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The Tradition of Song Renewal Among the Pueblo Indians of North America¹

PAUL HUMPHREYS

The musical tradition of the Pueblo Indians calls for both the performance and the "renewal" of songs. While some of the dance ceremonials do not change from year to year, occasions that call for new songs, and even new dances, are likely to outnumber those for which songs are prescribed.² Despite ongoing transformation, there is a continuity of symbolism in the costumes, patterns, words, melodies, instruments, and spirit that make up the dance ceremonials. It is a symbolism durably evolved through centuries alongside dominant Pueblo concerns of farming, hunting, and religious activities.

These activities have been traditionally carried on in a fascinating, varied, and arid landscape. The need for sufficient rainfall is a concern of Pueblo inhabitants even today. Pueblo culture has evolved in a way, however, that provides this concern with adequate expression. The dances, for which the songs are made and sung, represent a fulfillment of man's responsibility as a participant in the cosmos. Ancestor spirits demonstrate their appreciation for this observance by coming to attend. They delight in the impersonations of themselves that are performed by the dancers to the accompaniment of new songs. There is great emphasis on the propriety of these dance ceremonials for the ancestor-spirits, or *katsina*, are understood to visit the village as clouds—clouds that bring rain, rain that brings an abundance of crops and game.

Beyond propriety, there is a sense of joy and wonder in these observances. Simon Ortiz, an American poet, born in Acoma Pueblo, sings, as a poet sings, of this:

Today the Katzina come.
The Dancing prayers.
Many times, the Katzina.
The dancing prayers.

Again and Again,
the earth is new again
They come, listen, listen.

O great joy, they come.
The plants with bells.
The stones with voices.³

An air of joy similar to the Anglo-American "Christmas Spirit" prevails in anticipation of the so-called Night Dances at Zuni. In attending one evening's performance of these dances in the winter of 1981, I could not help but be caught up in the quiet excitement of the event. An outsider to the tradition, I nevertheless knew with everyone else present that the songs to which the dancers would perform would be new.

New songs may originate in a number of different ways. Old songs within the repertoire of one singing group may be recomposed; new texts may be worked into old or new melodies; songs from outside the repertoire may be borrowed and adapted; a song may even be renewed by recalling it after a lapse of years and performing it again, a kind of renewal by selective repetition. The first of these methods was confirmed by Maria LaVigna⁴ at San Juan Pueblo. She represented the sections of older songs with objects on a table and then rearranged various of these objects to illustrate the process of composition. An older song-maker acknowledged the aptness of her analogy.

The documentation of new texts is particularly rich for Zuni and illustrates the second method mentioned above. Barbara Tedlock⁵ is among those to have most recently recorded and transcribed Katcina Dance Songs whose texts leave no doubt that the songs are new; one is an allegorical narrative of the first U.S. moonshoot in 1969. Of particular interest to students of ethnology, perhaps, is a text recorded by Ruth Bunzel in the 1930s. It describes the activities of a pipe-smoking ethnomusicologist, George Herzog, carrying out field work in Zuni at the time:

Hither at the north edge of the world
Smoke Youth
Delights in the songs of the masked gods.
So he says,
Therefore he goes about
Greeting all the rainmakers with fair words.⁶

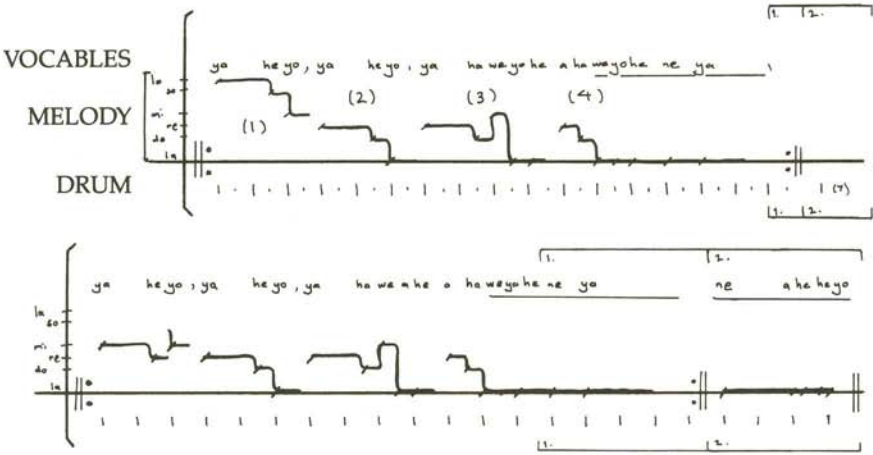
Several of the song processes I observed in the course of field work at Jemez Pueblo illustrate the adaptation of borrowed melodies and renewal by selective repetition. My method there, as in other Pueblos, was to learn the songs that a research co-worker had recorded for me and then to ask questions about the structure of the songs and about how they were composed; a great deal of my time in the field was spent alone with drum and cassette recorder. After having learned a fair number of songs, I ventured to compose one myself and then ask my Jemez co-worker to comment on the effort. The song was intentionally simple and exemplifies the two-verse, two-chorus structure that is a common form for Pueblo songs made to accompany dances of Plains origin.⁷ In the accompanying graph transcription, line one represents the verse, line two, the chorus (see figure 1).⁸

My co-worker asked that I record this song for him. Then at his leisure, he would be able to "put it into" several other songs. By my next visit he had made and recorded a new Arrow Dance Song, a new, and decidedly more correct, Buffalo Dance Song, and a new Eagle Dance Song—all from the melody of my original Buffalo Dance Song. There was little difficulty in this since melody is conceptually distinct from words and vocables in Pueblo song practice. My co-worker once said of melody, "It's like a shoelace—you can use it to lace up different shoes."

In the new Arrow Dance Song, the transformation of my original melody appears to be fascinating (see Figure 2). Not only has the "mode" shifted, but each of my simple descending groups one and two (indicated in Figure 1) appear to have been expanded through a partial retracing of steps in the course of melodic descent in the first and second groups of the new song (indicated in Figure 2). The third melodic group in the new song might be an elision of my original groups three and four. Any conclusions based upon this analysis, however, must be viewed in the light of a special circumstance. As it turned out, my friend had recorded this Arrow Dance Song along with a number of other songs about a month earlier. By the time of the visit in

ORIGINAL BUFFALO DANCE SONG* (Figure 1)

Graph Transcription:



Staff Transcription



*Fixed phrase introduction is omitted in this transcription.
N. B. Graph transcriptions are provided to facilitate comparative analysis.

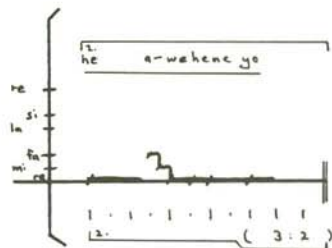
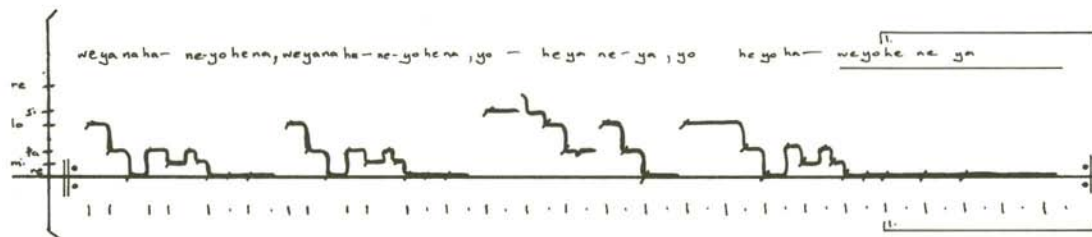
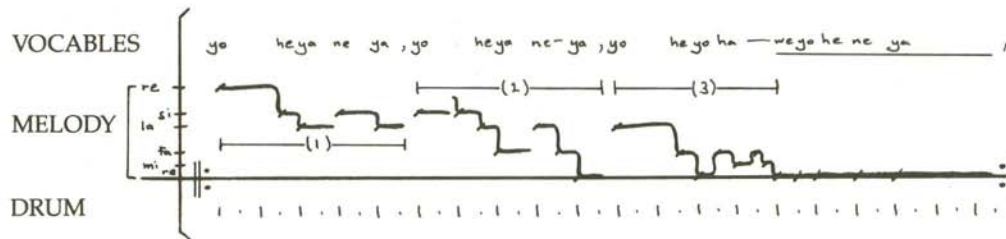
question, I had learned most of these songs and so recognized this one immediately. Why should he now offer the same song as a reworking of my Buffalo Dance Song?

We find that a song need not be drastically transformed in order to be considered new. For one Christmas Buffalo Entrance Song someone used the tune of "Bicycle Built for Two" because the day-to-day life name of the Buffalo Maiden for that year was Daisy. The next year, the pun-like humor of this song was alive enough to substitute the name of the new Buffalo Maiden for "Daisy" in the song.⁹ A song might be renewed simply by singing it again if it has not been used for several years. Thus innovation is not held to be synonymous with renewal. A song that can sound *fresh* is new enough. Presumably a singer comes to be regarded as a song-maker if the songs he offers, usually to the kiva group in its preparation for a ceremonial occasion, have this quality of freshness. For this reason, systematic comparison of a new song with old songs is not necessary, nor is it practical since an older song-maker may know hundreds of songs. My Buffalo Dance Song obviously suggested the Arrow Dance Song that my co-worker had sung the month before; this song was fresh enough in his mind's ear for him to tell me, and I think sincerely, that this was the same melody I had given him, now made into an Arrow Dance Song.

Similarities between the old and new Buffalo Dance Songs stand out clearly (see Figure 3). In the verse of each (first lines of Figure 1 and Figure 3), there are four small tone groups and a fixed-phrase pattern (underlined vocables in the transcription). The new song diverges from the old in the third tone group, however. Along with an accenting of the initial tone, the new melody descends to the ground tone without the upward inflection of the original group three. This upward leap, quitted by an even greater leap down is uncharacteristic of Pueblo melodies and has, in consequence, been replaced in the new song with an accented repetition of the second group. The new song also differs from the old in the fourth group; it could be considered yet another repetition of the second group or, perhaps, a prolongation of the original group four. In the second statement of the verse (second line of Figure 3), changes occur both in the texture of drum accompaniment and in the fixed-phrase ending. These changes contrast with the original song in which first and second statements of the verse are identical. A halving of pulse density and simplification of the ending formula are character-

NEW ARROW DANCE SONG* (Figure 2)

Graph Transcription:



*As in Figure 1.

NEW ARROW DANCE SONG (Figure 2, continued)

Staff Transcription:

VOCABLES yo he ya ne ya , yo - he ya - ne - ya , yo he ya ha - we ya he ne ya ,

MELODY

DRUM

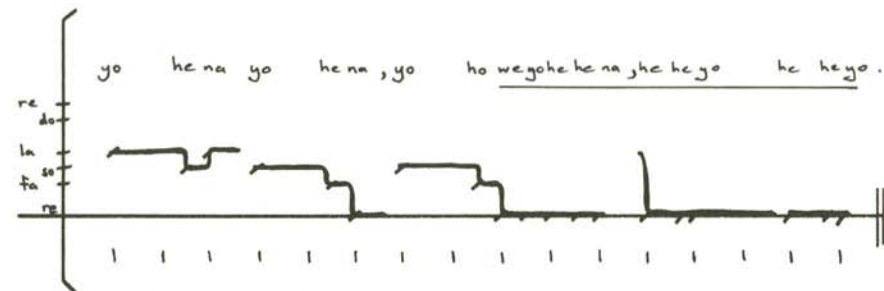
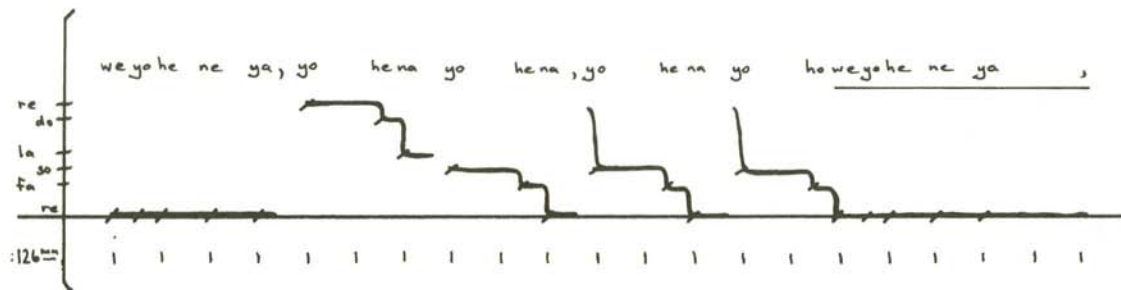
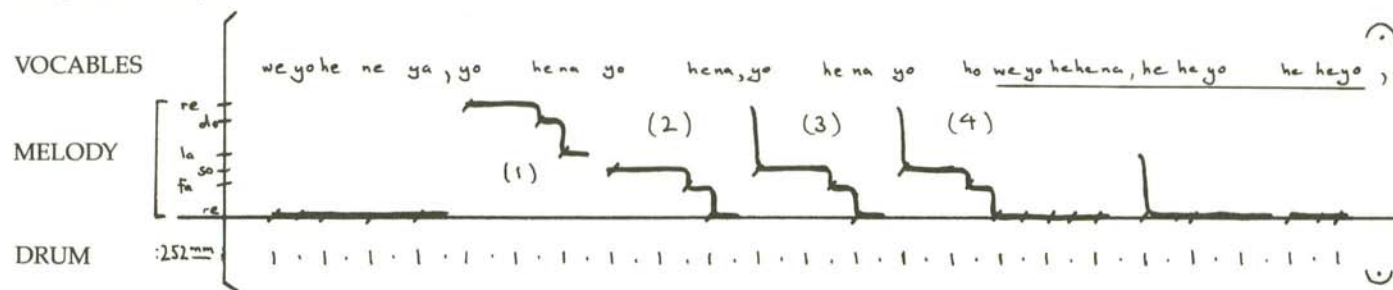
we ya na ha - ne - yo he na , we ya na ha - ne - yo he na , yo - he ya - ne - ya , yo he ya ha - we ya he ne ya ,

he a - we ha ne yo

(3:2)

NEW BUFFALO DANCE SONG (Figure 3)

Graph Transcription:



N. B. "mm" indicates pulses per minute.

NEW BUFFALO DANCE SONG (Figure 3, continued)

Staff Transcription:

VOCABLES wego he ne ya, yo hena yo hena, yo hena yo howegohena, he hego he hego,

MELODY

DRUM

wego he ne ya, yo hena yo hena, yo hena yo howegohena, he hego

yo hena yo hena, yo howegohena, he hego

istic at this point in a Jemez Buffalo Song. Also characteristic is a kind of "tightening up" of borrowed melodies put into this form. As a result, we see one tone group has been left out in the chorus of the new song (presumably the one with those ungainly leaps). A final observation on structure: the chorus of the new Buffalo Dance Song (third line of Figure 3) is not repeated.

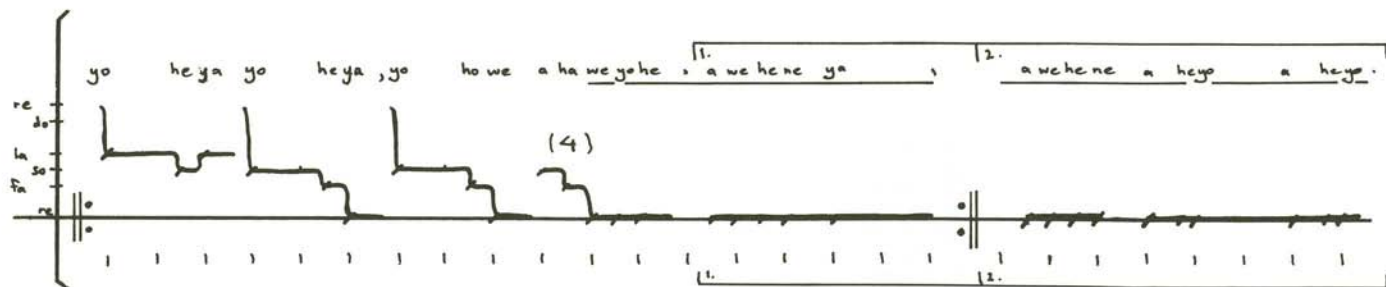
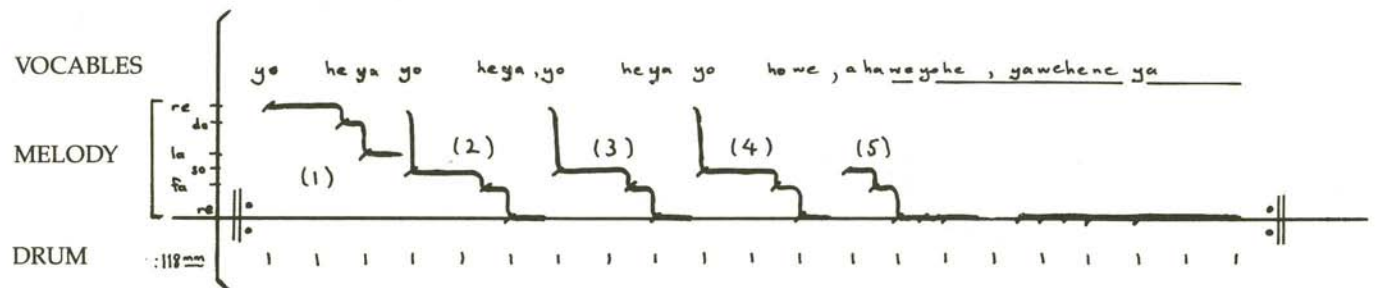
Because Eagle Dance Songs at Jemez are traditional and not composed from year to year, my friend cast the original melody in the shape and style of a Laguna Eagle Dance Song. Relaxed quality of voice and broader tempo set this song apart from the previously considered Buffalo Song. Formal expansion serves further to contrast the two examples; the new Eagle Song adds a fifth tone group in the verse and reinstates a fourth group in the chorus (see Figure 4).

The previous two examples illustrates the simplest possible modifications of an original melody. The transformation may be, and often will be, more extensive. The comparatively slight changes of an original melody in these songs may well reflect my co-worker/teacher's attitude toward his beginning field-worker/student. They also allow us to contrast the structural and stylistic requirements of a Jemez Buffalo Song, fast and clipped with marked textural changes, with the somewhat more expansive and homogeneous character of the Laguna Eagle Song.

Methods of renewal considered to this point include recombination, creation of new texts, singing old songs again after a lapse of time, and adaptation of borrowed songs. It remains to consider the renewal of songs without the conscious use of preexisting songs. On several occasions my co-worker at Jemez described making songs as being like putting together the pieces of a puzzle. Different parts would come at different times and the final process was that of assembly. "It's hard work to make a song," he said more than once, "especially fitting words to the tune." At Laguna, my co-worker described a different and more elusive process. "Mostly I pray for a song," he said. "They come pretty easily that way most of the time," though he too acknowledged the difficulty of matching words and melody. Not all songs have words, however. An Eagle Dance Song composed by my Laguna co-worker in the fall of 1980 is an example. Also in this song, structure and style of Pueblo songs derived from Plains Indian music are clearly apparent: (1) predominantly descending melodic contours; (2) drum tremolo accompanied

NEW EAGLE DANCE SONG* (Figure 4)

Graph Transcription Only:



*As in figure 1.

LAGUNA EAGLE DANCE SONG composed by Phillip Riley (Figure 5)

Staff Transcription Only:

VOCABLES
MELODY
DRUM

we go he ne ya wa go ho - na wa go ho - na we ,

wa go ho - na o hane go - o - o - o - o - na ,

wa go ho - na a - ha we go he , ya wa he na - ye ,

we go he ne ya ,

wa go ho - na wa go ho - na we ,

wa go ho - na o hane go - o - o - o - na ,

1. wa go ho - na a - ha we go he , ya we he ne ya ,

2. wa go ho - na a - ha we go he , ya we he ne ya ,

we ya hane go hane go - o - o - o - o - na ,

1. wa go ho - na a - ha we go he - ya , ya we he na ya

FIRST
PREPARATION

Fixed phrase
introduction

Verse

SONG
(sung twice)

Chorus

LAGUNA EAGLE DANCE SONG (Figure 5, continued)

12 wa yo ho - na a - ha wago he-yo , ya wa he ne - yo

we ya he ne ya he ne yo - o (1) o - na

wa yo ho - na a - ha wago he-yo 1 ya wa he ne - yo

AS ABOVE

AS ABOVE UNTIL FINAL CLOSE:

12 wa yo ho - na a - ha wago he-yo , ya wa he ne - yo

Final close

SECOND PREPARATION

SONG (first time)

SONG (second time)

symbols used in transcription: # indicates "half flat"

— indicates beginning and continuation of drum tremolo

| . | indicate strong and weak pulses of drum

"preparations" to each full statement of the song; (3) verse/chorus structure within the song with fixed phrase introductions and ending phrases to set off this structure (see Figure 5 and Glossary).

Borrowing and innovation are, as the above examples make clear, "built into" the dynamics of Pueblo song process. Tempered with conservatism born of life in association with a demanding environment, the ability to assimilate new ideas has carried over into other spheres as well. Incorporation of dances from outside tribes into the Pueblo ceremonial round, the co-practice of Catholicism and traditional Pueblo beliefs since the advent of the Spanish, new styles of pottery that meet demands of the twentieth century marketplace and yet remain distinctively Puebloan, the fashioning of ceremonial songs from Anglo-American religious and popular songs¹⁰—all bear witness to the flexibility and at the same time, the durability of Pueblo culture, society, and imagination. Another American poet, Gary Snyder, has spoken of the dance of Forest, up and down the mountain slope, responding over years, decades, and centuries to climatic change and yet, ever recognizable as Forest.¹¹ The Pueblos have borrowed this dance as well. They have accompanied it with the tradition of song renewal.

GLOSSARY

Chanting Syllables: Non-lexical syllables that serve to carry and articulate a melodic line in song; vocables.

Chorus: Second phrase grouping of a Pueblo song that accompanies a dance ceremonial of Plains origin.¹² This grouping is usually repeated.

Fixed ending phrase: A pattern of rhythm and chanting syllables sung on the ground tone (see below) to end a verse or a chorus. A particular fixed ending phrase may be characteristic of a dance song genre.

Fixed-phrase introduction: A pattern of rhythm and chanting syllables sung on the ground tone before verse (see below) begins.¹³

Ground tone: The pitch from which the melody of a song begins and to which it returns at the end of the verse and chorus; "tonic."

Research Co-worker: Friend/teacher/"informant"/song-maker, taken as one.¹⁴

Verse: First phrase grouping of a Pueblo song composed to accompany a dance ceremonial of Plains origin. Usually repeated.

NOTES

1. A grant from the UCLA Institute of American Cultures was indispensable in carrying out the field-work upon which this paper is substantially based. I am further indebted to many teachers, both in and outside of the Pueblos, who have helped me to gain and to communicate this limited understanding of the tradition of song renewal.

2. Ruth Bunzel in Zuni Katcinas (published in the *Bureau of American Ethnology Annual Report* for 1929-1930: 889, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1932) notes that of over one hundred types of Zuni Katcina dance, only four have traditional songs.

3. Excerpted from the poem "Earth and Rain, the Plants and Sun" in *A Good Journey* (Berkeley: Turtle Island Press, 1977), pp.60-61.

4. Okushare, Music for a Winter Ceremony: The Turtle Dance Songs of San Juan Pueblo, in *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology*, vol. 3, no. 2, ed. Charlotte Heth (Los Angeles: UCLA Program in Ethnomusicology, 1980), p. 82.

5. Songs of the Zuni Katcina Society, in *Southwestern Ritual Drama*, ed. Charlotte Frisbie (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1980), pp. 22, 23.

6. Bunzel, *Zuni Katcinas*, pp. 890-891.

7. For discussion of inter-borrowing between Plains and Pueblo Indian peoples, see Gertrude Kurath with Antonio Garcia, *Music and Dance of the Tewa Pueblos* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1973), p. 113. Also see Elsie Clews Parsons. Ritual Parallels in Pueblo and Plains Cultures with a Special Reference to the Pawnee (*American Anthropologist*, vol. 31 (1929): 644-651), passim.

8. Also typical of these songs, though not transcribed here, is a single statement of the verse accompanied by a drum tremolo during which the dancers trace out zig-zag patterns in walking—a kind of preparation or settling in for the dance proper.

9. I suspect that an attempt to renew the song in this way for a third consecutive year would not have been accepted (the example is from Jemez).

10. Such as the "Limbo Rock" Buffalo Song at Zuni and "Amazing Grace" Buffalo Song at Jemez.

11. In a lecture given in the spring of 1976 as Eliston Poet at the University of Cincinnati.

12. See note 7.

13. Adopted from Tedlock, Songs of the Zuni Katcina Society, p. 16.

14. An extension of the notion of "research collaborator" as set forth by Alfonso Ortiz in An Indian Anthropologist's Perspective on Anthropology, published in *Anthropology and the American Indian*, ed. Edward Dozier (San Francisco: Indian Historical Press, 1973), p. 91.

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