

Introduction

Tradition demands that an editor of a new scholarly journal perform the ritual gesture of justifying the birth of the new academic child, and certainly any periodical named *Oral Tradition* cannot afford to ignore either the demands of tradition in general or ritual gestures in particular. Nonetheless, those of us assisting at the delivery feel strongly that in this case the proverbial claim that the new medium “fills a gap” really does contain a modicum of truth. For nowhere in the hallowed halls of academia have we found a journal devoted exclusively to the study of oral tradition in its many forms, nowhere a single, central periodical through which scholars in this wide variety of specialties might communicate. And in recent years this simple “gap” has grown into a chasm: there are now more than one hundred separate language areas affected by studies in oral tradition, among them ancient Greek, Anglo-Saxon, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Old French, medieval Spanish, and dozens more; and the disciplines summoned to this collaborative undertaking include, at a minimum, literary history and criticism, folklore, anthropology, linguistics, and history. Thus it is that *Oral Tradition* is being inaugurated to inform specialists of parallel developments in their own and different areas, to build and maintain bridges among disciplines in order to promote the healthy growth of the field as a whole.

Our publishing program has been tailored to correspond to the various aspects of research and scholarship on oral tradition and on “literary” forms with roots in oral tradition. Especially over the first few years, and to some extent at regular intervals after that, we shall be featuring a series of *survey* or *state-of-the-art essays*, reviews of previous work on important areas intended to advise specialists in other fields of the current state of scholarship outside their own immediate areas of expertise, and in this way to facilitate comparative work. The first year of publication will see such essays on ancient Greek, Biblical studies,

Old Irish, Old English, medieval Spanish, modern Greek, and Middle High German. We shall also present a number of *analytical essays*, treating problems of many sorts in a wide range of fields. And alongside these two types of articles will stand more occasional *reports on ongoing or recent fieldwork*, which will allow readers to keep up to date with current field projects.

In addition to individual scholarly essays, *Oral Tradition* is committed to other kinds of forums for dissemination of the best and latest thinking in this multidisciplinary consortium. We shall be publishing a number of *special issues* on particular areas or genres, each of them edited by a scholar of eminence. Thus, over the first five years plans have been made for special issues on Native American (ed. Barre Toelken), the Hispanic ballad (Ruth Webber), Arabic (Issa Boullata), South Pacific (Ruth Finnegan and Margaret Orbell), and Turkish and Turkic (Ilhan Başgöz), and more are being discussed. The first in this series (January 1987) will be a Festschrift for Walter J. Ong, and will contain about twenty essays on a variety of literatures as well as on religion, philosophy, and linguistics. In order to keep the readership apprised of recent advances in the field on a regular basis, we shall also include *review essays*, that is, essay-length reviews of relevant research in a given area, and a *Year's Work Annotated Bibliography*. The object of this latter digest, to be published in the third and final issue of *Oral Tradition* each year, is to continue the bibliographical record begun by my 1985 *Oral-Formulaic Theory and Research*. Finally, we shall maintain a *Symposium* section specifically for readers' extended responses to earlier contents; these responses may be approbative or critical of the essays published in *Oral Tradition*, and will be printed at the discretion of the editorial board. We encourage this sort of immediate and focused reaction to important issues.

This inaugural issue presents a sample of the mix of survey and analytical essays that we hope will be typical of *Oral Tradition*. Robert Culley takes on the daunting task of reviewing scholarship on oral tradition and the Bible, with special emphasis on recent work, and Roderick Beaton surveys the complex world of modern Greek oral traditions, stressing the interactions between oral and literate and the different genres one encounters. The fascinating process of translating an oral text, or texts with roots in oral tradition, is the subject of Burton Raffel's lead essay on Russian, Indonesian, and Anglo-Saxon poetry, while Eric Havelock

continues a distinguished series of studies on the impact of letters on the ancient Greek world in "The Alphabetic Mind." Frederick Turner's anthropological view of oral performance offers a new perspective on oral tradition, one that draws from exciting advances in the study of aesthetics by the scientific community.

Our next two issues will contain survey articles on comparative perspectives (Albert B. Lord), ancient Greek (Mark Edwards), Old Irish (Joseph Nagy), and other areas, as well as a selection of analytical essays, the Year's Work Annotated Bibliography, and the first annual Milman Parry Lectures on Oral Tradition, given at Missouri in April 1985 by Joseph J. Duggan ("Social Functions of the Medieval Epic").

We invite all members of the community interested in studies in oral tradition to join this enterprise, and not only by entering personal and institutional subscriptions to *Oral Tradition* (always a high priority) but also by contributing manuscripts, responses for the Symposium section, copies of books and offprints of articles for review and report in the bibliography, ideas for special issues, and suggestions about any aspect of the journal's operation or contents. We who work in this rapidly evolving field have long needed a place to communicate about moving the field forward by sharing our ideas and by responding to the ideas of others. It is our hope that *Oral Tradition* will serve these purposes.

John Miles Foley, Editor