

The *heyoka* Cult in Historical and Contemporary Oglala Sioux Society

THOMAS H. LEWIS

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1. Introduction

The *heyoka* "contrary" cult of the Oglala Dakota was a secret society with specific magical powers and social functions. It was a component of the religious system, performed a designated part of the ceremonial activities, and had a defined role in Oglala life. The "becoming *heyoka*" was involuntary, involving particular visions or dreams of the Thunder Beings, the terrifying, anti-natural powers, the god *Heyoka*, his representatives or totems, or dreams interpreted by the dreamer or his medicine-advisors as symbolic of those deities. During observations of the Oglala Sun Dance (in itself a revival of Sioux religion) in 1966 through 1971 identifiable remnants of *heyoka* behaviors were noted and recorded. These notes were augmented by interviews with *heyoka* and non-*heyoka* informants, and with religious leaders.

The contemporary manifestations of *heyoka* beliefs and behaviors are, like the Sun Dance itself, fragmented, diluted, altered, and mixed with aspects of secular festival activities. Inquiry about individual *heyoka* is impeded by the traditional requirement that members be anonymous. Some *heyoka* were openly hostile. Others vigorously avoided interviews or photographs. Few would allow themselves to be identified.