

Editor's Column

With the present issue *Oral Tradition* enters a new era in its history. After twenty years as a bound paper volume, with online availability since 2004 through subscription to Project Muse, *OT* is presently in the process of migrating to a web-only, gratis publication. In 2006 it will be published in both media, but as of 2007 it will become a freestanding electronic entity posted on the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition website (www.oraltradition.org/ot).

Why have we chosen to follow this path? First and foremost, we aim, as always, to foster productive exchange among an interdisciplinary, international constituency, and to make that exchange as smooth and barrier-free as possible. *OT* was founded in 1986 to facilitate communication across disciplinary boundaries and among colleagues who otherwise would share no common forum. Since the internet has become the communicative instrument *par excellence*, creating a massive network with immediate and universal access, we feel it's time for scholarly exchange to leverage its enormous potential to the fullest.

Second, we are committed to making *OT* a free, gratis publication for the greater good of all concerned. Along with correcting problems inherent in distribution networks for paper publications, we intend to remove all financial barriers as well. Prospective readers of the journal will need no more than a web connection and a browser; all of our content from this issue onward will be open and continuously available worldwide without subscription fees of any sort.

Third, although we are beginning our online version of *OT* with the first issue of volume 21, we plan to make all back issues of the journal available in the same virtual format over the next few years. We will start with the inaugural volume (1986) and progress through back issues until the entire run of the journal is posted.

Concurrently, and in the context of this fundamental media-shift, much will remain the same. The vetting procedures for manuscripts submitted to *OT* will not change: our journal will be refereed in precisely the same fashion as during the last two decades, with one specialist and one generalist reviewing every submission before an editorial decision is made. Likewise with our recently introduced feature of eCompanions, the electronic appendages (audio, video, photos, etc.) meant to accompany the text of articles. Only in this case readers will no longer have to manage texts and eCompanions separately; the links to ancillary materials will be embedded in the online text of the articles in question.

We at the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition are extremely excited about the latest chapter in the journal's biography. We believe that this migration will be generally helpful to all readers and contributors, and especially important for

scholars and students in those parts of the world that (as letters to the editor testify weekly) have through no fault of their own seldom or never had access to our journal. Ironically, these are also some of the areas with the most thriving oral traditions. We very much hope that an online, gratis *OT* will correct this systemic imbalance and encourage both new readers and new contributors in what is, after all, our joint project.

The current addition to that project consists of what has become *OT*'s stock-in-trade over the past twenty years: a miscellany with articles on a wide variety of oral traditions from various parts of the world and from ancient to modern times. It opens with Joseph Sobol's analysis and representation of a folktale performance from the Appalachian region of the United States, together with an eCompanion audio-file of Ray Hicks performing "Wicked John and the Devil." Nicky Marsh, Peter Middleton, and Victoria Sheppard next offer perspectives on the growing interest in performing contemporary British poetry, with attention to both the history of the movements and the various audiences involved. Treating an oral tradition with roots in the Middle Ages, Antonio Scuderi then examines the Sicilian practice of *cuntastorie*, understanding it as a complex weave of performance and text; readers can consult the eCompanion to his article for an audio-file of a *cunto* sung by Peppino Celano.

The subject of the next contribution, by Elizabeth Oyler, is the Japanese narrative performance art known as *daimokutate*, which she introduces in historical and generic context as well as exemplifies with a video eCompanion. Kenneth Sherwood focuses on three performances by Amiri Baraka, Cecilia Vicuña, and Kamau Brathwaite, advocating an interpretive approach that does full justice to these print/oral/aural poets; audio versions of the performances described in his article are posted as an eCompanion.

The final three contributions to this issue form a cluster on ancient Greek oral and oral-derived works. Jonathan Burgess examines the relationship between neoanalysis, until recently a text-based method of approaching Homer, and perspectives from oral tradition. Next, Mark Usher considers the significance of the Hellenistic philosopher Carneades' practice of spontaneously quoting from earlier authors in a style that mirrors oral poetic composition. Finally, Penelope Skarsouli looks at the ancient Greek arts of memory and oral justice.

As always, and as a result of our move to the internet more inclusively than ever, we solicit your contributions to what will be modulating into an even more broadly based "eConversation."

John Miles Foley, Editor