

Editor's Column

With this issue of *Oral Tradition* we reach a benchmark of sorts: the end of the journal's first four years of publication and the end of the sixth year since its inception as a scholarly enterprise. Over those four volumes and twelve issues we have tried to bring before a diverse readership an equally diverse collection of essays on the world's oral traditions and their impact on literary and other written traditions. A significant percentage of *OT*'s pages have thus been devoted to miscellaneous topics, with forays into such areas as Australian, central Asian, ancient, medieval, and modern Greek, Biblical, Old and Middle English, Old Irish, Middle High German, Chinese, Arabic, Hispanic, African, Italian, Persian, Old French, Welsh, Asian Indian, Serbo-Croatian, Rumanian, and modern American traditions. Some of these essays have consisted of surveys of research and scholarship; others have been analytical articles that concentrated on a single work or subject within the broader framework. *Oral Tradition* has also mounted several special issues—a tribute to Walter J. Ong in 1987, a collection on Hispanic balladry in 1988, and, most recently, the double issue on Arabic in 1989—and annotated bibliographies of recent research and scholarship in the field.

As we look ahead to the next decade, *OT* will endeavor to maintain a similar array of contents, making every effort to act as a forum for interdisciplinary work on oral tradition. Most immediately, 1990 will see an issue devoted to Oceania, edited by Ruth Finnegan and Margaret Orbell, and other special collections will follow in future years on Yugoslav and Native American traditions. Another bibliographical supplement will appear in volume 6 (1991), while the next few issues will contain essays on the Indian folk-Mahābhārata, Old Norse sagas, Serbo-Croatian epic, Homeric poetry, and Old English narrative, as well as commentaries on and translations of works by Marcel Jousse, Matija Murko, and V. V. Radlov that significantly influenced the evolution of studies in oral tradition. At longer range we are contemplating special issues on African-American traditions as well as annual Milman Parry lectures to be delivered by Werner Kelber, Ursula Schaefer, and Richard Bauman.

The present issue represents the kind of heterogeneity we hope to continue to encourage: two of the articles concern living traditions (Hungarian folk dance and central Asian epic) on which their authors have done extensive fieldwork, while the others treat oral-derived texts best

understood, it is argued, from the double perspective of orality and textuality. Wayne Kraft opens the conversation with a comparative reinterpretation of folk dancing as a traditional idiom, adducing the discoveries made and theories formulated in the area of verse composition to provide a new perspective on the structures and meaning of the dance-performance. Michael Cherniss then examines an apparent textual blemish in *Beowulf* in the light of narrative patterning, illustrating how the lacuna disappears once one understands the role of the traditional context. Two of our foremost classicists then frame the remarks of a distinguished comparatist on Turkic epic. First, Charles Segal looks at the background of tragedy and other ancient Greek poetic forms from the point of view of their origin in song and ritual; one of the most attractive features of his approach is his attention to phraseology and the implicit networks of meaning that underlie tragic and epic texts. Karl Reichl then focuses on the formulaic structure of Kazakh oral epic, showing how the talented poet is not at all a slave to but rather a master of his tradition and idiom. Finally, William Scott, Milman Parry lecturer for 1989, gives us a perceptive and extremely readable discussion of the dynamics of oral composition in the *Odyssey*, with special attention to the portrait of the singer.

We continue to seek the aid of our readership in proposing books for review and relevant research for annotation in *OT*'s bibliographical supplements. We would also be grateful to hear from individuals who would like to undertake the kind of review-article exemplified in this and other issues.

John Miles Foley, Editor