

Editor's Column

With this issue *Oral Tradition*, founded in 1986 at the University of Missouri, reaches a milestone: the conclusion of its twenty-fifth year of publication. The raw numbers are significant—more than 500 articles comprising more than 11,000 pages treating close to 100 different oral traditions worldwide from ancient to modern times. But two other measurements are perhaps just as telling. Since 2006, when the journal first became available online, open-access, and free-of-charge (with all review procedures intact and in force), our constituency has increased from a maximum of 1200 paper subscriptions to an annual readership of over 20,000 from 216 countries and territories internationally. Just as importantly, we now receive submissions for possible publication from a much wider range of colleagues studying a much more diverse group of traditions from more markedly varied theoretical perspectives. In addition, many articles now feature audio, video, photographic, and other support in the form of eCompanions, thus providing multimedia experiences of performers, performances, audiences, and the like. In this way the electronic medium has liberated the understanding of oral traditions from what can be contained in a text, just as it has radically democratized access and contribution. In short, by taking advantage of the natural homology between humankind's first and most recent communications technologies, an OT-IT homology explored in the [Pathways Project](#), the journal is well placed to continue its growth as a comparative, interdisciplinary forum for scholars and students around the world.

Earlier this year, on February 10th, the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition celebrated its own quarter-century anniversary with several memorable events. Chief among them was the donation of the personal libraries of Albert Bates Lord and Mary Louise Lord to the CSOT and the University of Missouri. We are enormously grateful to Nathan and Mark Lord and their families for this remarkable act of generosity, and are excited to be able to offer this unique resource to visiting scholars and students as well as our own campus community. To mark the donation of the library, the College of Arts and Science at the university has created the Lord Fellowship, which will provide a stipend for visiting researchers who wish to use the collection and other resources of the CSOT. The inaugural recipient is Agnieszka Matkowska of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. As another aspect of the February commemoration, Mark Bender of Ohio State University delivered the 25th Lord and Parry Lecture, entitled "Butterflies and Dragon-Eagles: Processing Epics from Southwest China," which will be published in *Oral Tradition* next year.

On the same evening of February 10th we also announced the launch of a new initiative patterned after the online migration of the journal: the [International Society for Studies in Oral Tradition](#). The purpose of this Internet-based association is to further the original and continuing mission of the CSOT as a whole—to facilitate the study of oral traditions by promoting and facilitating exchange among all constituencies. With the electronic platform and a variety of virtual tools in place, we will support such activities as individual, person-to-person contacts; group discussions over topics of mutual interest; eSeminars and eConferences; and an eArchive for the deposit of primary and secondary materials. Membership in the ISSOT is free and open to all, and we have built a system that optimizes access while protecting identity through

gatekeeping. We hope that the Society will contribute to enhanced democratization of work in our shared field, a goal that harmonizes with the core nature of our joint inquiry.

Finally, a few words about the present issue of the journal, which is perhaps the most ambitious and diverse in *OT*'s history and in that respect a harbinger of contents to come. Kiri Miller opens the forum with an ethnographic exploration of sacred harp memorial lessons, a tradition native to the American South, made richer and more immediate by the author's dual, insider/outsider perspective as both a participant and an ethnomusicologist. Next, Adélékè Adèkò probes the nature and function of orality and literacy in Ifá divination stories from Nigeria, with special attention to the meaning and authority of the inscription system (illustrated photographically). Our third article, by L. I. Davies, queries the applicability of contemporary ideas of orality/literacy and popular vs. elite culture in eighteenth-century England by focusing on Henry Bourne's *Antiquities of the Common People* and John Brand's *Observations on Popular Antiquities*.

Katarzyna Mikulska Dąbrowska opens up a fascinating new area for the journal with her comparative examination of secret, oral-traditional language in Aztec magical discourse, showing how patterned, recurrent expression is imaged in two media: the visual (iconic, idiomatic figures) and the verbal (formulaic, idiomatic phraseology). This groundbreaking contribution is lavishly illustrated with striking re-drawings from religious manuscripts. On a different note, Albert Casals, Jaume Ayats, and Mercè Vilar then explain how they harnessed an oral traditional form for pedagogical purposes, using Catalanian improvised song in local primary schools. An eCompanion containing videos and photos helps the reader to grasp how this traditional medium is repurposed in novel ways.

From northwest China, Wang Guoming offers a rare glimpse into Tuzu *Gesar*, an oral epic tradition little known outside China but which articulates with the Tibetan and Mongolian versions of the expansive *Gesar* cycle that stretches across central and eastern Asia. In addition to the description of the Tuzu performances, Wang has provided photos and a 20-minute video of the singer, Wang Yongfu, that we are pleased to make available as an eCompanion with English subtitles (by Li Xianting). Next, Kati Kallio considers the large and multi-generic body of oral traditions from Ingria in the Finnish-Estonian region, with emphasis on the performance and "interperformativity" of swinging songs and lullabies; her presentation, which treats the multimedia nature of the performances, includes transcriptions and audio excerpts of sung materials.

Another, more general theoretical perspective on music and oral tradition is Francesca R. Sborgi Lawson's discussion of the implications of musicological research for studies in orality and literacy, in which she examines relationships among oral performance, notation, and electronic media. In a much different area, Fay Beauchamp makes the case for the Asian origins of the Cinderella folktale, tracing its pattern and features to the Tang Dynasty and the Zhuang ethnic group located in the Guangxi province, now within the People's Republic of China.

Finally, and fittingly, this twenty-fifth year of *Oral Tradition* closes with a bibliography of Albert Lord's writings, as compiled by Morgan Grey from an obituary article and Mary Louise Lord's additions. Neither the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition nor this journal would exist without Albert's encouragement and fundamental contributions, and we hope that giving pride of place to his seminal work makes that point. In a real sense, and notwithstanding the explosion of

comparative, interdisciplinary research and scholarship on oral tradition that has made this field so rewarding and intriguing for an ever-growing international constituency, the quarter-century comes full circle, ending where it began.

Let me close with an inadequate word of thanks to all those who have participated in the birth and nurturing of *Oral Tradition* as it has evolved from a rough-hewn idea through blue-penciled manuscripts to the (then-)miracle of in-house typesetting and now to a digital avatar on the Internet. Charles Gribble was an indispensable member of the midwifery team, with his and George Fowler's sponsorship of the journal's publication by Slavica for almost twenty years. Deans Milton Glick and Ted Tarkow, and now Dean Michael O'Brien, have trusted the CSOT and *OT* initiatives and have been essential partners in the ongoing project from the start. Generations of graduate editorial assistants, more than two dozen in all as chronicled in the succession of mastheads, have performed faithfully and often brilliantly the tasks of copyediting, proofing, and communication with authors, while the Center's IT managers, Mark Jarvis and Jamie Stephens, have enabled the journal's transition from paper to the web and all that has followed in the wake of that migration. Closer to home, a supremely supportive family has created a context that both supports and places in proper perspective all academic undertakings: in addition to more recent arrivals Joe and Bella, my deepest thanks to (in chronological order) Isaac, Lizzie (about coeval with *OT*), Joshua, and especially Anne-Marie.

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