

Editor's Column

With the present issue *Oral Tradition* begins its sixth year of publication, with a number of new developments on the horizon. Upcoming contents will include a special issue on the oral traditions of Yugoslavia guest-edited by John Miletich (6, ii-iii). This collection of essays will present noted Yugoslav scholars describing and analyzing the many oral genres that constitute that tradition; while some of the articles treat the most familiar poetic type—the epic, this issue will also contain essays on the lyric, ballad, legend, and prose narrative. For the first time, then, native scholars will present a comprehensive picture of Yugoslav oral traditions to an English-speaking audience.

Oral Tradition will also be featuring an “epistolary symposium” on the topic of “Orality, Literacy, and Contemporary Critical Theory” beginning in 1992. A significant new section of *Oral Tradition*, this exchange will be edited by Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, and will provide scholars with an opportunity for a meaningful exchange of ideas and theories on this timely subject. Interested individuals should correspond with the special editor (c/o Center for Studies in Oral Tradition, University of Missouri, 301 Read Hall, Columbia, MO 65211) before submitting a 510 page “letter” for consideration.

In this issue of *OT* we present a miscellany of essays on oral traditions from ancient Greece and medieval Europe to modern New Zealand, from the language of epic to the orality of dialogue in the novel and short story, and from linguistic and textual inquiry to biological correlation between art and psyche. Svetozar Koljević opens the discussion with an eye- (or ear-) opening illustration of the poetic value of formulaic phraseology in the Serbo-Croatian narrative poetry. Especially because the mechanism-versus-aesthetics debate over repetitive language has raged so long, his remarks on the traditional resonance of certain phrases will certainly open new vistas for specialists in numerous oral traditions. From the poems of the nineteenth-century Serbian collector Vuk Karadžić, Koenraad Kuiper takes us out to the racetrack in Christ Church, New Zealand, and to the oral genre of calling horseraces. He demonstrates the extent to which a series of callers employ a formulaic idiom to learn and maintain the fluency of expression necessary to their task, and also how this tradition has evolved over time from one informant to another. William Sayers' essay on “Serial Defamation in Two Medieval Tales” follows. Surveying Old Norse and Old Irish narrative, he locates five comparable movements in example tales from the two traditions—the last of them involving “projection of the traditional speech-craft of an oral culture . . . into a literate medium.”

Ryan Bishop continues the proceedings with a consideration of just

what it is that makes dialogue “sound” natural in a literary text; writing from an anthropologist’s perspective, he conducts an analysis of how such facsimile passages function in a variety of works from James Joyce to Samuel Beckett. From Bishop’s modern focus, Jeffrey Alan Mazo returns to the Anglo-Saxon period, and specifically to the poems of *Beowulf* and *Genesis A*, the latter a usually close translation of the Latin vulgate account. Mazo’s aim is to measure the components of traditional style and originality in the diction of these two poems, particularly their compound words, and his results will therefore be of interest to a great many specialists outside the area of Old English verse. To his conclusions about medieval English poets, Carol Dougherty adds a consideration of the Odyssean bard Phemius, specifically on the much-debated matter of his being *autodidaktos* (“self-taught”). Making reference to actual accounts of bardic activities and procedures, she argues engagingly that Phemius’ characterization reflects “the dialogue between tradition and occasion in oral poetic composition.”

Indeed, Ruth Finnegan’s 1989-90 Parry Lecture also concentrates on the meaning of “tradition,” an elusive term and concept often left unexamined by those interested in oral literature and related forms. Bringing numerous different perspectives to the discussion, she “deconstructs” the idea of tradition and lays bare many of the cultural assumptions that have supported its various meanings. This issue also includes a symposium feature: three position papers—by Frederick Turner, Carl Lindahl, and Robert Kellogg—on the topic of “Rules for Art in Oral Tradition.” First presented in a Modern Language Association section sponsored by the Anthropological Approaches to Literature division in 1988, these brief comments will soon be followed (*OT* 7, i) by papers contributed by Joan Radner and Dennis Tedlock.

I close by asking our readership to participate in any way that seems fitting and useful in the subscription drive now underway for *Oral Tradition*. Our aim is to increase the subscription roll by twenty per cent, and your recommendation to a colleague (individual rate: \$18) or a library (institutional rate: \$35) will bring us nearer that goal. We will certainly appreciate your assistance.

John Miles Foley, Editor