

## Editor's Column

With this issue we return to the “bedrock” format of *Oral Tradition*, the miscellany that offers the reader an interdisciplinary perspective on this naturally heterogeneous field. Susan Rasmussen opens the conversation with “reflections on myth and history” among the Tuareg of Nigeria, a people among whom she has done extensive fieldwork. Sabine Habermalz then continues with a discussion of orality in that most literate and textual of authors, James Joyce; this essay will acquaint our readership with the methodology developed by a group of scholars at the Universität Freiburg to treat a wide range of verbal art. Yet more recent in media evolution is the electronic text, the subject of Bruce Mason's article and a fresh point of departure in the consideration of orality and literacy; anyone involved with the Internet and e-mail, not to mention other electronic tools, will find his “virtual ethnography” exciting and instructive. Mark Bender then returns to a fieldwork-based examination of oral tradition with his examination of Suzhou *tanci* storytelling, which emphasizes aspects of performance and offers the author's firsthand experience as a guide.

The next two articles in this issue collectively stress the diversity of traditional oral forms and illustrate the tremendous variety of materials that can be better understood through their agency. First, Deborah VanderBilt recovers the orality of Old English prose, a significant addition to the nearly exclusive focus on the oral-derived poetry of that period. At the other end of things, Yvonne Banning recounts the evidence of various kinds of orality in the theater of South Africa during the last tumultuous decade. With Yang Enhong's overview of Geser epic we are fortunate to be able to present a glimpse of an important oral tradition, half a world away, in Mongolia and Tibet, a region little explored in Western scholarship but one that boasts epics more than ten times as long as Homer's *Iliad*. Closing out this issue, Craig Davis examines cultural assimilation in *Njáls saga*, explaining how the saga encodes reconstructions of social violence, while Ingrid Holmberg presents an intriguing explanation of the fragments and summaries of the lost Epic Cycle from ancient Greece as the oral tradition they no doubt once constituted.

In the future we plan to stay “close to the hearth” with heterogeneous, multidisciplinary issues like this one. To do our part to celebrate the millennium, however, we also have scheduled two special issues. The first of these will be a collection of short “position papers” on the state of studies in this field as we move toward 2001. Each essayist will address a simple but challenging question: “What's right and what's wrong with the way we study oral traditions?” For the second issue, to be guest-edited by Mark Amodio, the topic will be “Theoretical

Intersections.” In this collection contributors will examine how contemporary critical methods of all sorts can speak to studies in oral tradition. Please contact the guest-editor (amodio@vassar.edu) with your proposals for this second special issue.

As always, we welcome your input, reactions, and, most of all, subscriptions.

*John Miles Foley, Editor*

John Miles Foley  
Center for Studies in Oral Tradition  
316 Hillcrest Hall  
University of Missouri  
Columbia, MO 65211 USA  
*e-mail:* FoleyJ@missouri.edu  
*telephone:* +573-882-9720  
*fax:* +573-884-5306