# Editor's Column

With this issue *Oral Tradition* presents seven vistas onto the communicative spaces that the traditional verbal arts command and scholarly approaches to them; a septet of reports about the seemingly inexhaustible wealth and variety of humanity's traditional verbal arts. These essays reflect the high standards of scholarship that John Miles Foley established for the journal and represent part of the diversity and scope of the phenomena that are the bailiwick of *Oral Tradition*.

Michael Marmur opens the conversation with a study of quotation—a universal human behavior and powerful metonymic device—as it is manifested in the *longue duré* of Jewish voices negotiating the present, with its demands and requirements. From this sometimes precarious perch, individuals and institutions quote—Janus-like—with one eye (or ear, in this case) to the past and the other toward the future continuing a three-way conversation about tradition that necessarily regards its own continuity. Thus triangulated by its temporal coordinates, quotation reveals itself to be rhapsodic, constitutive, and conservative—containing dissension within the confines of a traditional discourse.

The warp and woof woven into quotation is reprised by Fleming Andersen's study of two distinct versions of a ballad collected on the same day from two women singers in a weavers village in South West Scotland. Marshaling a structural-formulaic approach to the analysis of the ballads, the essay dramatically illustrates the extent of an individual singer's creative control over the tradition's compositional dynamics: each singer weaves a version that makes the ballad her own.

Continuing in the Scots' realm, with one eye on the old *flyting* poems and the other on North American Hip Hop battle rap, Caitlin Flynn and Christy Mitchell compare common themes and techniques manifest in these contest poetries. Shared rhetorical techniques, characteristic circumstances, and prominent personalities in contemporary Hip Hop poetic polemics, offer footing for insights into the motives and objectives of the Scots' invective contests. Hip Hop emcees and *flyting* poets verbally destroy an opponent's pretension to possessing superior poetic skill and acumen with a primary purpose in mind: to acquire more elite social standing. This fruitful comparison invites extension to additional *comparanda* such as the Old Provenzal *partimen,* the Old Portuguese *cantiga d'escarnho*, or the scabrous 15th-century Spanish invective poems collected in the *Cancionero de Baena.*

Shifting to another facet of the rich vein of traditional poetics, Melissa Borgia offers an essay studying generational changes in story repertoire and storytelling among the Seneca residing in the Allegany Territory before and after construction of the Kinzua Dam on the Allegheny River in 1963. The dam flooded one-third of their territory, including the gravesite of their spiritual leader, and rent the fabric of close knit family enclaves. The Kinzua catastrophe manifests in Seneca storytelling. Tales about supernatural beings and events figure prominently in the tradition whether in the moralizing "life lessons" older residents remember from earlier generations or gravitating towards the cautionary tales or therapeutic vehicles for resolving the symbolic despair their dispossession entailed. The stories are threads sewn into the living cloth of Seneca culture.

Lila Grace Canevaro pinpoints common themes and techniques in two exemplars of sapiential discourse produced by societies distant by a millennium and twenty-five hundred miles: Hesiod's *Works and Days* and the eddic *Hávamál*. Drawing on the deep well of traditional wisdom poetry, and poised at the advent of writing, which became the vehicle for their transmission, both works foreground cardinal elements of early agrarian societies. The *collectanea* of precepts, maxims, and mythologies embody striking parallels in composition, content, transmission, and scholarly reception. Wisdom is a tricky business. Riddles hide meaning but their virtue is to sharpen the listener's interpretive acumen. Constants in both exemplars of the wisdom genre include concerns with balance and measure together with reciprocity and self-sufficiency. Canevaro concludes that interaction between tradition and innovation account for structural features shared by *Works and Days* and *Hávamál*. Whereas the gnomic and mythological features that are common to both works issued from oral traditions that predate writing, the shift to writing for their transmission negotiates a transfer of power from one class of performers to another.

William Duffy proposes that the narrative structures woven by the poetics of immanent verbal arts may also organize the narratives of other nonverbal performances, specifically the dialogic play between contenders in the contests staged in the rings of World Wrestling Federation. An overview of the emergence of modern-day staged wrestling matches from their carnival demimonde precursors uncovers a key in-house code word "kayfabe," referring to the subterfuge that maintains that a "staged" event between a "face" (hero) and a "heel" (villain) is "real" or "true" as far as the unsuspecting public is concerned. The essay contends that with the tools of oral poetic compositional analysis in hand, analysis of such wrestling matches demonstrates the formulaic nature of their tropes. Conversely, the study of wrestling tropes preserved in the thousands of hours of videotaped matches could yield important insights into the traditional verbal arts of now inaccessible and preterite performances, such as the Homeric corpus. Finally, the essay proposes that the origin and diffusion of specific Homeric epithets and formulae may have had less to do with their aesthetic expressiveness and more to do with the popularity of the singers and songs associated with them.

This issue closes with Ryan Platte's close study of the Homeric epithet κλυτόπωλος (of famous foals). Platte identifies a network of genetically related analogues in three cognate phrases in Greek, Vedic, and Gathic Avesta poetry and essays a scheme accounting for their diachronic development from Indo-European antiquity to archaic Greece testifying to a genuine lexeme in the poetic vocabulary of Proto-Indo-European. Additionally, Platte elucidates the argument that Greek oral poets' deployed κλυτόπωλος to refer to good horses and their owners in threats owing to the epithet's power to imply or herald the sudden death of the target against whom it is hurled: the epithet's traditional referentiality focalizes the force of the threat.

This issue sees the light of day thanks to the combined efforts of staff of the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition—Mark Jarvis, Hannah Lenon, Justin Arft, Elise Broaddus, Katy Chenoweth, Ruth Knezevich, Chris Dobbs, and recent arrival Rebecca Benson—and of the many colleagues who referee submissions giving us the benefit of their expertise and advice. *Oral Tradition* is indebted to you, its referees, for your guidance in maintaining the standard of scholarly excellence that John Miles Foley established for the journal. *Oral Tradition* is intended to be a forum for debate and discussion about all aspects of the world's verbal arts, traditional

and nascent. The fundamental importance of John's lifelong contribution to their study is universally recognized. The dialogue of inquiry that he fostered and promoted continues in the pages of this journal. It is again my pleasant duty to recognize the unwavering support this Center receives from the College of Arts & Science that makes this work possible.

As is customary, I invite you to share your research into the world's traditional verbal arts with us. Evaluation of submissions is made by two referees, a specialist and a generalist, and is generally reported to prospective authors within a trimester of receipt. Published online and free of charge, *Oral Tradition* is seen by more than 20,000 readers in 200 countries and territories. In closing, were these words endowed with incantatory power, calendar year 2015 CE would witness neither war, hunger, slavery, suffering nor fear.

John Zemke
Editor, *Oral Tradition*

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