

Introduction

The O'odham Mockingbird Texts, the Background, and the Argument

Preface

This book is about a combination of mythology, oratory, and ceremony practiced by the O'odham people or Pima-Papago of southern Arizona, U.S.A., and northern Sonora, Mexico. Outwardly the O'odham are not typical of North American Natives in that they lack grassy plains and high mesas or forests. The desert of the Tohono (desert) O'odham is mainly of scattered bushes on barren ground (except when it rains), and their mountains are like small islands rising above a dry sea. The two rivers of the Akimel (River) O'odham are thin ribbons in the desert and intermittently dry. The unreliable rains of these lands supported crops of corn, beans, and squash, a wild supply of cactus fruits, mesquite beans and greens, and game animals such as deer, rabbits, and wild pigs.

Seasonally nomadic except along the rivers, the indigenous O'odham lived in small villages with scattered brush-walled round houses and made baskets and pottery. Communal ceremonies centered around small, also brushed-walled, "rainhouses" and often united people from several villages. The River people (Pima) exchanged their more abundant crops for the fruits and seeds gathered by the Desert people (Papago). Ceremonies and oratory were also shared by the two people.

Since the O'odham land straddles the present border with Mexico, during the early periods of European contact the O'odham received and embraced considerable influences from Mexico. They incorporated square houses, church and feast house complexes as well as "town" meals for feasts based on beef and wheat flour. Like some other North America Natives the O'odham have a very rich full system of oral literature whose span includes

speeches, prose, and songs. The various ceremonies included dancing for rain, a harvest celebration, and a deer hunting ritual. The combination of the oral texts and the ceremonies reveals what the people thought of their desert homeland and shows them to be self-critical and proud.

The Two Speeches and the Plan to Explain Them

This book explains two versions of a ceremonial speech used by the O'odham, or Pima-Papago. One version, from the Pimas or Akimel O'odham, is extinct, the other, from the Papagos or Tohono O'odham, is still in use. The one still used, from the Papagos, tells how raucous, drunken people cause clouds to rise and come to them and explode with rain like so many vomiting drunks. The extinct speech tells a story of nearly silent and stately events: the calming of a heaving earth, the building of a house on the stilled land, the breathing out of smoke, and the coming of gentle rain. Both speeches were used for rain ceremonies, the extinct one being without and the living one with the making and drinking of a wine made from the fruits of the local giant cactus, the saguaro. Both feature mockingbirds (su:g), birds understood to be great imitators of the calls of other birds. Such calls and those of another mysterious being are about the only sounds mentioned in the extinct earth-calming speech. In that speech the mockingbirds' calls fail and then the mysterious being succeeds in quieting the planet. In the other raucous text, living mockingbirds carry the sounds of drunks to a place where winds live. There the sounds cause them to arise and carry clouds and rain to the drinkers.

One task of the book is to present the two speeches, and most particularly to come to terms with a passage in the quiet, earth-calming, Pima one. In 1902 the passage was translated as:

Yes, Black Mockingbird, if your plans for controlling the earth have failed, go far hence and leave the black winds and black clouds behind you. Your people will henceforth entreat your assistance from a distance. (Russell 1908, 348)

With this statement the god credited with first making the speech dismissed the Mockingbird who had volunteered to quiet the earth for him. I had long wondered whether the original Pima says exactly what the translation says. I wondered partly because this is one of the few Native American texts I am aware of in which a magic or spirit helper is dismissed for trying and failing to help someone. Also, the O'odhams who I know do not talk English in this way and neither do I. Therefore, does the original Pima actually say words

equivalent to “plans,” “control,” “leave behind,” and “entreat”—and if not, what *does* the Pima passage say; and why? Here to anticipate is my retranslation:

Yes, Black Mockingbird, we'll do this with your doings.

And you way-off can stay [with] your black wind, with your black cloud, and you can stand there [with them].

Your people sometimes will cry kinship to you, and you invisibly, helpfully will speak (or mimic), staying way-off.

My version, which I believe to be more accurate, makes three statements to the Mockingbird:

1. We will have further use for you.
2. You can keep your wind and cloud at a distance from us.
3. You may help us in the future (for example, with your wind and cloud).

The incorrect 1902 translation says:

1. Since you (bird) have failed (to calm the earth), you can go away from (not with) your winds.
2. You may help us in the future.

We can see that my translation is less curt than the original one. Also, mine leaves the bird in contact with wind and cloud while the other one separates them. Moreover, and going back to the original wordings, my version lacks the words *plans* and *control*. These are replaced by the vaguer word *doings*, and I will argue that mockingbirds never divulge that they *have* any plans, and moreover in the Papago speech, which I think is the source of the Pima one, mockingbirds do not exercise direct control over winds and clouds. These are important and delicate matters, but I would say that the original translation misconstrues the Pima and more generally the O'odham thinking on mockingbirds. Most important, but this is not a complaint about the earlier translation, in the context of the whole speech the Mockingbird has just failed to help humanity by calming the earth, a task which, as it happens, does not involve wind or cloud. Nor as I have just averred do mockingbirds have any essential connection with or control over winds and clouds. In the Papago text that we will concentrate on, the birds have a decisive *contingent* connection. The bird arouses wind and cloud by imitating the sounds of drunken humans. I believe the Pima orator knew

and alluded to this rain-bringing connection in his wind-and-cloud passage. Stimulating rain, then, is or *could* be the unstated future help of the Mockingbird. The original Pima text and both translations of it are all coy about this. But why was the orator coy? I think he was so because he wanted to *say* wind and cloud in his speech, and he even said “*your* clouds and winds” (in my improved translation—and no other O’odham oration says that), but he did not want to *use* wind and rain in his narrative as active properties of the bird. He did not deign to. He wanted to be different from the Papagos but to leave a sign, a tag, that he understood their idea.

I will be happy if five, and thrilled if fifty, O’odham speakers will agree with my slight revision in translating this passage, and also of course with my interpretation. Because of the interpretation, this book is more than a language lesson. First, it puts the two full texts in the context of the whole of O’odham oral literature. This is done by locating O’odham oratory in a larger system that includes oral prose and song. All three forms occur in the ceremonies in which our two speeches were used, and we will deal with the ceremonies, or the performance contexts of the speeches. We will also deal with the prose stories, or origin myths, of the ceremonies. The songs of the ceremonies and O’odham songs in general, I must say, will not be well attended to in this book. They must wait. Second, we will consider aspects of O’odham drinking: what the origin stories say about it, how the ceremonies enacted it, what the speeches say (and in the Pima case do not say) about it, and what the United States said about the ceremonies. Essentially, the United States said, “Stop them.” The ceremonies were banned in both communities, but earlier, longer, and with more force among the Pimas. I will say that this ban had something but not everything to do with the “dryness” or wineless nature of the Pima speech we are interested in, and likewise with the different evaluations of mockingbirds in the two speeches. Third, and just briefly in this introduction, we will discuss the status and prospects for O’odham language literacy, because I wish the O’odham as well as white people to read the speeches and, I hope, this entire book.

Now, if I may say what things readers who are not O’odham should find interesting in the book, or in other words what interested me the most in writing it, these are: to get close to the wordings and background of some intricately related texts; and to feel in the texts a force of intercommunity pride and mocking rivalry, a force that probably affected the texts before and surely did during and after the time of the ban on the wine ceremonies. The book presents three detailed bodies of fact, on the origin stories (chapter 2), the ceremonies (chapter 3), and the speeches (chapters 4 and 5). It explains the differences in all of these between the Pima and Papago communities as intentional and motivated by pride. This is a new kind of explanation and perhaps a new orchestration of detail—textual, mythic, and ceremonial—for

Native American studies. Pride in one's community is my interpretation of the wind and cloud in the above passage and of much else in the speeches and ceremonialism and myths of these communities. What one community has depends on its awareness of and desire to be different from what another community has. I call this difference "parody" and discuss this more in note 8.

Background: Oratory, Prose, and Song

I call the texts we will study *orations*. This section puts such texts in the context of the whole of O'dham oral literature. Literature for people without writing is stretches of language that are kept in memory for use and reuse. The O'dham have three forms of oral literature. Most familiar to the reading public are stories originally told face to face between individuals in a normal, quiet voice. I call this the prose of O'dham literature. Most of these more or less fixed and kept, and retold, prose texts tell of events of ancient times. These texts are generally called myths or legends, also oral traditions and oral histories, by whites. They tell of ancient times but they are not considered to be the exact language that was spoken in the ancient past. The preservation of exact language, including ancient language, is the task of the other kinds of O'dham literature, oratory and song. The latter also tell stories, and so they could be considered mythic if by that we mean "pertaining to and believed to be true of ancientness." The O'dham do not have one word, such as *mythic*, for all such texts. They call their prose texts "Ho'ok A:gida," "Witch Tellings," after the main character in one of them, an individual called "Ho'ok," which name the O'dham translate as "Witch" because she was a woman with claws who ate children. There was no other Ho'ok but this one, however, so the word is effectively a singular and proper name.

The second kind of O'dham oral literature, the oratory that includes our Mockingbird texts, is performed before large groups in outdoor public ceremonies. The vocabulary and pronunciation of these speeches are the same as in Witch Tellings, but the speeches—or orations—are delivered with a strong voice and in a cadence more measured than that of the prose texts. They are public addresses rather than private tellings. They are much shorter than the prose stories, being about ten minutes long as opposed to an hour or so. Also, the orations are more perfectly memorized than prose stories. Oratory is memorized at the level of the sentence, prose at the level of the episode. Consistent with the degree of memorization, the orations are not considered to be of the present speaker's own wording or diction. Rather, they are the wording of a past, often godly person. It follows that there is more artistic freedom in telling or retelling a prose story than in reciting an oration. The orations are sometimes called "Windy Talk," *S-hewelim*

Niok (Saxton, Saxton, and Enos 1983, 46), perhaps in reference both to the amount of breath needed to speak them out forcefully or perhaps because of the swishing or windy sound of some speakers' delivery. They are also called "talking-for-someone," "*niokculida*." This book then concentrates on a pair of orations used for rainmaking, one "wet" and one "dry."

A final difference between O'odham prose texts and orations is that the latter are virtually always spoken in the first person ("I") and they normally also include the words "you" and "we." These words are not interpreted as "I who now speak" and "you who now listen," but as "I's" and "you's" of a long ago occasion when the speech was first given. Prose texts also have first- and second-person language, but in these texts the "I's" refer (except in quotations) to the person who is telling the story. If we take all "I's" to refer to the author of a given text, then the author of an oration is an ancient person, and the author of prose is the present speaker.

The third kind of O'odham literature, "song," (*ne'i*), is shorter, more melodic, more poetic, and still more perfectly memorized than oratory. A song is about a minute long and is memorized at the level of the syllable, while orations, ten or so minutes long, are memorized at the level of the sentence. Songs are repeated many times in performance and are usually sung in series. Whole orations usually are not repeated in performance (frequently passages are, with minor changes, e.g., for colors or cardinal directions); however, like songs orations are usually performed in series. Song series generally tell or suggest a single unfolding story, and sometimes serial orations are portions of an unfolding ritual drama. One of the two orations we treat is part of such a series given at the Santa Rosa rainmaking ceremony, the other is not. Both kinds of text, song and oratory, can be used in the same ceremony. Also, both songs and orations are included in the mainly prose Ho-ok A:gida or "Witch Tellings" of ancient times. When included, the songs and orations are taken to be the actual words of ancient characters, quite like Western historians' quotations from primary sources. Therefore, the O'odham have what they consider to be historical documents, that is, songs and orations. The prose tellings are not documents (although they may be "documented" by our recording them) they are equivalent to a historian's authored narrative.¹

Traditionally, of course, the O'odham did not write. Interestingly, their word for "to read," which now nearly all of them do in English, is "*niokculid*," the same word that designates an oration. The word's parts can be analyzed as follows: "*niok*" means "to talk in words"; "to speak a language"; "*-cul-*" is a modification of "*-cud*," meaning "to cause"; "*-id*" means "for someone"; and "*-a*" means "the act of doing that." Thus, "*niokculid* /to make a speech" and "*niokculid* /to read" both mean, at bottom, "to give articulate voice to a fixed piece of language": to give voice, thanks to one's memory on the one hand and to one's knowledge of letters on the other.

Why not call all three kinds of oral literature *niokculida*? Since they all depend on memory and are all articulated in the O’odham language, are they not all “readings” from memory? The fact is, they are not all so called by the O’odham. The Witch Tellings are not, I suggest, because they are memorized at the level of the episode, not that of the sentence. Thus, the diction—the actual *talk*—of one such is only a paraphrase of the talk of another. Why then are songs not referred to as readings, since they are memorized even more scrupulously than orations? I suggest they are not because they are sung and not talked. To sing is one thing in O’odham, to talk is another.² We can now state exactly what an O’odham *niokculida* is: a reproduction of *talk*, normal speech. Thus, when O’odham read a song they voice the “notes” and as well as the words of a song, the voicing of that reading is called “*singing* for someone” (*neoculida*), not “*talking*”: song reading as distinct from talk reading.

All strictly oral peoples, without writing, must have, or have had, the equivalent to the O’odham span of literary forms. It is a pity that the full span is rarely discussed in a single scholarly study. This book focuses on two texts from the middle of the span, two *niokculid* or orations. The designation “oration” is somewhat arbitrary. Texts of the same nature may also be called prayers³ or chants or speeches. In any case one purpose of this book is to describe how our two orated texts are supplemented by texts of prose and song and are connected with a rainmaking ceremony. We will discuss as many prose texts as can be found on the origin of rain ceremonies and on the role of mockingbirds at the time of creation. There will be less to say about songs because there are few songs that treat either of those topics—although one song on mockingbirds will be key in justifying our interpretation of the meaning of the bird in the orations.

In centering this book on orations it may seem that we are treating a kind of text and a literature that counts for less than prose, the medium of history, or song, the medium of art. I would not diminish those two, but I point out that for the O’odham oratory is the medium in which the gods’ speech is preserved. No doubt their gods also spoke in prose, but that speech is not preserved. They also sang, and that is preserved, but, let us say, they spoke at greater length in oratory. Therefore, oratory holds a more important place in the O’odham economy of literature than it does in our—my (white)—own.

Background: Drinking

Another purpose of this book is to give an instance of traditional Native American drinking, an instance that the people—the O’odham—believe originated among themselves in ancient times. The O’odham are not unique

in having had their own way of making and using liquor at the time of the European arrival (in the 1600s for them). So did many other peoples of the U. S. Southwest and Mesoamerica make wine at least for private celebrations (see Driver 1969, ch. 7 and maps 12, 41, and 42). Some archaeologists believe that ancient corn, the Central and North American food staple, was initially domesticated to produce a fermented drink. What distinguishes the O'dham from the other peoples, and what this book is about, is their making and drinking of wine to improve the world by bringing rain.

Nearly everyone agrees that Native America in general now has a large problem with liquor bought in town and manufactured by whites. The O'dham think they were better off before, and I agree. Now, however, they have white peoples' liquor and also modern technology and representative constitutional government, a national library, a community college, and many other things the old-timers did not dream of. They need to understand all of that, and yet, if I may say so, an understanding of their transition from the old drinking to the new is as important as any of it. This book makes the barest beginning on this by assembling the materials on the old manner of drinking.

All O'dham now distinguish between cactus wine, which they think was meant for their use in bringing rain, and "white-people wine" (*milgan nawait*—the word here covers the whole range of white-made liquid intoxicants), which they blame for alcoholism (or as they call it *i'idag*, "drinking-way" or "drinking as a way of life")⁴ and its bad effects. I would like to say that the old way of wine drinking was a sacrament, but I am not sure this is true. If we define sacrament more or less as Catholics do, as an outward sign (the serving and drinking of cactus wine in this case) of an inward coming of spiritual grace, then the Wine Drinks Ceremonies (*Nawait I'ita*), as they call them, were not sacraments. The O'dham had and have their own sacraments by that definition. They blow sacramentally over sick persons as a form of prayer and to aid the heart of the patient; and they give new-born babies and pubescent girls a mixture of white clay and water to drink as a prayer and an aid to the heart. People today explain these actions as acts that help the soul.⁵ The stories of the rain ceremony's origin do not say that it was intended by a god for the O'dham, or that a god or other ancient person instructed the people in how to make wine or how to pray for rain with their drinking. Nor has anyone said to me that something special happens to the heart or soul when the serving and drinking are done.

After the *cactus* originated, the stories say that the people (and talking animals among them) hit upon the idea of making wine by adding water to the pulp of its fruit. They thought that turning to wine was a virtue of the fruit of the saguaro cactus. They did not, so far as I know, consider fermentation to be a process distinct from rotting or souring; it is just that

cactus fruits and a few other things “rot” into a wine which then rather speedily sours. Furthermore, their most widely spread story on the origin of cactus-and-wine does not say that the first Wine Drinks were meant to make rain. All that happens is that the drinkers get drunk and act badly. Yet at the end they do not swear off the ceremony. Eventually, although no story tells how, the ceremony simply took root as a way to get rain.

Drunkenness is not described by the O’odham as a heightened state of the soul or consciousness. People dream and get visions without drinking, and no story says, and I have not heard, that drinking makes dreams or visionary experiences better, brighter, or more memorable. As we will see, the wine-free rain ceremonial speech is cosmic, and it seems to come from a private vision or dream. The implication is that drinking did not help to produce that brilliant speech.

I conclude that the O’odham took a prosaic attitude toward their traditional drinking. They did it, they enjoyed it, it made and still makes them misbehave, and it is not the unique means to anything good—except that, as the “wet” speech affirms, people eventually learned that the sounds of their drunk singing when transmitted by mockingbirds can be rewarded with rain. It is a most modest claim. I will say this in favor of the old way of drinking. When people drink cactus wine they sing their old-style songs, which they trace back to someone’s dreaming: cactus wine drinking brings out those songs. When people drink American or Mexican liquor they seem to get drunk faster and in any case they are less inclined to sing the old songs. I cannot say that old-time drinking still brings, or ever brought, fresh songs to people, but it does bring out old songs, which I consider to be a great virtue. It makes people who are inclined to sing, sing.

Background: Rain Ceremonies and the Law

The speech that does not mention drinking describes a liquorless rain ceremony and dates from 1902, twelve years after Wine Drinks were banned by the U.S. Superintendent of the community where the speech was recorded. This was the community of Gila River Pimas, now called Akimel O’odham (“River People”). The speech that extols drinking was recorded in 1970 and is still in use. It comes from a geographically larger but less densely inhabited community, formerly called the Papagos, now Tohono O’odham (“Desert People”). The Papagos had no U.S. Superintendent until 1915. When one came, he too abolished the ceremonies, around 1920, but the Papago reservation had too many remote places for the ban to be completely enforced.

By the middle of the 1930s the federal policies on native ceremonies had changed from suppression to support, or at least toleration, and both

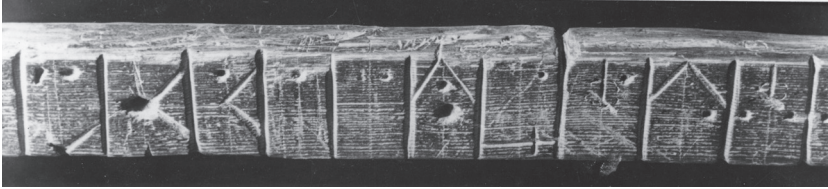


Figure 2. Calendar Stick Fragment. The first to the right entry mentions the Feast at Kaic Muc (Santa Rosa) Village in the year 1899. The carver is Jose Maria from the village of Silnakia. (Arizona Historical Society 7192)

communities had self-governments with the sovereign power to reinstate wine ceremonies. The Tohono O'odham formally legalized theirs, although their remoter villages probably had never stopped them. The Akimel O'odham did not revive theirs, perhaps because they had been longer and more persuasively suppressed. A good portion of the Pimas had converted to Presbyterianism by the 1920s. These people, unlike the then Catholic Pima minority, rejected Wine Drinks and most of O'odham religion. The proportion of Catholics to Presbyterians was the reverse with the Papagos. Perhaps this is why the Papagos did and the Pimas did not revive the ceremony.

During the ban, both communities produced martyrs for the old religion, specifically for the Wine Drinks. In each case the martyrs died a very few years after the inception of the ban. In each case a village chief was arrested for organizing a Sit and Drink event (see chapter 3, this is a wine-serving ceremony in which oratory is used), and the arrested person died in the reservation jail within the year. We know of these jailings from "calendar stick" records kept in each community. The sticks were the long, flat, thin ribs of the saguaro cactus, the source, too, of the fruits for the wine. Onto the stick the owner would carve symbols, and sometimes apply colors, to stand for one or two events of the year. A mature stick, one perhaps made and added to by two or three individuals in succession, could cover a hundred years, each year separated from its neighbors by a year-marking line carved across the stick like the inch marks on a measuring tape. The stories were recited in prose, some stories being as long as a short Witch Telling tale. In the calendar stick tellings, however, unlike the Witch Tellings, the characters were precisely located in space and genealogy, and the events if not seen by the teller were considered to be reliable or at least disputable. This was the temporal territory of oral *history* as distinct from oral *tradition* (see Mason 2006, for this distinction).

Bernard Fontana lists all of the several O'odham calendar sticks that were recited for whites and published by them in Russell (1908, reedition

of 1975, xi–xii). None was taken down in the O’odham language and only one of them, taken by Ruth Underhill from a Papago, has many long stories. She and the teller, Jose Santos of San Havier village, gave two weeks to the telling and writing down. The printed text is forty-four pages long (Underhill 1938). From the Pimas of 1902 Frank Russell took down three still rather good recitations totaling twenty-eight pages (1908, 38–66).

Here is Santos’s entry, which is brief, for 1922–23. (The O’odham year begins in July.) First is a terse account of a man dying from encountering a ghost while cutting wood, then, equally terse, comes this:

The head singer and Smoke Keeper [village chief] was taken by a man at the new agency [seat of the U.S. Superintendent]. The police took him for making liquor. [I assume because of his office that he made it for a Wine Drinks.] He died in jail. The People [the O’odham] got his body. (Underhill 1938, 62)

The account in Russell, from Blackwater village, was given by Juan Thomas (identified in Russell 1908, 60). The arrested Pima chief lived at a different village, at the opposite, west end of the Gila River community:

The chief at Gila Crossing favored tizwin [cactus wine] drinking and resisted the progress that was beginning to manifest itself. He died in jail at Sacaton [the agency headquarters; I assume he was arrested for his attitude or practice]. (1908, 63)

Here is the Pima calendar stick entry of 1889–1890 on the abolition of Wine Drinks, from the Salt River village stick kept by a man named Owl Ears:

In a tizwin drink at Salt River Santco was killed. Soon afterwards another general debauch resulted in the death of Hitiraki. These events caused the order prohibiting the Pimas from making tizwin. (Russell 1908, 61)

The three Pima sticks are thicker in entries on Wine Drink troubles than the Papago one. All of the sticks dwell mainly on Apache fighting from the sticks’ beginning (1833–34 for two of the Pima, 1851–52 for the other; 1839–1840 for the Papago) until about 1875, when the Apaches were effectively pacified by the U.S. Army with O’odham and Maricopa Indians’ help. In the Pima sticks the years 1875 to 1890 mark a change from Apache deaths to deaths at Wine Drinks—actually Wine Drinks deaths supplemented by deaths involving White-man’s liquor. The last Pima mention of a Wine

Drinks death is from 1895–96, and this was at a Papago not a Pima village. In the same year the successor chief at Gila Crossing “fell dead in the prisoner’s chair when on trial at Sacaton [agency headquarters] for selling whiskey” (Russell 1908, 64), a martyr we may say to American-style mercenary bootleg drinking.

Impressionistically then, the Pimas had more violence at Wine Drinks than the Papagos. (The latter, however, had more medicine men killed for practicing sorcery.) Here are the important points: first, both communities suffered the loss of a village chief in the defense of Wine Drinks. Second, neither calendar recitation states the chief’s name. I suspect this is not because the narrator did not know the name, but because of reluctance to say the name of the dead, especially of those dead who might come back to haunt one (Underhill comments on this: 1938, 17). Last, there seemed to be no O’odham memory of either chief in 2005. At least, no Pima whom I asked had heard of the Gila Crossing chief and Bernard Fontana, who has lived at San Havier since 1956, says he has not heard anyone mention the jailed chief of 1922. Nor has a little searching resulted in a white record of the jailings and deaths. Calendar sticks stopped being made or added to in the 1930s or ’40s. People began marking printed American calendars instead.⁶

A Possible History

As we have seen, Pimas and Papagos differ in the events of their contacts with whites. The two Mockingbird speeches are also different and so it appears were the two communities’ ideas on the origin of Wine Drinks and their rainmaking ceremonies. I say “appears” because the available facts point that way, but the facts are skimpy, especially about Pima wine and rain ceremonies. Chapter 2 treats what is known about the origin stories and chapter 3 does the same for the ceremonies. The alleged (by me) difference is: the Papagos embraced Wine Drinks and the Pimas looked askance on them.

Of course, the differences are not surprising considering the government suppression and the inverse proportions of Christian conversion. What is challenging is, first, to find the evidence for the differences between the speeches, and then decide whether they are real and are adequately expressed by the words *embraced* and *askance*; and second, to state the cause for the difference. On this second matter I argue that the suppression and conversion were *a* cause, but another was that each community desired to be and took pleasure in being different from the other, and different not only relative to geography (desert versus river) but also, and especially, relative to character, precisely to embrace drinking or to look askance at it. The pleasure in that

difference, I argue, could have preceded the suppression and differential Christian conversion. Therefore, the difference could have existed in 1850, and not only in 1902 when Frank Russell took down the speech and sketched the “dry” Pima rainmaking ceremony.

Here are the weaknesses of the argument: we have no facts of any sort from 1850; and the evidence on the post-suppression, dry Pima rain ceremony is poor. All that is solid therefore are the two texts (subjects of chapter 4) and to a lesser extent the origin stories (chapter 2), which is why this book is best taken as a study of literature. What might seem the airiest of topics—the contents of two ceremonial speeches—is the most solid part of the argument.

On Literacy

This book is meant to promote O’odham language literacy. In the 1960s and ’70s, Native American communities such as the Pima/Akimel O. and the Papago/Tohono O. began to staff and govern their own schools and other public services. Sometimes the communities officially designated themselves “nations” (thus the Tohono O’odham Nation), sometimes “communities” (the Akimel O’odham are components of two such, the Gila River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community and the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community). Sometimes they remained self-designated “tribes,” but whatever the name, they all became bureaucratically self-governing.

As those changes took place many whites, including myself, expected that Native American communities would take up literacy in their own languages. Not only would the languages continue to be spoken, but newspapers, essays, governmental resolutions, internal contracts, personal letters, and of course poetry would be written in them. In fact, as of now (2007) the languages are less spoken and the writings are skimpy. Of the O’odham I would guess that only a tenth or less of the people born since 1970 speak the language fluently, and at the other extreme the many people over fifty years old who do speak the language fluently complain, for example, that they themselves don’t know the word for “elbow.” They feel that English has captured their thinking on elbows and much else.

A language suffers when people do not address each other in it. The most important addressings from the point of view of language health are parents-to-children. Second are children-to-children, and third come adults-to-adults. This book will not save the language. It is in English and is addressed to adults. Still, the central objects of the book are texts in O’odham, and I have taken care to aid in the reading of those texts. The inspiration is simple: since nearly all O’odham are literate in English and

nearly none are literate in O'odham, it makes sense to approach the reading of O'odham by means of passages, not isolated words, written in English. It also makes sense that some of the passages should be whole texts that the old people held dear.

The texts here, of course, are the rain ceremony speeches. I am sure that the Pima text that was published in 1908 is now gone from the live memory of its community. I am also confident that no O'odham has ever read through and understood the Pima it was published in. Anyone who has tried, I imagine, would say after a few minutes, "This must be a very old speech because it has words that we no longer use." In fact, most of the words are still in use, but they are spelled in ways that make them difficult to recognize. If I am correct that this text is illegible as it stands, then it is a good one to put into more legible form and to use for practice in reading. The other text is still in use, or at least it was used somewhat recently in Santa Rosa and is still securely memorized. That text was published by some Papagos and me in 1980 and it was republished by Ofelia Zepeda in 1982. Some O'odhams have surely read it, but none has discussed reading it with me.

The speeches are difficult to memorize and the right to use them belongs to particular families. Other people can hear them and can ask the speaker about them, but it is considered impolite for a person unrelated to the speaker to try to learn, much less to use, them. Therefore, if this book succeeds in making the O'odham texts more readable than before, could that success spread the speeches farther than the past privileged families would wish? If the families are worried about a reader of this book learning to recite the texts perfectly, I say they should not worry. I don't believe I have written the O'odham perfectly, so whoever reads the texts aloud is warned that Thin Leather and Jose Moreno, the two original speakers, might be very dissatisfied with the result. I believe, however, that the writings will enable fluent speakers of O'odham to come close to Thin Leather and Moreno, especially if the reader commits the recitation to memory and has heard some actual oratory. If the families do not want anyone not of their choosing to know anything about the texts, I say that the O'odham texts and their translations are already published and so this book only improves upon what is already available. Of course, I hope the families, whoever they are, for I do not know if Thin Leather has descendants, will like to read the texts and will be pleased with this book.

Now the technicalities: my method for coordinating passages of English and O'odham is easy to state but difficult, because ultimately arbitrary, to execute: write the O'odham first, and punctuate it with periods, question marks, exclamation points (as needed), commas, and dashes. Do not use colons or semicolons, because colons are used in the present word spelling method to show vowel length and semicolons look too much like colons. Then translate the O'odham into English phrase by phrase, a phrase being

the amount of O'odham included between punctuation marks. Use exactly the same punctuation marks for the English translation, so that exactly the same stream of phrases is marked off in each language.

There is no one best, agreed-upon way to punctuate the phrases of O'odham. Linguists have theories of the underlying or deep structures of O'odham phrasing, but those theories do not enable one to mark the flow of O'odham speech in any uniquely best way. Therefore, there is latitude, and thus arbitrariness, in the punctuation and also the phrasing of O'odham. Of course, the same is true of English: punctuation is variable and is a matter of style.

Also, although the procedure for matching English to O'odham is simple, there is no easy to state method for rendering O'odham words. This is true of punctuation as was just stated, and it is also true of dividing words, that is, of deciding where words start and stop. What to write as a word is more settled for writers of English than for little-written O'odham. Finally, and worst of all, there is great uncertainty on how to spell O'odham words. This is partly because the people of the different communities and villages pronounce their words differently (these are dialect differences); and partly because some words sound one way when said carefully in isolation and another way when said in rapid speech; and partly because the different spellers of O'odham have used different letters of the alphabet to write what they might (or might not) agree is the same sound.

Most of the O'odham who have written their language were trained by whites, each of whom has had different ideas on word rendering. The one point that they all agree on is that O'odham should *not* be written by spelling O'odham syllables in the same way the syllables would be spelled in English. Rather, all of the writers, but in different ways, have used an orthography, that is, a sound-writing alphabet, that they believed was capable of representing *all* human language sounds.

To spell English speech in any of those systems makes English illegible to most people who read English. This is because the ordinary spelling of English was not arrived at rationally, as were the various scientific orthographies. The ordinary spelling of English is inconsistent: the same sound is written in various ways, while the scientific method aspires to one and only one letter for a given sound, whenever and wherever that sound occurs. A few O'odham have learned to write their language according to each of the three or four different scientific orthographies that were developed for that purpose. Also, a few O'odham have developed their own ways to spell words in their language. All of the homemade ways that I am aware of are varieties of the same thing. They spell the syllables of O'odham the same as the syllables are spelled in English, and they put a dash between each syllable of a word. Thus, the O'odham word for "water" would be written "shoo-dack," while the same word is written in the orthography that I use as "su:dagi." Or, an important O'odham god's name would be written "Ee-ee-toy," while

the scientific spelling is “Titoi.” We can call this syllable-writing practice “the peoples’” spelling, as opposed to “the scientific” one.

No linguist has accepted the peoples’ spelling, for the good reason that any language will have some (perhaps only a few) sounds that English does not have, and so words with those sounds cannot be spelled in “the peoples’” fashion. The advantage of the scientific way is that all sounds can be spelled (or represented) by it. The disadvantage is that so far as I know no people with a previously unwritten language has become literate through the use of a scientific orthography.

I suspect that whenever writing has spread from the literate speakers of one language to the not-yet-literate speakers of another, some of the “starting-up” people have already become literate in the “patron” language, and these people use the spellings (or ideograms, etc) of the patron language as the base for their own writing. The result will be some form of “peoples’ way.” And, I believe about the O’odham and suspect about other languages, that the linguists who have developed the scientific orthographies have cared too little about the tribal peoples’ “peoples’ ways” of writing. The result with the O’odham, as I can confidently attest, is that thousands of O’odham can read and write English, and yet they cannot begin to read, and therefore cannot write, a text written in the scientific orthography.

This book’s contribution to literacy is to use punctuation to show (1) the boundaries of phrases that are written, alas, in scientific O’odham, and (2) to make those phrases correspond to the phrases of English translation. I demur from trying to spell in “peoples’ O’odham” partly because there truly are O’odham sounds that English lacks, and partly out of respect for the Tohono O’odham Nation, which has adopted the orthography, developed by Kenneth Hale, that is used in this book. The Akimel O’odham to my knowledge have not formally adopted an orthography.

On Translation

A final point, which is more a necessity than a purpose: translation. Many linguists and anthropologists, including Russell, give both word-for-word and free, therefore double, translations. The translations in this book are tied to phrases, which practice seems to me to make a good compromise between readability (low in word-for-word translation) and literalness (low in free translation). Thus, the translations in this book are my best guess as to how to express in English what is said in a corresponding, identically punctuated, phrase of O’odham.⁷ The result is a single rather than a double translation, and the single translation is quite clearly spaced and aligned via columns to the written O’odham original. I must point out, too, that I hyphenate English

words, for example “medicine-man,” when the hyphenated result stands for a single O’odham word (*ma:kai* in this instance).

Here is a simple and important way in which such translations are better than those of the “classic” period of Native American ethnography, 1895–1920. Into this period, of course, falls Russell’s presentation of Thin Leather. Russell and his colleagues habitually made and published double translations, one word-for-word and presented in “interlinear” format, that is, English equivalents were written immediately below each native word, and one “free,” in quite legible English. These were placed separately on each page. My method takes a middle path, namely, the path of the phrase. The result is at once legible (unlike most word-for-word translations) and precise (tied to phrases). This is basically the same “facing page” or “facing column” format that is norm for translating modern poetry, except those translations rarely coordinate their punctuation, therefore their phrasing. My method feels agreeably humane. The double format, I feel, treats texts inhumanely, and haughtily, as if one cannot catch the details (as the interlinear does) and flow (as the free does) in one English product. I feel one can do that, even though the flow may be twisty.

The speeches are difficult for O’odhams to understand, and still more so for me. I may be mistaken in major as well as minor points. Therefore, I ask the reader’s patience in the few places where I enter into the meanings of particular passages or words. We have already seen the most important of them, on the dismissal of the Mockingbird, and there will be a rather few more.

The Historical Argument, in Brief

1. It is as difficult to imagine wine ceremonies without speeches on wine as to imagine Christian communion services without speeches about the body (bread) and blood (wine) of Christ. Therefore, since we know the Pimas had wine ceremonies, we must suppose they had ceremonial speeches on wine. Those speeches are lost, but there is a trace of them in the speech we are studying, in fact in the dismissal passage quoted at the start of this chapter. This is the association of mockingbirds with wind and clouds, a gratuitous association in that the birds’ actions, in that speech, have nothing to do with wind and clouds.
2. The lost speeches would therefore be like those of the Papagos in associating the bird with wind and clouds. But that

association is coincidental if not gratuitous in this sense: in the Papago Mockingbird speeches, the bird does not own or control winds or clouds. It only carries the sounds of human drunkenness to wind and cloud. As I read the speeches, it is the bird's imitation of drunks, not its control of winds, that brings wind and cloud to the humans.

3. I venture but do not know for certain that no people has ever viewed mockingbirds as intrinsically rainy or as masters of wind and clouds. But many, even all, peoples have noted the birds' imitativeness. The Papagos put this property to the unique use of mediating, by carrying sounds, from drunk humans to wind, clouds, and rain. That the Pimas retain the wind and cloud part while dropping the drunkenness part implies that their speech is derived from, or was once similar to, the Papago ones. We specialize in one Papago speech but will refer to a few known others.
4. In several respects the Pima and Papago speeches we will study are good counters to each other. The Pima speech is cosmic while the other is earthy; the one is serene where the other is ecstatic; one alludes to the story of creation where the other does not; and one disparages the services of mockingbirds where the other praises them. Therefore, not just in the wind and cloud retention but from beginning to end I consider the Pima speech to be a masterful parody of the Papago version. It burlesques, but it does so in a manner that makes the Pimas seem more dignified than the Papagos.⁸
5. Common to both speeches is the idea that the bird imitates—and perhaps only imitates—other creatures. Therefore, what the bird says is not original. There is evidence from these and other O'odham (Pima-Papago) texts that this is the reason why the Pimas disparaged the bird, a criticism by them that extends to all of the world's ritualized speech and canned sentiments. The extension commends the speeches to everyone. Whoever is not interested in rain, drinking, or the history of the the Pima-Papagos may still take note of the Mockingbird as a symbols of canned sentiments, or of what we call in English "parroting." I admire the O'odham for having a liturgy about something very important to them (rain) that contains a critique of all liturgy.
6. I would like to think that the wish for a reworking in the direction of self-dignity was sufficient to produce the Pima

speech even before the United States imposed its ban on their wine ceremonies. Lacking any texts from the Pima “wet period,” however, I cannot prove that they did this, in other words, that the prime Pima speech dates from the years 1850 or 1800. Nor can I guess how they would have distinguished themselves at this time from the Papagos. I merely expect that they would have had some clever rejoinder to what they knew the Papagos were doing.

More about the O’odham

Finally, here are some additional brief remarks and references on the history and civilization of the O’odham. As noted in the preface, outwardly the O’odham are not distinctive among Native Americans. This is in part because they live in a desert environment, in part because their material culture is spare, and in part because they remodeled their domestic and communal architecture to resemble that of a Mexican town.

The reason for that change is that the traditional O’odham territory straddles the present (since 1850) U.S.-Mexican border. There was equal O’odham land on both sides. What is now the U.S. side received little Spanish or Mexican settlement during those periods of O’odham history (1694–1850), but what is on the Mexican side received a considerable amount. “Civilization” to the O’odham therefore meant “Mexico.” Until the United States came, however, that civilization and the O’odham themselves were sorely pressed by Apaches. That pressure ended soon after the United States arrived on the scene.

From 1850 to 1950 the O’odham portion of Mexico, in the state of Sonora, developed with little regard for O’odham rights, while the territory in the United States developed with O’odham rights protected through the creation of four Indian reservations (Sells, or Papago; Ak Chin, also Papago; and Gila River and Salt River, a combination of Pimas and Maricopas, the last being linguistically unrelated to the O’odham). Two U.S. cities, Tucson and Phoenix, and various towns were also built in former O’odham territory (Tucson, however, was established during the Spanish period). It was in those hundred years that the O’odham in the United States, aided by O’odham immigrants from the Mexican side, converted to Mexican-style architecture.

Square adobe houses replaced the old round, brush-walled ones. Each house or house cluster had a corral because cattle raising, as in Sonora, became a focus for, especially, men’s life. And each village built at least one “church complex,” consisting of a chapel; a dance ground as in Mexico; a covered shelter for a Mexican-style orchestra (guitars, violin, drum, accordion, and later, saxophone); and a feast house where free Mexican-style “town”

meals (chili with meat, yeast bread, coffee, dessert) were served to all who attended a fiesta. This complex supplemented the brush-walled “round house” or “rainhouse” where the traditional communal ceremonial life was centered. The point is, the O’odham civilized themselves. The fiestas were for *them*. They served each other the town meals, centered on beef, in a round robin of village fiestas.

The book is about the native combination of mythology, oratory, and ceremony. This combination will show the poetic concern of these people for their arid environment and their pride in their spoken literature. If I may say so, their Mexican side was not so exciting poetically. It was a folk religion of Mexican songs and prayers. I should say, finally, that their Mexican side is now waning, more so, perhaps, than the Native side. Few O’odham in the United States now speak Spanish; the cowboy life has given way to jobs in schools, clinics, and casinos; and O’odham Christianity is now more integrated with that of the United States, both Catholic and Protestant, than with that of Mexico. U.S.-based missions of both kinds began coming to them in the 1880s. The fiestas persist, especially among the Papagos, and so do the Spanish language hymns, sung by the laity.

In my opinion these are the most useful books to read on the O’odham: Frank Russell’s *The Pima Indians* (1902, prominently used in the present book); Alice Joseph’s, Jane Chesky’s, and Rosamond Spicer’s *The Desert People* (1949), on the Papagos, Edward Spicer’s *Cycles of Conquest* (1962), on the O’odham and several other peoples, in fact all of the native peoples, of Arizona, Sonora, New Mexico, and Chihuahua, Mexico; Bernard Fontana’s *Of Earth and Little Rain* (1989), and Ruth Underhill’s *Papago Indian Religion*, on the Papagos; and Byrd Baylor’s *Yes Is Better Than No* (1972), a work of fiction on the Papagos. An important book about Pima folk ornithology was published by Amadeo Rea in 2007 after this manuscript was completed. The book has a comprehensive section on Pima beliefs about mockingbirds, including songs and sections of the myths (Rea 2007). Scores more books have been written on the O’odham, and some of those will be drawn upon in the present book; but the above are the best general references. As for the present book, it is specialized and not general. I hope it will be received as an intricate and readable and unusually good work in Native American literary criticism, specifically in the criticism of an “old-times” form of literature.