

Editor's Column

With this seventeenth volume *Oral Tradition* offers what has become its stock-in-trade: a cornucopia of articles on the natural diversity of the world's oral traditions and related forms. Indeed, the miscellaneous character of this issue, and of many of our collections over the past decade and one-half, is straightforwardly mimetic of the field itself. Almost weekly one hears of a recently discovered tradition, or a new genre within a well-known oral poetry, or a freshly encountered interface between orality and literacy. If the study of oral traditions initially made its way by attempting to distinguish itself from "literature" and to define itself quite separately as an implicitly homogeneous type of verbal art, so now all indicators seem to be pointing in the other direction. Oral traditions dwarf their textual counterparts in size and variety, and many of the most intriguing challenges arise from the intersection of orality (in all its guises), literacy (in its own mansidedness), and even the ever more important electronic media. To put it simply, such miscellanies only become more appropriate vehicles for the presentation of research and scholarship as time goes on and our perspectives deepen.

Here the reader will find essays on Native American, modern Italian, Irish, and Indian verbal arts, as well as the New Testament and uses of orality in the Romantic period and the late twentieth century. Four of these articles constitute the first half of Guest Editor Mark Amodio's collection on "Oral Tradition and Contemporary Critical Theory." The next issue, 17/2, will follow suit by presenting the second half of that cluster and by focusing on orality and hypertextuality, Romanian epic, *Beowulf*, Chaucer, the concept of "aurature" in medieval Spanish, and other subjects.

Looking further ahead, we plan a special event for *Oral Tradition* 18/1, wherein more than three dozen specialists in a wide variety of disciplines and from various parts of the world undertake brief, 500-word answers to two questions: (1) What is oral tradition in your area? and (2) What are the most interesting challenges now emerging within your specialty? The responses will come from six of seven continents and treat more than thirty different oral traditions. If the early submissions are any measure, this collective (and, yes, extremely miscellaneous) issue may prove a benchmark in assessing the current vitality, diversity, and complexity of this fascinating field of inquiry.

Finally, we urge our readers to visit our new web site at www.oraltradition.org, where we are beginning the construction of an e-archive for oral tradition. At present, visitors can listen to South Slavic epic

and charms, as well as watch a videotaped performance of slam poetry; searchable bibliographies are also available there, and much more will be mounted in the months to come. We welcome your suggestions and contributions to this facility, which is intended, like the journal *Oral Tradition*, as a resource that fosters cross-disciplinary exchange.

John Miles Foley, Editor

Center for Studies in Oral Tradition
21 Parker Hall
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO 65211 USA
Telephone: 573-882-9720
Fax: 573-446-2585
e-mail: oraltradition@missouri.edu