Editor's Column

We at the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition are pleased to offer our latest issue of *Oral Tradition* for consideration: seven essays reporting on a miscellany of verbal traditions from Europe, Australia, Uganda, the Peruvian Andes, Southeast Asia, and the archaic Greek world. It opens smartly with a study by Tom Pettitt that reveals processes of memorization, performance, and oral transmission in the life of "The Suffolk Tragedy," a nineteenth-century English ballad. Confronting the broadside text against reflexes circulating in oral tradition—two collected in England (1906 and 1972), four in New South Wales, Australia, versions sung by Sally Sloane (1957 and 1976) and by Carrie Milliner (1995)—and with a version that Milliner reconstructed from a fragment found in an aunt's songbook, Pettitt draws insights into the tradition's propensity "to capture the absolute narrative (and dramatic) core of the ballad [...] implying nearly all the rest of the narrative."

The next pair of essays address the socializing function of oral traditions in contemporary Uganda. Lara Rosenoff Gauvin draws on years of intensive fieldwork in Uganda and the writings of Okot p'Bitek (1931-1982) to portray the keen sense of desolation felt by Acoli youth victimized by two decades of war between the Ugandan government and the infamous Lord's Resistance Army. Author and scholar, Okot p'Bitek regarded Acoli oral traditions as the vehicle for cultural knowledge that the individual requires in order to situate the self properly in society. Today, Acoli youth find themselves estranged from their tradition's cultural norms and practices (tekwaro), deprived of the oral tradition of odoko dano, "the socialization process of creating a real human being."

Valeda Dent Goodman and Geoff Goodman report their continuing research into the roles played by libraries in rural villages of Uganda and Africa. They study a set of adult reports about stories that primary caregivers tell to young children with an eye to discovering "what socializing concepts are present" and "the role that stories play within the parent/child communication framework." The authors observe that storytelling as a socialization practice differs across cultures, highlighting a child's misbehavior or catalyzing the teller's re-imagination of her own childhood.

Reporting on the traditional Masha festival practice of songs improvised by pairs of singers in a Peruvian highland village, Charles Pigott adopts an ethnopoetic analytical model to interpret the songs' construction of unity and difference. Pigott's analysis reveals a complex of complementary opposites informing the festival's activities. Quechua, a polysynthetic and agglutinating language, makes available to the singers a repertoire of affixes and suffixes for expressing semantic nuances that "interact in the creation of meaning." A dynamic interplay between complementarity and opposition that is reflective of contradictions and oppositions that act reciprocally in Andean cosmology to serially produce new syntheses inform the song texts. The Masha songs are one expression of the ethical as "a function of the pragmatic" so that an individual's participation in the festival is seen as a moral and social duty as well as a personal decision.

Qu Yongxian studies the song culture of the Dai, a people who are spread across southern China, northeast Thailand, northwest Vietnam, northeast Burma and Northern Laos. She contrasts the epic traditions and songs current among a Dai cultural group that practices Theravada Buddhism and employs a multi-secular writing system for the transmission of its epic poems with that of a second group that practices an indigenous animist religion and transmits its epic poems solely through oral tradition. The two groups share a poetic technique the "waist-feet rhyme." Leading to the conclusion that the Dai groups share a similar poetic tradition, Qu Yongxian fashions a thorough portrait of the several Dai subgroups, recounts the etiological myth of their dispersal, characterizes the Dai script styles, manuscript production and storage techniques, and identifies Buddhist and Indian influence, such as Buddhist Jataka stories among the Theravada Buddhist Dai, that are completely unknown among the indigenous animists.

New technologies for interacting with traditional narratives and songs are highlighted by Coppélie Cocq's study of the transposition of traditional Sami language into internet sites designed to encourage revitalization of this minority language. Proponents of revitalizing this endangered language, spoken by minorities in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, identify the Sami language as the cultural glue of their identity. As does all translation, the translation of traditional Sami storytelling to the Internet effects changes. Whereas storytelling once took place at the árran, the fireplace at the center of the Sami tent, where the presence of the adults could serve as a bulwark shielding emotionally sensitive youngsters and deflecting a tale's more terrifying details, the Internet offers no such guardian presence resulting in the elimination or bowdlerization of salacious details as occurred with Grimm's märchen. Though traditional narrative practices, Cocq observes, "remain the strongest bearer of language revitalization," the development of Internet platforms for Sami storytelling offers an alternate venue and a model for other speakers of minority languages intent on preventing the demise of a mother tongue.

Finally, this issue concludes with an essay by David Elmer that explores political dimensions of archaic Greek epic and lyric poetry. An initial version of the essay was presented at the 26th Albert Lord and Milman Parry Lecture, March 13, 2012; it is here dedicated to the memory of John Miles Foley and offers a fitting tribute. Indeed, Elmer seamlessly argues that the *Iliad* casts consensus as "the ideal outcome of collective deliberation," and that this political attitude is itself allied with "the poem as the product of an oral tradition"—thus advancing the case that the sympotic lyric tradition responds to the very same forces of archaic "song culture" as does the epic. Contrasting the public performance arena of Homeric epic with the private symposium performance space of the lyric, Elmer identifies and essays a rationale for situating "the preoccupation of sympotic poetry with political alienation." His conclusion emphasizes that "the performance of poetry was a fundamentally political event in archaic Greece [...] whether at the symposium or the festival."

Casting about for a novel way to duly recognize the efforts of Associate Editors Lori and Scott Garner: a simple thank you for maintaining the exacting standards of accuracy instituted by the founding editor, your teacher, seems about right. Our resident IT wizard Mark Jarvis controls the Center's computing functions while Hannah Lenon keeps all manner of business affairs on the right side of the balance sheet. Also contributing to the day-to-day operations, Justin Arft, managing editor, Darcy Holtgrave, Associate Editor of ISSOT, and editorial assistants Elise Broaddus, Katy Chenoweth, Elizabeth Janda, Ruth Knezevich, and Rebecca Richardson Mouser lend indispensable assistance. Finally, it is my privilege to acknowledge a debt of gratitude owed to the many colleagues who graciously share their expertise reading and evaluating essays submitted to the journal. This process is fundamental to the now nearly thirty years of scholarly excellence that is customary of *Oral Tradition*.

In closing, we invite you to share your thinking about the world's traditional verbal arts with us. The standard review process involves evaluation by a specialist and a generalist reader, and a decision is generally forthcoming within a trimester of receipt. This journal is published online and free of charge: it counts upwards of 20,000 readers in some 200 countries and territories. We look forward to hearing from you.

John Zemke
Editor, *Oral Tradition*

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