Wilson 1924:196–197). According to George Bent, who lived many years with the Cheyenne, their dogs were "just like wolves, they never barked but howled like wolves, and were half-wild animals" (Hyde 1968:9; Schlesier 1987:147–148).

Native traditions also report the dog to be descended from the wolf. Among the Hidatsa, for example, the origin of the dogs was due to a mythical hero called Yellow Dog, whose supernatural power was a dog. His father was not a man but a red-chested wolf, who "was evidently a supernatural wolf, for there are no wolves that have red chests naturally." Yellow Dog introduced the dogs among the Hidatsa and taught his people about them. In particular he instructed the people to kill the dogs when they have a bad temper and are surly, when they reveal an unbecoming and wild behavior, stealing meat or digging at the foot of the poles at the outside of a lodge. But the dogs that behaved in a gentle and friendly way, thus acting according to human-like norms of conduct, had to be treated well, because they were deemed to have mystery power, a power which could be used for the benefit of his human masters (Wilson 1924:198–199).

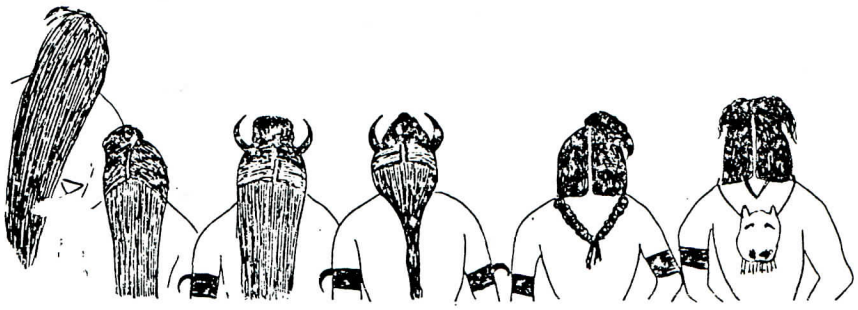

Fig. 2 Piegan drawing showing the costumes of the All-brave-dogs. After Wissler 1913: Fig. 8.

Thus, according to the Native system of thought, wolf and dog were conceived as closely related, not only for their physical appearance but also for some of their behavioral peculiarities. Yet, they placed themselves in thoroughly opposite relations to man. The wolf as a hunter was a competitor of man, he lived far away from human settlements, and belonged to the wilderness world that surrounded Native villages. The dog, on the contrary, was man's cooperator, lived in the village with men, and contributed to the well-being and to the activities of the community. Before the introduction of the horse, the dog was an essential aid in the hunt and the only means of transportation available to the Plains tribes; he was so tightly associated with the human sphere that the dog was almost identified with humans. On the other hand, the dog maintained many characteristics which assimilated him to the wolf: his ferocity, his greed, his wild destructive qualities were only latent potentials in the dog, but they had not disappeared and could resurface at any moment, transforming the domestic animal *par excellence* into the most ruthless and dreadful predator known to man.

According to the Native metaphorical system of relationships, then, the wolf and the dog were opposed and at the same time viewed as consubstantial with one another. The association of the wolf/dog pair with warfare and warriors has thus to be analyzed on the basis of such systems of symbolical and ceremonial relationships.

Dogs and Warriors

Among the Hidatsa one can find a set of traditions of particular interest, by means of which we can try to shed some light on some ceremonial connections, which were shared by other groups, too, though less clearly emphasized.

Yellow Dog, the mythical hero of the Hidatsa, was responsible not only for the introduction of dogs among his people and of the proper treatment of them, but also for the creation of the warrior society of Dogs. The Hidatsa term, *macuka'ike*, can be translated as 'dog imitators,' i.e. those who behave like dogs. During their dances, the members of the society could freely indulge their passions in the dark, irrespective of ties of relationship and social rules, behaving thus like dogs, who mate indiscriminately (Lowie 1913b:284–285). This behavior corresponds to the animal-like, instinctive qualities expected from warriors. In battle, warriors should display fierceness and skills of a non-human nature, a power similar to that of the wolf, but they should, like domestic dogs, turn these qualities only against the enemy. While the warrior had to acquire the qualities of the animal predator in order to be effective in his actions against the enemy, he was also required to be able to control his own aggressive and destructive impulses for the benefit of the social group. The strength and power of the predator should be kept under control and adapted to the needs of society, whose well-being and continuity was to be placed above personal drives and raptures. In this sense, a warrior should be like a domestic "dog," ready to as-

Fig. 3 Seth Eastman, "Dog Dance of the Dahcotas," from Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, *Historical and Statistical Information* (Philadelphia 1851–1857), 2: plate 22.

sault and fight against enemies for the exclusive benefit of the social group to which he belonged.

The warrior's condition halfway between humanity and animality was indicated by the custom of the Hidatsa Dogs to behave "backwards," i.e. in a manner contrary to what was said to them: if they were told to flee, they would go forward against the enemy, and vice versa (Lowie 1913b:285; Mails 1973:167; Ray 1945:91ff.). Some of the members of the Dog society were called "real dogs" (*macukakati*), wore fox skins, and behaved contrarily: they walked about naked in winter and took meat from a boiling kettle with their bare hands (Lowie 1913b:288).

All the peculiarities of this military society were thus intimately connected with the metaphorical image of the warrior as a dog: the disregard for social and sexual rules; the "backward" behavior; the indifference against suffering heat or cold. Contrary behavior was evidently related to the contempt of danger and the unconcern about suffering and death, which were the peculiar qualities of the warrior. Among many Plains societies some warriors were designated as "fool" or "crazy" for the manner in which they confronted danger during a fight. On the other hand, the warrior's capacity to control his "craziness," to dominate the animal power which bursts out of him, was effectively expressed by the public demonstrations of mastering one's own body and the external sensations, so that the warrior was able to plunge his hands in boiling water without suffering any harm.

These same elements are found in the Crazy Men dance among the Arapaho. The participants wore various animal skins, among which were foxes, wolves, and two "holy wolves" or "medicine wolves," i.e. supernatural powers impersonated by the wolf. The dance consisted of an exhibition of paradoxical and nonsensical behavior, in particular doing the opposite of whatever they were asked to do. Furthermore, the Crazy Men danced back and forth through a fire until they had extinguished it completely by their trampling. The two society leaders were known as "White Fools," and were permitted every license because they were "feared" by the other members of the community (Mooney 1965:273; Mails 1973:199–200). It is likely that this fear was inspired by their condition as owners of a supernatural power, which could change their behavior into that of a wild animal. Among the various accomplishments undertaken by the "fool" dancers was that of running out of the village and reaching the camp of an allied tribe, such as the Cheyenne, where they would kill some dogs (Kroeber 1904:192). This was probably an imitation of a war raid, in which the dog acted as substitute for the enemy killed during a fight. The Gros Ventre Crazy dance reveals essentially the same characteristics (Mails 1973:218).

Membership in a society which takes its name from the dog was thus often related to behavior particularly loose and irrespective of moral and social norms, at least in a ceremonial context. Among the Blackfoot, the Dogs went about through the camp imitating dogs and taking food or whatever else they wished (Wissler 1913:395). Another warrior society, the Brave Dogs (or Crazy Dogs), performed a dance in which the members had their bodies painted with white clay to represent gray wolves, and would circle around the other dancers in imitation of wolves driving buffalo and closing in on them (Mails 1973:104). Once again, we find here emphasized the relationship between wolf and dog, connected to warrior symbolism and ceremonial behavior.

The Oglala had a warrior society named after the dog or the wolf (Wissler 1912:52); J. O. Dorsey (1894:478) attributed the name of this society to the wolf, affirming that all the wolf stories belonged to it. Its mythical originator was the wolf, and according to an informant the members were originally known as wolves or coyotes, but later the term was changed to dogs. Members painted their mouths with an horizontal red band which represented the bloody mouth of a feeding coyote. They had the privilege of entering any tipi, growling and acting like dogs, and taking any food they might desire (Wissler 1912:52ff.). A rigorously enforced taboo prohibited society members from the eating of dog meat. This rule was very likely connected with the metaphorical relationships linking men and dogs: Dog society members perceived themselves to be like dogs, so they refrained from eating what was permissible food for humans (Powers and Powers 1984:51). Similarly, the members of the Mandan Black Mouth or Soldiers society could punish and maltreat anyone who had shot a wolf (Lowie 1913b:313), while the members of the Kit-fox society of the Blackfoot taught their children never to harm a kit-fox (Mails 1973:113). But if a Black Mouth who had shot an enemy in battle saw a dog approaching the society's parade, he was permitted symbolically to refer to his deed by shooting the dog (Lowie 1913b:315). The prohibition of eating the dog and the license of killing the dog in a ceremonial situation were both equally appropriate means to emphasize the metaphorical relations existing between the warriors and the dogs.

Dog Feasts and Hot Dances

Since the dog is the animal closest to man and to human activities, its slaughtering always had a sacred meaning and great cultural moment (Powers and Powers 1984:48–57). In the Pawnee origin tale of the Young Dog society the hero obtains supernatural "power" from the dogs, whom

he had always treated with care and affection, and it was predicted to him that he should become a great warrior among his people. After having given him the instructions concerning dances and regalia of the new society, the dogs established the custom of killing a dog and consuming its meat during a solemn feast (Murie 1914:584–585), thus laying the basis for its own sacrifice. Among the Oglala, the ceremonial importance of the dog is based on its function in the emergence myth as an aspect of the culture hero; thus, the ritual eating of dog becomes part of a ceremonial reenactment of the cosmological order (Powers and Powers 1984:52).

The importance for the warrior of eating dog meat is illustrated by the Omaha society of the Oglala. Its members celebrated a feast in which the man who was to kill the dog told in a loud voice about the enemies he had killed, and then struck the animal. The choicest parts, that is, the head, feet, heart, liver, and front part of the breast, were offered to four men known for having killed an enemy in battle (Wissler 1912:50–51). Furthermore, the dog sacrifice and feast were generally associated with a dance complex widely diffused among Plains tribes, and variously named as Hot dance, Grass dance, or Omaha dance, whose original form probably derived from a warrior ceremony. Particular features of this dance complex were: walking barefoot over the embers of a hearth, "backward" behavior or the tricks of a society of "fools," and the ritual killing and eating of dogs. With the passage of time and the diffusion from one tribe to the other, the dance seems to have shed many of its ceremonial aspects, eventually evolving from a warrior's society into a social dance (Howard 1951:83). For the present purpose only the symbolical relationships of some of the components of the Grass dance among themselves and to the warrior symbolism just analyzed will be emphasized.

Among the Crow the Hot dance consisted essentially of the sacrifice of some dogs which were cooked and distributed to the participants, with particular regard for those who had distinguished themselves in battle (Lowie 1913a:202ff.). But the Hot dancers of other tribes also displayed their control over fire and a remarkable insensibility to pain. This feature linked the Hot dance to the various "contraries'" societies, whose members plunged their bare hands into a vessel of boiling water to extract pieces of meat, an act that was also accomplished by the Hidatsa Hot dancers (Lowie 1913b:252–253). Fire control and indifference to pain were features that denoted the "power" acquired by the person performing these actions, and publicly demonstrated the special condition he had attained.

The control over fire was a dramatic representation of a peculiarly human and cultural endowment, and featured as the very counterpart of the warrior's "wild" behavior inspired by the power of the wilderness. Here the fire seems to mediate between the "crazy" acts of the warriors and the highly cultural achievement of mastering the fire for its use in the human domain. We are reminded here of Lévi-Strauss's notion of the mediating role of fire between raw and cooked food in the Amerindian mythologies (Lévi-Strauss 1964). Displaying his power over fire, the Hot dancer expressed his affinity to the cultural sphere, and illustrated the "taming" of his ferocity and aggression under the control of the community's rules.

Among the Mandan, the Hot dance was performed by the Crazy Dog society; it included dancing barefoot on glowing embers and putting the hands into boiling water (Lowie 1913b:308). According to one of Wissler's informants, the Oglala once had an organization named after the dog, whose members were a sort of fools who performed to make people laugh, wearing absurd costumes and grotesquely painting themselves (Wissler 1912:54). Among the Crow, the Crazy Dog warrior talked "crosswise," expressing the opposite of his real intentions, and deliberately rushed into danger in battle seeking death (Lowie 1913a:194). The Crazy Dog was hence a warrior dominated by the frenzy and outburst of war, was the warrior possessed by the strength and fierceness of the wild predator, but uncontrolled by social rules. The Eastern Sioux (Dakota) "believed that 'bravery' could be exaggerated to the point of 'craziness,' when the man, through vanity, disregarded serious hazards for love of war honors" (Landes 1959:52). The "crazy" warrior was regarded as an animal turned wild. The Cheyenne saw a direct link between the Wolf and the Crazy Dog societies, since they affirmed that they originated from the fission of an older Wolf society (Llewellyn and Hoebel 1941:100; Mails 1973:320). When the Lakota warriors who had dreamed of a wolf or a coyote gave a feast, they required the presence of the ceremonial buffoon, the *heyoka* (Wissler 1912:90; Blish 1967:277). A similar symbolic association is revealed by the Okipa ceremony of the Mandan, where the Foolish One (*oxinh ede*) arrived from the prairie carrying a staff with a symbolic human head attached (Bowers 1950:145; Schlesier 1987:184); he had to be evicted from the village, since he was regarded as the incarnation of a maleficent spirit, and was connected with the ideas of death and of the enemies of the tribe.

In another work (Comba 1987:14ff.) I have emphasized how the cosmological systems of the Plains peoples were not only made up of a stable and ordered structure, but also included powers and beings who represented disorder and the dangerous and dreadful side of the universe. Warfare and the warrior's activities were potentially dangerous actions which could engender disorder and disruption of social life. As behavior dominated by craziness and destructive frenzy and inspired by the power of the wild predators, they were set apart from ordinary conduct. The ceremonial "buffoons," like the *heyoka* of the Lakota, were the ritual counterpart of the "crazy" warriors, at the same time providing a ritual means by which the aggressive and uncontrolled conduct could be appeased and reincorporated into the socially accepted rules.

The metaphoric animal image of the warrior caught by a wild frenzy was essentially that of a raw meat eater. The war paint of the warriors of the Blackfoot Brave Dog society was entirely red in the lower part of the face and was sometimes spoken of as "eating raw meat," because when a coyote has been eating, his mouth and nose are generally red with blood (Wissler 1913:398). A similar face painting was used by Oglala Dog society members, while the warriors of the Dog Company of the Ute imitated the animal from which they derived their name to the point of usually eating raw meat (Lowie 1915:823).

Thus, eating raw meat and behaving in a "crazy" manner were two modalities of the warrior's wild condition, and both were related to a non-human power that took the image of the wolf or that of the dog. The killing and eating of the dog were the ceremonial moments in which the two aspects of the metaphorical image of the warrior came into contact with one another. Here the "crazy" warrior, the raw meat eater, the ruthless destroyer gradually faded into the figure of the warrior who is able to master the fire, and who can

take under control his own impulses turning them to the benefit of the social group. Since the dog was regarded as the domestic animal *par excellence*, dog meat assumed a particular significance and was considered as "contrary" to other animal flesh (Schlesier 1987:99). Dog meat was regarded as a sort of "non-natural" food, a sacred substance which was used only on solemn and ceremonial occasions, being a food obtained from an animal strictly related to mankind and almost identified with man (Powers and Powers 1984:52). The "contrary" characteristics of the dog as food were linked with human "contraries" or "fools," such as the *hohnuhka* of the Cheyenne (Schlesier 1987:99) or the *heyoka* of the Lakota (Wissler 1912:84–85; Walker 1980:155ff.). Dog killing and eating was then another means of ritual mediation between the "craziness" of warriors and the normal social conduct. As a wild animal that overcomes its fear of the fire acquires power over it, so the fierce warrior who manages to control his own destructive powers can conform to the ideal behavior pattern enforced by the social ethics of his own society.

Conclusions

Some informants themselves recognized the importance of the social function of the warrior societies, enhancing fraternal relations among their members, contributing to the settlement of conflicts, and displaying exemplary braveness, generosity, and friendliness toward fellow members (Wissler 1912:20, 64–65; Provinse 1955; Bailey 1980). An older member of the Arikara Young Dog society addressed these words to the new members: "Then you must not get angry, and go towards the enemy" (Lowie 1915:658). Lowie, being uncertain of the significance of this speech, added a question mark after the word "angry." Based on our findings we can interpret this statement to express the opposition between aggressive behavior directed against the enemy and a dangerous behavior directed against the members of one's own group; a good warrior should not be "angry" or fierce but peaceful and friendly with his own fellow members.

The Plains warrior sought to acquire the powers of the wolf; though he did not transform himself into a wild animal, he acted *as though* he was a wild and powerful predator. This complex of ideas corresponds to the wolf symbolism. Yet men had to avoid to become *too* wild, lest they lose their humanity and endanger the continuity of normal social life. This danger was illustrated by the mythological character of the scalped man, frequent in Arikara and Pawnee folklore. He was considered to be no longer a human being, lived a solitary existence apart from human society, and was related to the wolf, whose skin often covered his disfigured head (Parks 1982). For this reason, the ferocity of the warrior had to be "tamed" and controlled through a set of symbolic and ritual acts. To this complex of ideas corresponds the symbolism of the dog sacrifice and of the fire-walking ceremony. The wolf and the dog were thus the central metaphorical images through which the warrior ideology was expressed.

Still another element to be added to this complex is crow symbolism. Societies named after the crow existed among the Blackfoot, Arikara, Hidatsa, Mandan, Oglala, Crow, and other groups. We have many reasons to suspect that the association of the crow with the warrior societies was not more casual than that of the wolf. The crow plays among the birds a role similar to that of the wolf among the terrestrial animals; as wolves and coyotes, crows are attracted by carrion, so they are constantly present on the scene when animals are killed by hunters or when men are slain in battle. The Oglala saw a relationship linking the crow to the wolf and to the owl: "The wolf knows everything, the crow can find dead things no matter where they are hidden, and the owl knows everything even if it is night" (Wissler 1912:58). These same three animals were related to *Waziya*, the North Wind, and then to winter, cold, and death (Walker 1980:125). Crow or raven and owl feathers were as much used in the regalia of the various warrior societies as was the wolf or coyote skin.

Among the Omaha, a man who had attained particular honors in warfare was entitled to wear an elaborate ornament known as the Crow belt, made of crow feathers, which was said to symbolize the birds fighting over the dead bodies of a battlefield. Crow and wolf were also associated with the mythical origin of the office of marshals and keepers of the order of the camp during the annual tribal hunt (Fletcher and La Flesche 1911:441–442).

Naturalists have observed the close association of these two animals; and one of them, L. D. Mech (cited in Lopez 1978:68), has ascertained a firm social attachment between crows and wolves. Therefore, the presence of the crow in the warrior symbolism of the Plains peoples was not a mere product of chance, but determined by a specific set of beliefs and metaphorical representations tightly connected with one another.

A Methodological Note

The conclusions to which this paper has led have been reached through a relatively uncommon procedure: not by means of a deep and detailed examination of a single cultural context, but by the comparative analysis of an entire set of historical cultures, each one having its own peculiarities and specificities; and by assembling various elements taken from different tribal groups, as if they were pieces of a puzzle confusedly scattered on the floor. Such an approach invites methodological criticism, especially with regard to the legitimacy of a cross-cultural survey of this kind. A few words may be in order in partial justification of this approach.

First of all, the disappearance of the social and cultural milieu of Plains war customs, resulting from the military defeat of the indigenous peoples and the forced abandonment of many fundamental aspects of their socio-economic organization, makes it difficult to reconstruct the symbolic meaning of the warrior societies in any other way than through a careful study of all the historical ethnographic data. Secondly, the scattered and fragmented character of this material can in part justify the procedure of tracing connections and parallels from one source to another. Furthermore, the comparative analysis reveals a substantial unity over the Plains area. A significant set of features was diffused among most of the Plains tribes, so that many correspondences and analogies go well beyond the geographical and linguistic boundaries; they testify to a rich and complex course of historical events, of communication and borrowings among different peoples—a history that has left no documents but the Native traditions themselves.

The present article is only a first attempt to delve into some aspects of a rich ideology, common to a number of Native cultures of North America, centered around the figure of the warrior

and his metaphorical relationships with the wolf and the dog. Obviously, other aspects of this topic require further research, wider perspectives, new insight, and probably some revisions and modifications of the points of view proposed in this essay.

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