



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

MELUS



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Source: *MELUS*, Spring, 1989 - Spring, 1990, Vol. 16, No. 1, Folklore and Orature (Spring, 1989 - Spring, 1990), pp. 59-76

Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS)

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Words for the Sun Dance: Pete Catches, 1969

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In 1896 an unidentified Oglala Lakota holy man told James R. Walker that “the Sun Dance is the greatest ceremony that the Oglalas do. It is a sacred ceremony in which all the people have a part” (Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual* 181). It is significant that the holy man spoke in the present tense, since the Lakota (Teton Sioux) Sun Dance had been declared illegal by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1883. Neither the declaration by the Department of the Interior in 1904 banning the ceremony (Mails, *Sundancing* 3), nor the repeal of the ban by the Indian Religious Freedom Act, passed by Congress in 1978 (Mails, *Fools Crow* 266), had much impact on the ceremony’s actual practice (see Amiotte, “Lakota Sun Dance” 75 and Mails, *Fools Crow* 43). It flourished in secret performances through the decades until the unopposed but still illegal ceremony directed by Frank Fools Crow in 1952 (see Mails, *Fools Crow* 119).

The number of participants has grown over the last 40 years, culminating in the presence of approximately 200 dancers in the mystery circle of Fools Crow at Kyle, South Dakota during the 1980s. Fools Crow is the most well known of twentieth century Sun Dance intercessors, although the *Sicangu* (Brulé) spiritual leader, Bill Schweigman, was perhaps just as instrumental in the open restoration of the ceremony (Mails, *Sundancing* 45-47). Both men are now deceased. The somewhat younger Pete Catches, who danced in Sun Dances conducted by both Fools Crow and Schweigman, has since emerged as the foremost living spiritual leader among the Oglala and perhaps among the Lakota generally.

Like Fools Crow, Catches is renowned for his eloquence in Lakota. Although he is sophisticated and adept when speaking of spiritual matters in English, the Sun Dance is so sacred that Catches restricts its verbalizing to the language of its visionary origin. His 1969 Lakota language response to an interviewer’s request to explain ritual details does not attempt to be inclusive or definitive in the manner of ethnographic testimony. The Sun Dance has an abundance of complex

elements and actions, but Catches makes no effort to preserve them all in words. Instead, he intuitively selects some of the ceremony's strongest symbols, and with modulations of intensity in both vocabulary and voice conveys an essence rather than an account. His speech, though not simply analogous to Western forms, resembles literature more than ethnography in its elevation of metonymy and feeling over information and objectivity. But for us to appreciate the quality of this orature, it is necessary to briefly review its ritual context (augmented for those who wish to know more by the parenthetically cited sources).

General readers of such books as *Black Elk Speaks* and *The Sacred Pipe* may initially remember that the Sun Dance makes unusual physical demands—especially abstaining from food and water for four days and nights and, most strikingly for the outsider, the voluntary submission to having one's flesh pierced in one of four ordeals: 1) having two wooden pegs passed under the flesh of the chest and being attached to the tree in the center of the dance circle by ropes tied to these pegs; 2) having four to eight twenty-five pound buffalo skulls suspended from the flesh of one's back; 3) being suspended between four poles by ropes and pegs attached to the front and back of the shoulders; 4) dragging buffalo skulls on the ground on the outside of the circle by means of ropes tied to pegs passed under the flesh of one's back (Black Elk, *The Sacred Pipe* 94-96; Densmore 132-34; Walker, *Oglala Sun Dance* 116-19). In all these forms the ideal performance resulted in the dancer's spontaneously breaking loose due to his own exertions, or from the weight of the skulls on his body, depending on which ordeal he endured, though occasionally ritual measures of cutting an individual loose were required (Walker, *Oglala Sun Dance* 119).

Why would the majority of people in a society consider such a seemingly cruel spectacle to be their greatest ceremony? The answer lies at the heart of Lakota belief then and now. In the nineteenth century the Sun Dance occurred in mid-summer when separate communities and bands moved out on to the plains to hunt buffalo. They would gather in a large encampment for approximately two weeks at the time of the summer solstice before dispersing again to continue the hunt (Hassrick 281). The Sun Dance celebrated solidarity and renewal. Exogamous marriage practices made the Sun Dance camp a place where young men and women could meet those with whom they might legitimately come to live, not only as husband and wife but in the varied kinship relations that marriage would confer. In such subtle, scrupulously observed expressions of respect toward each of their relatives, the Lakota found their identity. In addition to regularly distinguishing specific relatives (a married man, for example, could neither address nor look at his wife's mother), people of all ages gathered once a year in such numbers as to symbolically enact the

endurance of the people through the generations (see Deloria, *Speaking of Indians* 17-26 and Hassrick 115-19).

Mature trust was centered in the willingness of all members of the tribe to live for the people rather than for themselves. In the sacred drama of the Sun Dance, young men gave the people the confidence necessary for creation and love by demonstrating how far they were willing to go to protect the nation. This intent held every dancer, although individual participants had special vows to fulfill for prayers answered as well as for future benefits, particularly an empowering vision to be received after the ceremony's conclusion. Of all Lakota sacred rites, only the Sun Dance included so many people as participants and witnesses. The extended rite, beginning eleven days before the actual dance (Walker, *Sun Dance* 94-119), was an embodiment of kinship and identity. Attendance as a form of participation has now come to have an additional importance "because the more people there are at a function, especially an Indian function, the less chance there is that the function will disappear" (Powers, *Yuwipi* 16).

Whether influenced by the Catholic side of Black Elk's thinking (Black Elk, *The Sixth Grandfather* 14) or the editing of Joseph Epes Brown, the description of the Sun Dance in *The Sacred Pipe* is highly Christianized in that the sacrifice is explained as primarily intended to redeem sin rather than to affirm the people's endurance on earth: "This dance, during the first night, represents the people in the darkness of ignorance; they were not yet worthy to meet the light of the Great Spirit which would shine upon them with the coming of the next day; first they must suffer and purify themselves before they could be worthy to be with *Wakan-Tanka*" (87-88). The account in *The Sacred Pipe* assumes the people wish to go to God (*Wakan Tanka*), but prayer songs transcribed elsewhere most frequently share the same, essential request: "*mitakuye ob/wani kte lo*" ('with my relatives I will live') as much before as after death (Around Him and White Hat, Sr. 24; Densmore 131).

For the one who prays to live with his relatives, both he and his relatives must endure. To live spiritually is not simply to breathe in health and prosperity but to maintain and generate a Lakota consciousness. The four cardinal Lakota virtues can still clear a circle of identifying potentiality: "*woohitika*" 'courage' (west), "*wawacintanka*" 'fortitude' (north), "*wacantognaka*" 'generosity' (east), and "*woksape*" 'wisdom' (south). It is obvious how these virtues were applied in a hunting society in which individuals could not physically survive without their *tiyošpaye* (community), band, or tribe. The warrior virtues expressed in the Sun Dance may be more necessary now than ever before, when self-respect is drained by an induced desire for the white man's money, status, or "education." Pete Catches has been a strong force in establishing the Sun Dance in its present strength and fre-

quency. Today twenty to thirty annual Sun Dances are held in various Lakota and Dakota communities—some, like Fools Crow's, including over 100 dancers, most of whom are pierced (Catches, Lecture, 1981).

Catches was born in Manderson, South Dakota (Black Elk's community) in 1913. Although his father, Paul Catches, was a medicine man, Pete was strongly imprinted by the all-encompassing indoctrination he received at the Holy Rosary Mission boarding school at Pine Ridge. In several lectures and interviews he offers a personal perspective on the attempt to erase Native culture throughout the country. In 1889-90 the government made a concerted effort to "make the Indian abandon his culture, his whole being, his worship, his means of prayer that connects him to the Great Mystery." Indian police went about "collecting pipes, destroying them, breaking the bowl and the stem, and throwing them into the fire" (Lecture 1981). As a result of this deliberate attempt to negate Indian traditions, part of the Indian religion "went underground" so that the sacred pipes and bundles were protected, though some of the knowledge was lost. But if it were not for the courageous efforts of the old men, it all would have been lost. In the mission boarding school in the early 1920s the priests "tried to curb everything that was Indian in us." If a boy "talked Indian," he was spanked and his mouth was washed out with soap, and if he did not understand an English command, "they took a stick and rammed it in your ear." Runaways were forced to wear girl's clothes and parade around the school with a broom (McGaa interview 1969).

Like many survivors of this well-intended brutality, Catches found Catholicism to be the only religious tradition that he knew well enough to express his spirituality. But after fulfilling a vow to serve for five years as a catechist, in 1959 he met Frank Good Lance, a renowned eagle medicine dreamer and healer (Zimmerly 52). He was awed by what Good Lance taught him, and, after having an enabling vision, he too came to practice the eagle way of healing. By 1968 he was fully embarked on becoming the highly respected *wicaša wakan* (sacred man) he is known to be throughout the Lakota reservations. Like Lame Deer, Black Elk, and Fools Crow he has become internationally known, largely through his presence in the popular autobiography of John (Fire) Lame Deer (Lame Deer and Erdoes 114-16, 126-28, 199-202). For his healing abilities he has been sought by people of all nationalities, though he never seeks patients, accepts fees, or allows publicity. For reservation people primarily, but not exclusively, he directs Vision Quests (see Amiotte, "Eagles Fly Over" 28-41), naming ceremonies, and, perhaps most importantly, Sun Dances.

In 1964 Catches carried on a Sun Dance in which he was the only dancer: "I started dancing before the sun came up and it was about

9:00 when I pierced which lasted till about 3:30 in the afternoon. During the later part of the evening towards 3:00, a great thunder storm was approaching in the west, and while I was under the tree attached to the rawhide thong, they gave me my pipe so I prayed to the Great Spirit to split this storm in two, and to the amazement of the people gathered there (they are full witnesses to this happening), this storm broke in two and one swerved to the south of us and the other half to the north of us" (McGaa interview 1969).

Through the intensity and sincerity of Catches and a handful of others, denigration of the people's "pagan" ways (Black Elk, *The Sixth Grandfather* 58-59) no longer threatens. But storms cannot be split by will power alone. Historically, the Sun Dance anticipates and integrates deprivation: "fasting is the real essence of this Sun Dance. That's the main point in really truly trying to observe the rituals of the Sun Dance. Make yourself suffer" (Zimmerly 56). In a long clarification Catches recalls how he turned his experiences as a fire fighter into a training ground for the *Hanbleceya* (Vision Quest): "I never drank from that canteen. I fasted, I thirsted, made myself thirst for the ordeal that was coming. And when they gave us a five minute break on the trail, everybody would sit down or lay down and stretch out. I would stand there with the tools on my shoulder" (Zimmerly 56). At the chow line he "would eat just part of it, give the rest to—well, my eyes tell me who needs it, give it to him or them you know. So I made myself hungry all the time, purposely. And go without water. At night I would just lay there and keep from sleeping whether I was tired or not. I made myself suffer. That's the old Indian way" (Zimmerly 57).

In all of his published interviews, Catches emphasizes the value of ritual deprivation as the cure for material or emotional deprivation. With wry humor he recalls his "inability" to appreciate certain religious pictures shown to him on a speaking engagement in Hawaii: "Oh they were chubby, they were fat, and I said I haven't seen a picture of a holy man yet. Show me a picture of a skinny man. That to me would be a holy man" (Lecture 1981). At the same time that Catches is quick to eschew ecumenical clichés, he is consistently gentle in voice and aspect. This balance between compassion and rigor, yin and yang, is the revealed outline of his message, especially when he contains it in his distinctively eloquent but unembellished oratory.

While Catches is an effective speaker in either English or Lakota, he declines to speak at length in English about the Sun Dance and in general about the other ceremonies. Ceremonies are carried on entirely in Lakota. In all spiritual expressions and in the Sun Dance oration presented here, Catches, like Black Elk and Fools Crow before him, reiterates that he is not an artful practitioner but a mediating voice of the spirits. In 1981 he spoke of his recent opportunity to educate many

young Lakota wishing to return to the ceremonies: "It is fortunate that we are able to teach...to say at least one word that will touch you. It isn't me. It's the pipe and the Great Spirit" (Lecture 1981). "Sometimes I give advice I know nothing about, but it comes flowing through me...I am just an instrument of the Great Spirit" (1976). In speaking of his successful healing ceremonies, Catches does not proclaim personal success so much as he confirms the vitality of Lakota culture. Protecting and practicing the ways is inseparable from ensuring the survival of the people. As a healer, Catches is a clear channel of benevolent influence sent by spirit-beings with whom the Lakota can establish kinship.

In the same way that healers realize supernatural protection for the whole people, not just those whom they cure, so Lakota warriors have always fought to manifest spiritual reality, as much as to fend off physical threat. Their acts of bravery and their survival depend upon each individual's alliance with a spirit-helper. In the 1969 South Dakota Oral History Center taped interview, Catches is asked to talk about the Sun Dance by Ed McGaa, the same warrior-pilot who is mentioned later in the speech as the quintessential Sun Dancer, leaving the circle for Vietnam to encounter life-threatening danger and returning to the people unharmed. Catches properly speaks only in Lakota about the most sacred, the "highest" Lakota ceremony, and while his delivery is intense, it is also respectful. Although the Sun Dance realizes suffering, courage, and endurance, these elements are not enlarged to dominate its mood. Rather, the Sun Dance affirms the people's ability to survive in their traditional symbolic consciousness where all necessary experience is transformed into celebration. While the Sun Dance combines all the sensory forms of sacred drama, Catches' oration temporarily contains the Sun Dance in language alone, at least for those unable to observe his gestures or facial expressions. In this sense Catches' transcribed words become written literature and can be valued on that basis.

This regard for language as a vehicle of mysterious wisdom was also shown 40 years earlier in Ella Deloria's transcription and translation of George Sword's account of the Sun Dance, originally written by him for Walker in 1917 (Deloria, "The Sun Dance" 354). Before the ceremony of selecting the Sun Dance tree, the "Iya Waliwala Omniciye" ('Gentle Speech Society') begin their supervision of the Sun Dance camp. The atmosphere created by those who prevent speech from being divisive and harmful suggests the degree to which the Lakota anticipated the potential impact of speech for destruction as well as life. But the voice repeatedly brings life throughout the ceremony both as physical food and awareness of sustaining relationships: "*Hotanin hibu we lo; Hotanin hibu we lo;*

Itetanin yan hibu we lo;/Nita makoce ki tatanka omaniwanka ge lo ("With voice sounding forth, I appear;/With face showing, I appear;/I cause the buffalo bull to roam over your land') (372, 398).

In the long descriptions of the four-day cycles that precede the actual dance, varied expressions contribute to the consistent purpose of giving the people confidence. The choosing and selection of the Sun Dance tree ritually transforms fear, since the tree is regarded as an enemy in the sacred drama of its capture. The scouts sent to find the tree report that they have found "a host of Crow Indians encamped" (368-69) rather than the sacred center of the Sun Dance. But to find a center of the nation's hoop that will firmly hold the people together, each individual must capture his fear and make an ally of it. Every part of human experience must be included. Courage cannot exist without fear, love cannot exist without suffering. When this is known, adversity becomes articulate, as an inevitable but potentially benevolent aspect of existence. First, the holy man asks forgiveness from the red woodpecker, the flicker, the robin, and the pileated woodpecker: "*hena can nitawapi na akan hokśicaliyakiyapi ki hokśila wašte wahehantu wan wauniciya c'e. Can nitawa owalota*" ("This is your tree and on it you rear your offspring well. A comely youth offers himself a sacrifice. I am borrowing your tree') (368, 397). With these words the spirits of the birds and the tree itself assume a supportive identity. The tree now lend its "voice": "*Anpecokaya wakan nawazin k'un./Oyate iyekiyaya wakan nawazin k'un./Hocokata wakan nawazin k'un*" ("Here at high noon stood I, holy;/Stood I, holy, recognizing people here and there;/In the center, stood I, holy') (370, 397). After the tree's spirit recognizes the people (accepts kinship with them), the young men who are to strike the tree "relate their war achievements." This manifestation of reinforcements "*maka śitomniyan*" ('all over the universe') emphasizes the symbolic meaning of speech in a ceremonial context.

Essential expressions consistently make the voice the instrument of nourishment and life, the appreciative sound of physical and cultural renewal. The voice making itself heard in this way is the living proof of the people's assured continuance. Pete Catches sends forth his voice in both Lakota and English for a traditional purpose. While his English is polished and metaphorical when he wishes it to be, he reserves detailed discussion of spiritual matters for the language in which the spirits first spoke to individual Lakota in visions. The following speech is given only in Lakota, and my translation attempts a relatively literal version of its meaning. Word choice is based directly on definitions in the Buechel dictionary, and no attempt has been made to reflect the aesthetic qualities of the original. The translation is meant only to supplement the subsequent analysis of rhetoric, affect, and nuance in the original.

The language of the original, though not sacred language *per se* (see Powers, *Sacred Language* 5), is limited to Lakota out of respect for the subject matter. Otherwise it contains no special terminology beyond the range of the average Lakota speaker or the Buechel dictionary. Nevertheless, it has a stylistic sophistication that might be generally imitated but not accurately conveyed, as is usual with translation. Catches once told me that only a small part of Lakota tradition has ever been revealed to people not specially initiated in its knowledge. I do not think it appropriate to offer an anglicized version of the spiritual feeling Catches prefers to contain in Lakota.

The translation, therefore, is intentionally plain, limited to meaning only, in contrast to the intensity of the original. To further avoid misleading imitation I have tried to approach the speech only through the language of literary criticism. Important cultural differences may be less likely to blur by translating conceptually to a non-Lakota form. The analysis following the translation shows how Catches uses the poetic and vocal technique of sacred orature to convey an impression of the Sun Dance different in quality from witnessed or paradigmatic reports (see Deloria, "The Sun Dance" 354-413, as well as her fictionalized description in *Waterlily* 113-34; Densmore 84-151; Dorsey 450-67; Mails, *Sundancing* 169-226; and Walker, *Oglala Sun Dance* 55-121).

LAKOTA TRANSCRIPTION

Peter Catches, "Sun Dance Speech," part of interview conducted by Ed McGaa, August 29, 1969. South Dakota Oral History Center tape, no. 459. Note that rhythmic pauses are marked by slashes.

Mitakuyepi, wi wanyang wacipi kin le, wicoh'an kin lila tanka wan. Lakota wocekiye kin he, oitanin kin can. Hanbleceyapi, eyin na, inikagapi, wo ins'eya mani tuktel unpi eyas ikce wicasa Wakan Tanka Tunkasila, cekiya. Eyas wi wanyang wacipi kin le ataya ihankeya, wankata, Lakota kin wocekiye Tunkasila Wakan Tanka ecetkiya kagapi he.

Yunkan owikan kin kah'nigapi na anpetu wi hel oyacin. Owikan kin ko kah'nigapi na hel can kah'nigapi can he Tatanka sina, mato sina, wase; ilowan kin na woeye na cekpiya winyan yapi, hel aicahyapi na ho i hinhanni ehantans waheceyayapi na wakanheja na tatiye kin le na i oyacin na can kin he kaowinga. Na wacekiya, Wakan Tanka cekiya. Can he k'un he Wakan Tanka napsilya u kin hel paslatin. He ikce wacasa hiyu na owanka ekta i kagan i kta canke Wakan Tanka kokijupi, cekiya le Wakan Tanka, lel i epazo ape. Azilye ikce wicasa onsikila cekiya he icu na owanka kagan i kte. Oheciya paslatin na toyapi kin

maka kin le opta wi cinca kin le ni unk unpi kta ca tatanka ota kte. Na wicoh'an ota wašte kte omaka wašte kte, otehike wanice kte. Canke heciya mañloke kagapi na wasna wan, na cannunpa wan heciya na i gla na wasna kin le un kitan k'un, tanyan makoce un na ayaštanpi. Hena un wozunte. Cannunpa opagi na hel wan egnaka kin he, un kitan k'un he i na wiconi ecetkiya i na ehake ocekiya pa. Ho na caegle yuwoslal icu yukeya wo i na, sapa i na, ša wan na, zi wan na, ska wan na otkeyapi. Yunkan hena ni tatiye kin le oyacin sapa kin le wiohpeyata tanyan waziya u keye kin heciyata han he wo i kin sapa kin he. He e kiya hecetkiya kiya keyapi. Na ša kin he waziyatakiya. Tatanka oyate. Ptehincala Cannunpa, na keye hecetkiya wo i ena luta he otkeyapi. Na zi kin he wi wanyang oyanke wani hinapeya. Owihanke wani hecetkiya wo i zi otkeyapi. Itokagata, wo i san wan otkeyapi. Tunkašila eya san wisanye hecetkiya otkeyapi.

Ho yunkan owanka kin le yuwinyeya el wi wanyang wacipi kin yamni wacipi kin, topa wacipi kin ehantans' eyaš lena hoyeiciyapi na kitakuye kujapi na inš kitakuye akicita hokšilapi na inš taku unhe heca wan inš icu yapi. Ca heon inikagapi na ini hinhanni hantaš, ha owanka ho cokata, ceya, heya, napsil kin owanka kagan, na otehika, na hel ceya yapi na pa yuhapi, peji hota owinja to yuha yapi; Na kitakuye hiyu na tatanka kin le ikce wicaša kin he u ni kukeya, he yuta na heye na hena kukeya, na he oti, na tatanka agli taku tona tacan ni kuwakiya ikce wicaša kin le inš'eya ilagya. Ceye i kilaye waci kiya.

Na Oglala Sioux kin lena ku owihanke kiya ohitike. Yunkan tatanka agligluza — ohitike;/wamakaškan otankaš — ohitike./Ho heci lena u wiyuhloka yuhapi. Na/owanka kin heciya/he Tatanka pa; wi yuha ikan/cannunpa opagi kin./Ho anpetu kin opta waci./Ho hece wi hi mahel iya waci,/na ho na kukeya pahlokapi./Na tehpi wikan ya najin aiya kaškeyapi,/cantku pahloka./Wana kan kici iya Tunkašila Wakan Tanka cekiyapi. Yukilaye hunhikiya otehike kin/okicize lehanl "Air Force," "Vietnam,"/mitakola/hekta le blokehan/"1969 Sun Dance,"/hehan icinunpa wi wanyang wacipi/Captain Eddie McGaa ciya/kaiglutokab pahloke./Itokab "war" ikce wicaša kin le wacekiye kin le waš'aka./"Vietnam" kin heci keye kinyanpi/"over a hundred missions,"/kinye./Wotanin wana ko yuha, "Pine Ridge medicine man" Frank Fools Crow can ca gincela./Otehike gi hel ohan eyaš wapiye zanniya kiya tahomni./Unki Tunkašila Wakan Tanka, cekiya na/ikce wicaša kiciza wasas inajin kta keye./Woicu tanka tak./Hohe blokehan canke aicañyapi heci./

Ho lecet u ikce wicaša tawa cekiyeye le tanka./Na el škatapi ca šni,/el otehike wanyanke./Taku kin tohanl kin wani eyaš tohanl wani heya Wakan Tanka etonwan wankal le e mani makiya ya. Wi wanyang wacipi kin le, wapatan tuktel. El wašicahowaya. Wicoie šikšice kahloke kin yunkan kiya na el kagan šni. He e, wicotan si wan šiyaka u hanpi

kin le. Ikce wicaša kin le Tunkašila Wakan Tanka cekiye kin le suta na ektonje šni./Yuha na unk unpi na/unkicizapi/hekta kin unk unpi lena/yuha wayaka icagapi i na inś ahan hena tokata keye yuha yapi kte./Wicoh'an kin le šni šni./Tokata tohanl maka wita kin le Tunkašila Wakan Tanka kagan šni hehan./Inś'eya ani ikce wicaša kin le maka kin le mani kta hecel ci cekiya mani kte lo. Pila maya.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

My relatives, this Sun Dance is a very great ceremony. That Lakota prayer is a day of honor. To perform the vision quest and the sweat lodge as long as they live, these are also ways to pray to *Wakan Tanka*, *Tunkašila*. But the Sun Dance is the greatest of all, the highest, of the Lakota prayers which they direct toward *Tunkašila Wakan Tanka*.

For this they select the ropes they will need on that day. They attach the selected ropes to the selected tree [exact repetition reflects Lakota usage], and they lay them down on a buffalo robe or a bear robe which is painted red; and pregnant women pass by, singing and speaking a prayer for generation; and then in the morning they gather to pray, and the children touch the tree at each direction as they walk around it. And they pray, to *Wakan Tanka* they pray. Then that tree, around which *Wakan Tanka* will cause them to dance, is here set in the ground. There the people come in and make the ground smooth, for they have come together to pray to *Wakan Tanka*, and they have been waiting to show themselves to *Wakan Tanka*. The people burn sweet grass, and they pray for the poor, and they clear a space on the ground. Here they drive in the stakes, which are painted blue, sunwise on the ground and they do this so that their children may live and there will be many buffalo. And we pray that we will have many good ceremonies, that we will have a good year, that we will not have hardships. Then they make a hole in the ground and point a piece of meat and a pipe toward it, and they offer a small piece of the meat in the right manner to the earth, and then they begin their fast. This is the correct way. A filled pipe is then set down here, and a few people come over and pray for lasting life, and finally they face the buffalo skulls and pray.

Ho, and the next step is to pound in the flag poles, each of which has its own flag; a black one, a red one, a yellow one, and a white one are hung there. These are placed at the directional points. The black one is at the west, and it is said it is good to go toward the north but to the black one they always return, it is said. The red one faces the north, in the direction of the buffalo nation. The calf pipe, it is said, comes from there where the red one is hung. And the yellow remains facing the sun where life appears. The dance ends here looking toward the sun where the yellow one hangs. At the south the white one is attached.

Toward that grandfather they hang the white one.

And then onto the ground come those who have been prepared to dance for three days or four days, and they are praying for their relatives who are sick, or who are soldier boys, or for whatever reason they have undertaken to dance. They have been purified in the sweat lodge on that morning, and then on the ground of the circle they lament, pray, and dance on the cleared ground and although it is hard, they are praying, they have the buffalo skull, and they have sage; and a family undertakes to bring a buffalo for the people to eat and they call over the poor people who live there, and they bring many things from the buffalo's body that the people can use to promote life. Then they return to the dance to pray.

And the Oglala Sioux who stay here until the end become brave over there [in Vietnam] through this. And from the buffalo robes that are brought out—they become brave; from the greatest of the animal spirits—they become brave. And here they bring the instruments for piercing. The robes have been laid on the ground, facing the buffalo skull. They offer the rope and a filled pipe to the sun. Then throughout the day they dance. In this way from sunrise to sunset they dance and they go humbly to be pierced. And they go over to a blanket and the ropes are tied and their chests are pierced. Now attached to the ropes, together they go praying to *Wakan Tanka*. They pray to complete their dangerous missions in the war. Before going to the current war, in the Air Force to Vietnam, my good friend, last summer in the 1969 Sun Dance at his second Sun Dance, Captain Eddie McGaa I am speaking of, before leaving for over there he was pierced. In the past before going to "war" [English word], the people prayed in this way for strength. In Vietnam the Air Force reported that he flew over 100 missions. Pine Ridge medicine man Frank Fools Crow was also present on that day to intercede on behalf of the sick. For sick people it was hard to be there but the healer returned them to well-being. We pray to *Tunkašila Wakan Tanka* that the people's soldiers will stand unharmed and cause their relatives to praise them for their bravery. This is carried out in the summer to perpetuate life.

Ho, in this way the people have this great prayer for their own. And they will not disrespect it when they witness this hard time here. Whatever happens at any time in their lives, *Wakan Tanka* watches over them as they walk the earth. This Sun Dance preserves the people wherever they are. In it some may be forced to cry out in pain, but bad words wound and therefore they do not allow that. That is why the whole group must use an eagle bone whistle throughout the dance. This people prays to *Tunkašila Wakan Tanka* enduringly and does not forget. Having this we will live, and those of us who are fighting will live, the POWS's will survive, and if we rely on those prayers, it is

promised that they will have their freedom. Do not extinguish this custom. Then as long as they gather together, *Tunkasila Wakan Tanka* will not abandon them. And as long as the people live to walk the earth, in this way I pray they will walk. Thank you.

ANALYSIS

Catches' reflections on the Sun Dance are neither extensive nor unusual from an ethnographic standpoint. He does not explain or describe *wi wanyang wacipi*—he reenacts it in words. The aspects he chooses to describe are not necessarily the most culturally important, nor do they chronologically match their place in the ceremonial sequence. Each detail mentioned combines to make a powerful presence accessible to the listeners. To establish this link between the source of the words and their object, the first implement of the ceremony mentioned is the dancer's rope, the symbol of sacrifice, the umbilical cord to the spirit world. After tying the ropes to the tree, the central source of strength and vision, the dancers (and the speaker) extend awareness to another source of life by laying the ropes down on a buffalo or bear robe, so that the courage and wisdom of these *wamakaśkan otankaś* (greatest of the animal spirits) may be absorbed by the ropes and flow into the dancers.

Since the ropes, buffalo robes, and all parts of a Sun Dance contribute to the transformation of the people, no single element is the most meaningful and therefore Catches describes the ceremony metonymically. The value is not in the quantity of objects or spectators, or in the degree of pain, or in any individual object or person but only in the power circulating through everyone and everything involved. When he says that the people "*cekiya le Wakan Tanka lel i epazo ape*" ('have been waiting to show themselves to *Wakan Tanka* in prayer') he again reflects on the varying ways to recreate one's existence, such as showing himself through this recorded interview. The expressions pray for an answer in the future but they also demonstrate spiritual presence in their own enactment. In becoming visible to *Wakan Tanka* they "*epazopi*" ('show') *Wakan Tanka* to themselves (cf. Sword's previously quoted song, "With voice sounding... With face showing," Deloria 398). The initial phase of prayer is represented by the preparation of the ground, a cleared circle evoking alert devotion.

The Sun Dance awakens everyone to a multiplicity of life-bringing symbols. Clearing the ground purifies and prepares by directing the mind to shut out all but the essentially valuable. Analogous acts of preparation include the fasting of the dancers and the burning away to nothing of the sweet grass by which growth is initiated (see Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual* on how the smoke of sweet grass is an offering

to secure the favor of good spirits 76-77). The emptiness created by shutting out destructive influences is then filled by the offering of "*wasna*" ('dried meat') to the earth and the feeding of the "poor" (a relatively symbolic term on a contemporary reservation with an 80% rate of unemployment). These processes of purification and transformation reflect the change to be experienced by the participants and are symbolized by painting the robes red. Red is the color of "*Wi*" ('the sun') (Walker, *Oglala Sun Dance* 81), the image of periodic growth in all aspects of the world including the human soul. Blue is the color of "*Škan*" ('the sky') (Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual* 115) which represents the synchronic eternity of the cycles, the mysterious dimension within which the drama eternally recurs. The stakes creating the circle therefore are blue, a circumference in which each generation will undergo inevitable suffering to perpetuate a fully human existence. Although the dance may be repeated many times in one's lifetime, the sky will never quench the fire of the sun, nor will the sun consume the human soul, which in remembering the blue circumference becomes a generative center.

The "*wakanheja*" ('children') to whom Catches refers twice are being created and not simply hoped for by the ceremony. The ritual of having them touch the tree on each side ensures that they will know a full cycle of growth. To confirm their ability to effect this, the people and the speaker then pray for "*wicohi'an ota wašte*" ('many good ceremonies'). A synthesizing object like the buffalo skull, source of all material needs but also a spirit of courage, health, fecundity, and generosity (Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual* 214), reminds us that the fundamental purpose is expressed in the phrase "*yanipi kte lo*" ('you will live') and that *Wakan Tanka* offers many sources of strength for those who ritually make reception possible. Catches implies that the people pray to be able to continue to pray, to give, and to love the world in which they live.

His phrasing in the enumeration of the flags communicates appreciation for the whole cycle. He does not elaborate on the connotations of each color and direction since it is unnecessary in a speech which is more expressive than descriptive. He does briefly mention that the people must always return to the black flag, which his audience will remember is the color of hardship and suffering, the black road (Black Elk, *The Sixth Grandfather* 118). The red flag is associated with the potentiality of the sun, the health and joy through which people may also expect to pass, though never to remain. Red also praises kinship and endurance, the "buffalo nation" (Walker, *Oglala Sun Dance* 114-15), while the yellow flag represents the sun as the mature power of creation.

While inevitable difficulty is ritually affirmed in the directional

circuits and in the ordeal aspect of the dance, those who participate are not passively resigned to suffering. As warriors they stand firmly against despair, keeping the people strong through their acts, perhaps more than by propitiation. The Lakota "live" in the courage and love shown so that regardless of specific physical results, "sickness" is healed and "*akicita hokšilapi*" ('soldier boys') endure by entering the *hocoka*, as they will then endure in Vietnam or anywhere else. Their power is explicitly defined as the courage of love from the buffalo skull and the protective shield of confidence from the sage which can identify and drive away obsessive fear for the self.

Courage and life are inseparable. One cannot "live" without the power radiating from the buffalo robes on which the men stand or lie to be pierced. Were it not for the robes and for all the living symbols of this ceremony, the pain of the piercing and of life itself might often be unbearable. The pipe is the most important mediating symbol between the spirit world and the people (Lame Deer 239-55; Black Elk, *The Sixth Grandfather* 81-82), and without it they would be no more than helpless children. The rope is similarly valuable and another gift to the sun. The rope represents the possibility of human beings deriving life from a sacred source but for this to occur, the binding cord must be continually reattached. Only the courage to suffer for another can confer a fully human existence on those who perform and empathically witness this. The length of the prayer, from sunrise to sunset, is also important. To live means to be conscious of the spiritual dimension for progressively longer periods of time as one matures: "*Ho anpetu kin opta waci. Ho heca wi hi pa mahel iya waci*" ('Then throughout the day they dance. In this way from sunrise to sunset they dance.')

Two examples demonstrate the effect of the Sun Dance on the mind and heart as well as on the physical world. The two most highly honored male contributors to the people in traditional Lakota culture are still the warrior and the *wicaša wakan* (sacred man). To raise the hearts of all his listeners, Catches praises the contributions of Captain Ed McGaa who was pierced in the Sun Dance of 1968, before a distinguished tour of duty with the Air Force in Vietnam where he flew over 100 missions. Then Frank Fools Crow's gifts of healing are recalled, and both McGaa and Fools Crow may be said to defend the *ikce wicaša* (grass roots people) in Catches' reverberating words as much as by their original acts. The sacrifice and the benefit lie in Catches' perpetuation of warriors and healers among his listeners by including the coups counted by McGaa and the voluntary depletion of *sicun* (acquired powers) to restore the well being of others by the elderly Fools Crow (see Powers, *Sacred Language* 117-18).

The last ritual object mentioned epitomizes this purposeful use of language. Profane exclamations or simple sounds of fear and anger

have the power to “wound” the courage of others. A disciplined reverence for language can keep a person from lurching into destructive acts. The eagle bone whistles blown by the dancers throughout the dance “speak” the power of the spotted eagle, *akicita* of the sun (Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual* 232), into the hearts of everyone present. Only the sounds of the Sun, heard in the cry of his favored bird and in the ceremonial songs, are permitted. Everything in the circle must defend, as the dancers centrally defend, the eyes, ears, and nerves of the people from contagious selfishness.

The conclusive promise of life and freedom ameliorates a contemporary threat. At the same time, the intensity of the Sun Dance and the speech about it have demonstrably manifested future blessings in the present. Those who fight will live, since to live is to fight. One may not win or even survive, the ceremony teaches us, yet one can only “live” in defending the people. McGaa, Fools Crow, and Catches are living reminders that even on a reservation, which may in places seem like a POW camp, people have always been free. The final example is directed to the specific crisis of Vietnam, but may also describe the imprisonment of the Lakota religion, officially repressed for 95 years. Because authentic and satisfying Sun Dances with piercing had been openly performed at Pine Ridge for only eleven years before this interview, the reference to the liberation of captives is both metaphorical and topical.

Just as Ed McGaa had so persistently driven out fear from the Sun Dance *hocoka* (circle), and later from the cockpit of his plane, so a small group of Lakota including Pete Catches have scrupulously remembered and performed the Sun Dance in opposition to the United States government, formidably convinced missionaries including Christian Lakota, and even the potentially disheartening scorn of some of their younger relatives (McGaa interview 1969). In his conclusion, Pete Catches promises with certainty: “*Tunkašila Wakan Tanka kagan śni hehan*” (‘*Tunkašila Wakan Tanka* will not abandon them’). If Catches’ prayer is heeded by traditional young people like McGaa, who conducted this interview, then the Sun Dance in varied forms of physical enactment and in words such as these for his *takuyepi* will endure while “*ani ikce wicaša ki le maka ki le mani kta*” (‘the people live to walk the earth’).

Catches is as accomplished in performance rhetoric as he is in symbolic selection. The rhythms of repetition in his language and the subtle modulations of intensity in his voice form a verbal microcosm of the dance itself. He begins evenly but soon begins to transmit rather than to explain the dance’s power through exact repetition and alliteration: “*Yunkan owikan kin kaĥnigapi na anpetu wi hel oyacin. Owikan kin ko kaĥnigapi na hel can kaĥnigapi can he*” (‘For this they select the

ropes they will need on that day. They attach the selected ropes to the selected tree'). The repetition corresponds to the importance of the ropes as the first symbolic implement transferred into these words, which also link speaker and listener to each other and to the spiritual presence radiating through the voice. Varying techniques of verbal repetition correspond to the many expressions deepening the dance itself. The pledgers dance and pray at each of the directions facing away from the tree; on the next and on succeeding rounds they pray facing the tree. At certain points they dance forward to the tree to embrace it and to pray. The singers repeat sacred songs in sequences throughout the dance; the singers must accept the pipe from each dancer before a rest period may begin, and so we might proceed at great length to merely outline repetitions in the Sun Dance.

In addition to alliteration and exact repetition, Catches repeats slightly varied short phrases in immediate succession such as "*wacekiye, Wakan Tanka cekiya*" ('they pray, to Wakan Tanka they pray,') and "*tatanka śina, mato śina*" ('buffalo robes, bear robes'). He also makes extensive use of parallelism to provide the feeling of continuation in the survival of the Sun Dance, the extension of relationships between participants, onlookers, families, nations and between human beings and spirits. A typical example is a long sentence of separate elements connected by *na* (and): "*Na wakanheja na tatiye kin le na i oiyacin na can ki he kaowinga. Na wacekiya, Wakan Tanka cekiya*" ('and the children touch the tree at each direction as they walk around it. And they pray, to Wakan Tanka they pray'). Or the parallelism may include shorter phrases of similar length and sound, united by a common word such as *kte* (will): "*Na wicoh'an ota wašte kte, omaka wašte kte, otehike wanice kte*" ('and we pray that we will have many good ceremonies, that we will have a good year, that we will not have hardships').

Near the end Catches again uses alliteration to convey the chronological survival of the Lakota through their sacred ceremonies: "*Taku kin tohanl kin wani eyaś tohanl wani heya Wakan Tanka etonwan wankal le e mani makiya ya. Wi wanyang wacipi kin le, wapatan tuktel. El waśicahowaya. Wicoie siksice kahloke kin yunkan kiya na el kagan śni*" ('Whatever happens at any time in their lives, Wakan Tanka watches over them as they walk the earth. The Sun Dance preserves the people wherever they are. In it, some may be forced to cry out in pain, but bad words wound and therefore they do not allow that'). The formal diction corresponds to his emphasis on the sound made by the Sun Dancers, the specific ceremonial element to which Catches refers.

Most of the speech is delivered at a high level of reverential concentration. Many phrases have a short powerful life ending in a whisper. This punctuates them with a *wakan* silence. The voice invigorates most of the time, but when it says the ordeal of the dance is

somewhat lessened because the pledgers have sage to rest on, the voice drops noticeably in pitch to become as soothing as the sage itself: “*peji hota owinja to yuha yapi*” (‘they have sage’). The voice retains this gentle, quiet tone through the description of the feeding of the poor, until beginning an abrupt ascent to describe the ability of the buffalo robe to impart courage through the emphatic repetition of “*ohitike*” (‘brave’).

For the most part, however, emphasis is not given by an increase in volume. The steadiness in volume represents the synchronic dimension of the dance while the nuances of affect express the dynamic evolution occurring in the participants. In order to honor McGaa and Fools Crow, Catches slows the tempo and employs short phrases and frequent pauses, changing the tone to mark off the extraordinary “*Yukilaye hunhikiya otehike...canke aicahiyapi heci*” (‘They pray to complete...to perpetuate life’).

After this step back to focus attention on heroic others, Catches resumes the role of participant in his concluding words. In a Sun Dance the greatest effort in the long “hard time” must be put forth not at but near the end, when the pierced dancers pull themselves free from the ropes. In this penultimate affirmation Catches is at his strongest. The word “*suta*” (‘enduringly’) is enhanced by an increase in volume in perhaps the only significant use of volume for emphasis in the speech. Then the tempo increases and the intensity builds until the end of the next-to-last sentence. At this point a somewhat longer than usual pause signals the approaching end, like the single hard drum beat several words (or vocables) before the end of a Lakota song:

Tunkašila Wakan Tanka cekiye kin le suta [louder] *na ektonje šni.* / [rhythmic pauses are marked by slashes] *yuha na unk unpi na/unkicizapi/hekta kin unk unpi lena/yuha wayaka icagapi i na inś ahan hena tokata keye yuha yapi kte.* / *Wicoh’an kin le šni šni* // [longer pause] *Tokata tohan! makawita kin le Tunkašila Wakan Tanka kagan šni hehan.* /

This people prays to *Tunkašila Wakan Tanka* enduringly and does not forget. Having this we will live, and those of us who are fighting will live, the POW’s will survive, and if we rely on those prayers, it is promised that they will have their freedom. Do not extinguish this custom. Then as long as they gather together, *Tunkašila Wakan Tanka* will not abandon them.

As in the last phrase of a song, the last line of the speech descends in pitch and volume to a whisper, but in this instance one of significantly less intensity. Like the implements of the Sun Dance itself, the voice and the language are ritually put away. The tone of the last sentence returns the speaker to individual limitations: “*Inś’eya ani ikce wicaša kin le maka le mani kta hecel ci cekiya mani kte lo. Pila Maya*” (‘And as long as

the people live to walk the earth, in this way I pray they will walk. Thank you'). For the first time he speaks in the first person, a necessary reminder to the listeners of an identity clearly distinct from the spirit world, although capable of containing and expressing its power.

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