

Editor's Column

With the present issue *Oral Tradition* returns to its more common—and in many ways most fundamental—format: a digest of articles on a wide variety of traditions and expressive forms. The rationale for this diversity stems from our editorial commitment to study oral tradition comparatively, to learn more about our “home fields” by juxtaposing verbal arts from all over the world and throughout history.

Ulrich Marzolph begins the collective discussion by bringing before us a fascinating character from Persian popular romance, Hosein the Kurd. What Marzolph offers is a kind of morphology of the story, with attention to its recurrent formulaic elements, as derived from extant medieval manuscripts. Michael Saenger's essay on Old English and Black English then bridges the gap between medieval and modern, focusing as it does on the seventh-century Bede's story of the oral singer Cædmon as compared with John Pearson, a prominent character in Zora Neale Hurston's novel, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. From Anglo-Saxon England and the modern rural South in the United States, we then journey back to ancient Greece and the orally based poems of Homer. Françoise Létoublon tackles the longstanding crux of what Homer (and his tradition) mean by the phrase “winged words,” while Elizabeth Minchin analyzes the “poetics of talk” with special reference to a prolonged exchange between Odysseus and Eumaios in Book 14 of the *Odyssey*.

With Leslie MacCoull's essay on Coptic hymnography and oral-formulaic approaches, our journal enters an area it has not touched upon in the past. As always, we at *Oral Tradition* welcome the opportunity to offer our readership a fresh perspective on widely ramifying phenomena. In this spirit, the final three essays form a small cluster on medieval texts that derive from oral traditions. Lea Olsan examines the multilingual charms found in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, concentrating on the mixture of performance, ritual, and actual paleographical context. Christine Neufeld looks at the portrayal of women's oral discourse and its ambiguous ghettoizing and empowerment as stemming from the interaction of oral and written traditions in the Middle Ages. Finally, Lisa Robeson turns to the Old French *La Queste del Saint Graal* for a study of inscriptions, oral interpretations, and the authenticity of relics.

Upcoming issues of *Oral Tradition* will feature essays on Native American, Japanese, Celtic, African American, Finnish, South African,

ancient Greek, Norse, and Scottish oral traditions, as well as innovative articles on the Nobelist Dario Fo and the Balto-Finnic myth of the World Egg. Further in our future lies a special issue on the minority oral traditions of China, a project undertaken in partnership with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing.

We continue to welcome your best ideas about our shared field of oral tradition. Whatever your specialty—geographically, ethnically, chronologically, or medially—our journal stands ready to present your perspective to a broad, interested audience.

Similarly, we are in the process of launching a subscription drive, and we hope that those of you who are not yet subscribers will take steps to do so. *Oral Tradition* is priced at \$25 annually for individuals, certainly one of the “best bargains” in academic publishing, and the rate for institutions is a similarly inexpensive annual rate of \$40. Most back issues from the inaugural issue (1986) onward are still available.

Subscriptions may be sent to Slavica Publishers (Indiana University, 2611 E. 10th St., Bloomington, IN 47408-2603 USA) or to our editorial office as given immediately below.

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