

Editor's Column

With the first issue of volume 19 we return to *Oral Tradition's* most customary (even archetypal) format: a collection of six medium-sized essays on a variety of areas spanning both geographical and historical space. Volume 18, which comprised two anthologies of brief reports on the world's oral traditions and related phenomena, aspired to bring before our readership some reflection of the enormous diversity of the subject to which this journal has attended for nearly twenty years. Those two issues—with their total of more than 80 contributions of approximately 500 words each on the questions of “What is oral tradition in your field?” and “What are the most interesting new directions in your field?”—have drawn significant attention from individual scholars and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (February 27, 2004). Now we resume what has become our conventional style, but perhaps with an increased awareness of the remarkably diverse background against which studies in oral tradition must be understood.

The present issue begins in the medieval Germanic world with the 2003 Lord and Parry Lecture, Joseph Harris' meditation on myth and literary history, with specific reference to the Old Norse Master-builder tale and the Langobardic story of Lamicho the Barker. In a cognate vein, Lori Ann Garner then explores the little-studied Anglo-Saxon magical charms from the perspective of performance, elucidating the source of their word-power as ritual. From a different corner of the early Germanic tradition, Edward Haymes considers the special, genre-dependent status of the poems constituting the *Poetic Edda*, suggesting that they employ a particular type of oral composition and transmission.

Isidore Okpewho continues the colloquy with an examination of Okabou Ojolo's one-time performance of the *Ozidi Saga* from the Niger Delta as a continuous oral narrative, showing how the bard “was able to hold the plot of the tale together, despite the potentially destabilizing influence of contingent factors.” From contemporary Nigeria we journey back two millennia to the Middle East with Holly Hearon's very welcome overview of the broad spectrum of historical studies of orality and the New Testament, including attention to the most recent investigations, which tend to stress the productive interactions between oral traditions and texts. Finally, Kristin Kuutma illustrates the complex collaborative framework within which the Seto singer Anne Vabarna created the epic known as *Peko* in 1927, arguing

that “it constitutes an ethnographic representation of Seto culture in traditional poetic form.”

On the horizon are an issue treating the modern Gaelic, ancient Greek, Balochi, and South Slavic traditions as well as contemporary folklore, the medieval mystic Margery Kempe, and American jazz (19, ii) and, further in the future, a special issue on the well preserved and thriving oral traditions of the Basque country. Prior contents are now listed in a searchable database at www.oraltradition.org/otjournal/search.asp. As always, we welcome your reactions, your advice, and especially your manuscripts.

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