

Editor's Column

In the current issue of *Oral Tradition* we offer seven articles that collectively represent the original vision of what the journal was established to do: namely, to illustrate the enormous wealth and innate diversity of oral traditions and thereby to suggest comparisons and contrasts outside the customary boundaries of specialty and discipline. The next three issues will trace the same path, with a miscellany (like the present number) in 24, i to be followed by collections on “sound effects” and the interface of humankind’s oldest and most widespread communications technology with Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

Tammy Ho Lai-Ming opens the discussion with an examination of the evidence that Charles Dickens meant his novels to be read aloud, in other words to be performed. Given the great Victorian author’s use of oral traditional strategies such as folktale plotlines and the heightening of suspense through serialization, this article helps us understand the continuing influence of pre-Gutenberg dynamics. Helen Gregory then takes up the rich topic of poetry in the U. K., with special attention to particular poets and their melding of an international performance art with their identity as British artists. Next in order is a suggestive essay by Joan Gross, who discovers the roots of contemporary Puerto Rican poetic improvisation in a sixteenth-century Spanish form, and shows how poetic practice fosters “re-territorialization” of Puerto Rican culture by recalling its rural, agrarian origins.

In an article written from the perspective of oral history, Outi Fingerroos explains how the lost homeland of Karelia (which spans parts of modern Finland and Russia) has been reconstructed in memory after war and resettlement foreshortened its history. Katrin Rupp explores what happens to an Anglo-Saxon charm, a practical and performance-based intervention, after it is committed to a manuscript, and how the scribe seems to have sensed the semiotic shift. In an essay that treats what may well be the most ubiquitous oral genre of all, Andrea Fishman looks at the oral tradition of lament by comparing examples from the ancient world (Euripides’ *Suppliants*) to contemporary field-recorded performances from Mani and Epiros. Finally, Lorenzo Cherubini considers the phenomenon of digital storytelling among the Aboriginal peoples of Canada as an extension of the oral tradition and a vehicle for political commentary.

Along with the ongoing forum represented by our journal, which last year attracted almost 30,000 readers online, two related projects at the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition are underway. The first consists of an omnibus bibliography of more than 15,000 entries compiled from references cited over the 23 years of the journal’s existence; like *Oral Tradition* itself, this searchable facility will be available online and free of charge, hopefully by October 2009. Along with this data-base we are assembling an eBook of tagged and subtitled video excerpts from extensive interviews with Paolo Zedda, an oral poet and ethnomusicologist from Sardinia, who is in a unique position to explain the art of oral poetry from the double perspective of performer and scholar. The Lord and Parry Lecture that he delivered at the University of Missouri in late 2008 will be linked to this eBook, along with additional videos of performances of Sardinian *mutetu*.

Let me end with a request. Please make a concerted effort to inform your colleagues of the existence of *Oral Tradition* in its free, online format

(<http://journal.oraltradition.org>). The site was created in order to increase and diversify both readership and authorship, and we have already seen dramatic surges in both areas. Quite clearly, the study of the world's oral traditions is an international enterprise, and we aim to serve all interested scholars, students, and institutions by promoting a truly democratic sharing of knowledge, art, and ideas.

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