

## Editor's Column

With the present issue, *Oral Tradition* begins its twenty-third year of publication. We are happy to report that the entire run of the journal, from the inaugural issue in 1986 through the present number, is now available as an open-access, searchable, and free-of-charge online resource. In other words, scholars and students from anywhere in the world can read or download any of approximately 500 articles on the world's oral traditions, amounting to some 10,000 pages—all without subscription fees of any sort. And the tracking software on our server strongly indicates that they have been doing just that: people from 109 different countries, using browsers in nearly 50 languages, have visited the site. Just as importantly, we are now receiving submissions from a much wider range of potential authors, many of them based in areas where they have firsthand experience of thriving oral traditions. We look forward to helping more people join the international conversation that *Oral Tradition* was long ago established to support.

Fatos Tarifa begins this issue with a fascinating account of the roots of Albanian “customary law” in oral tradition. Purportedly formulated by the fifteenth-century Prince Dukagjini, this body of law was passed down orally for many generations and “shaped and dominated the lives of northern Albanians until well into the mid-twentieth century.” Next, Florence Goyet proposes a new theory of what oral and oral-derived epic actually do for a society: namely, they compare contemporary visions of the world, offering audiences an instrument for thinking about and evaluating alternatives. Her essay considers the ancient Greek *Iliad*, the Old French *Song of Roland*, and the Japanese *Hôgen* and *Heiji monogatari*. Next comes an essay on Mark Twain's (highly literate and literary) novel, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, in which Marie Nelson explores the author Clemens' use of simulated oral speech-acts to trigger certain kinds of realities and hoped-for responses. In a similar vein if also in a very different kind of work, Nancy P. Stork finds “traditions of oral memory and composition” operative even in as thoroughly textual a document as Julian of Toledo's *Prognosticon*, written in seventh-century Visigothic Spain.

The next five articles show a similar variety in subject and breadth of approach. Susan Gorman studies Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, also known as *The Golden Ass*, in the context of second-century Roman public readings, called *recitationes*, arguing that this work creates a new kind of politically valenced storytelling. As a counterweight to the prevailing evolutionary notion of oral-to-written, Tom Pettitt examines the evidence for the source and transmission of a Gypsy folk ballad that had its origin in a printed broadside and was subsequently absorbed into the vibrant oral tradition of English folk song. Lene Petersen likewise productively problematizes oral and written in her analysis of Elizabethan playtexts, specifically *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, arguing that laws of variation governing folk narrative are also applicable in playtext transmission. Narrative strategies—methods for effective storytelling, in short—are the focus of Owain Edwards' treatment of the legend of St. David, the Welsh patron saint, in versions of which he locates certain propagandistic motives. Finally, Thérèse de Vet reports on her fieldwork on performances of Balinese oral epic, comparing what she has uncovered with the oral-derived poems of Homer from ancient Greece.

Let me close this column with a special invitation to those of you who have discovered *Oral Tradition* via the internet, which in many ways I take to be its most natural home.<sup>1</sup> Please share your research and ideas by sending us your contributions for possible publication. We can offer prompt evaluation (usually 60-90 days), the opportunity to include multimedia illustrations (audio, video, photographs, etc.) to accompany your text, and not least an increasingly large and extremely diverse international audience.

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<sup>1</sup> See further Foley, "Navigating Pathways: Oral Tradition and the Internet," *Academic Intersections*, 2 (Spring 2008): <http://edcommunity.apple.com/ali/story.php?itemID=13163> .