

## Editor's Column

With this issue of *Oral Tradition* we offer our readership perspectives on a cornucopia of traditions from around the world and from ancient times to the present day, and at the same time we inaugurate the new feature of *E-Companions* that will become a staple of our publication program.

Wakefield Foster begins the discussion with a highly suggestive comparison between two superficially quite different kinds of traditional performers: the South Slavic *guslari*, or bards, from the Former Yugoslavia who are widely known for their oral epic narratives, and contemporary jazz musicians from the United States. Drawing on what investigators have reported about the training and practice of the *guslari* and on his own fieldwork with jazz performers (consult the *E-Companion* at [www.oraltradition.org](http://www.oraltradition.org) for actual conversations with informants), Foster engages the important issues of memory, composition, creativity, and multiformity. His comparative observations will be useful for specialists in myriad different areas, as will Robert Cochran's study of three moments—again, superficially quite disparate—that share the quality of having been inspired by oral tradition. Looking at a young woman's burning of love-letters behind her family's farmhouse in northwest Arkansas, the intersection of a newsreel film and a joke tradition in Romania, and a custodians' retirement party at the University of Arkansas, he cleverly illustrates how implied traditions of folksong, jokes, and the web of cultural predispositions associated with retirement rituals act as supporting frames for the performance and reception of everyday events.

Next comes Lillis Ó Laoire's fieldwork-based study of the modern Gaelic song tradition in Tory Island, off the northwest coast of Ireland. Taking into account both comparative theory and the real-life experience gained over twenty years of *in situ* collection and analysis, he considers the topics of orality and literacy, formulaic structure and variation, ethnic (emic) terminology for the composition of oral songs, and the nexus of individual performance and the larger tradition. Ó Laoire's text is augmented by an *E-Companion* ([www.oraltradition.org](http://www.oraltradition.org)) that lets the reader become an audience by making available the audio recordings of the very song-performances discussed in the article. Marie Nelson concerns herself not with a contemporary oral tradition but rather with a medieval document, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, whose probably non-literate author engaged scribes to write down oral accounts of her revelations twenty years after the fact. Using speech-act theory, Nelson explicates the power and resourcefulness of Kempe's verbal duel with the clergy and in particular the transparently oral aspects of her rhetoric.

Margalit Finkelberg continues this issue's discussion with a penetrating look at the conjunction of orality and formulaic structure in the Homeric epics. Observing that the patterned phraseology of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is not uniform in texture, she posits a continuum of diction from the formulaic to the nonformulaic, contending that the latter kind of diction is complementary to the former and therefore not at all an argument against the oral (or oral-derived) nature of the Homeric poems. Finally, Sabir Badalkhan closes the present symposium by opening a window onto the little-studied but fascinating oral traditions of the Balochi people of Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. His focus is the epic tradition at large and especially the legend of Šey Murīd, which shares with Homer's *Odyssey* the story-pattern of the hero's return. Badalkhan includes many fascinating

details about the performance and collection of Balochi epic, gathered during fieldwork and archival study undertaken from an insider's perspective.

From this issue onward, *Oral Tradition* will, whenever feasible and helpful, enlist the opportunities afforded by the internet to flesh out its contents in as realistic and genuine a way as possible. Specifically, we plan to supplement the articles that appear in the physical and virtual pages of the journal itself (as published in paper format by Slavica Publishers and in virtual format as part of Project Muse) with a facility we call the *E-Companion*. Consisting of such supplementary aids as streaming audio and video, photographs, and ancillary text-based items such as bibliographies and appendices, these *E-Companions* are meant to accomplish what the published article by its very nature cannot: to fill in some of the background of real-life context and experience that is by convention eliminated from even the most carefully prepared textual document. Hopefully, they will help the reader to become a better, more faithful audience for the oral tradition under consideration.

The next few issues will house a number of special collections as well as the miscellaneous gatherings that are *OT*'s most common coin. Two issues will be devoted to the highly diverse proceedings of the Performance Seminar held at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, and another, prepared by the scholars and performers associated with the Bertsozale Elkarte in San Sebastián/Donostia, Spain, will feature Basque oral traditions. All three of these issues will be accompanied by *E-Companions* located on our website ([www.oraltradition.org](http://www.oraltradition.org)).

In closing this column let me share the happy news that the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition, the original and continuing home to the journal *Oral Tradition*, will next year celebrate its twentieth year of existence. And in that very year the CSOT will be welcoming an infant sibling at the University of Missouri: the Center for E-Research. The CER is being established to study and facilitate computer- and internet-based research across the disciplinary spectrum, with a view to helping coordinate communication among different areas. Toward that end it will inaugurate an online journal, *E-Research*, as well as undertake cooperations with other institutions in this emerging area of inquiry. We welcome proposals and news items from all quarters; please direct any responses to [FoleyJ@missouri.edu](mailto:FoleyJ@missouri.edu).

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