

Editor's Column

This issue of *Oral Tradition* marks the beginning of our fifth year of publication, and it thus seems appropriate to thank the individuals who have fostered our growth since the inaugural issue of 1986. I am especially grateful to a series of administrators who in one way or another saw value in this field and assisted in the establishment of the journal and the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition at the University of Missouri-Columbia: Melvin George, Theodore Tarkow, Milton Glick, Gerald Brouder, Lois DeFleur, and Larry Clark. We are also indebted to the English department, particularly the former and present Chairs, Timothy Materer and Ellie Ragland-Sullivan. At the "other end" of the process, Charles Gribble, president of Slavica Publishers, has followed through on his firm's commitment to launch and maintain the journal, even as we moved from typescript to disk to desktop publishing. And mediating between authors and publisher has been a host of talented editorial assistants, headed by Ed Tyler.

In future issues of the journal we plan a variety of contents, with approximately every third number devoted to a special area or topic. Upcoming special issues include Ruth Finnegan's and Margaret Orbell's collection on the oral traditions of Oceania (5, ii-iii); a group of essays on Yugoslavia, edited by John Miletich; and a third number on Native American traditions, under the joint supervision of Barre Toelken and Larry Evers. For every such highly focused collection we plan two miscellanies or "potpourri" issues, with emphasis on the variety of oral traditions—modern, medieval, and ancient. We see the documentation (if this not too "un-oral" a term) of that heterogeneity as our primary mission; indeed it is our hope that an increased awareness of the richness and complexity of oral traditions worldwide will help all specialists to a greater understanding of their own particular corners of that world.

Toward such an end this issue presents a wide variety of scholarship on oral traditions from various places and eras. John D. Smith opens the discussion with an article on the folk-*Mahābhārata*, the Rajasthani popular—and oral traditional—version of the great Sanskrit epic; Smith's observations and analysis stem from his considerable experience carrying on fieldwork in the Indian state of Rajasthan, and offer another perspective on the interface between orality and literacy. In the next essay, on the Old English written text "Solomon and Saturn I," Marie Nelson scrutinizes what amounts to a "fictional representation of an oral performance" which was probably written by its author in an idiom that was nonetheless oral traditional in origin. The result is a productive complication of earlier ideas about "written" versus "oral" in Anglo-Saxon poetry, a helpful contextualizing of the various layers of signification in what has always seemed a curious poem. From King Solomon Keith Dickson takes us to Nestor and other ancient Greek *senex* figures in his essay on "A Typology

of Mediation in Homer.” Starting with a single formula, Dickson cleverly examines the group of characters with which it is associated as well as the “contextual parameters” within which it is employed, and is able to lay bare correspondences that suggest interpretive backgrounds for figures, situations, and developing sequences of events.

Just as these three initial essays probe new dimensions of studies in oral tradition, so the next three selections recall some of the work that made them possible. In this sixtieth anniversary year of Milman Parry’s “Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making.¹ Homer and Homeric Style,” we have devoted a section of the journal to three of the most important influences on his research and scholarship.! The first of these, a translation of Wilhelm Radloff’s preface to his foundational work among the central Asian Kara-Kirgiz, has been prepared especially for this purpose by Gudrun Böttcher Sherman with the assistance of Adam Brooke Davis. Next comes Edgard Sienaert’s introductory article on Marcel Jousse, whose 1924 monograph on *Le Style oral rythmique et mnémotechnique chez les verbo-moteurs* was repeatedly cited by Parry. To accompany these two pieces of the puzzle we have reprinted a third item, a translation of the first part of *La Poésie populaire yougoslave au début du XXe siècle* (1929) by Matija Murko,² arguably the greatest of all contemporary influences on Parry’s ideas.

Annalee Rejhon closes this issue with a contribution to our Symposium section, in this case an extended comment on the medieval Welsh and French traditions, with reference to the physiology of the brain and Frederick Turner’s essay “Performed Being: Word Art as a Human Inheritance.”³ Future numbers of *OT* will include articles on Old Norse, Old Irish, Anglo-Saxon, African and African-American, and other traditions, as well as an essay on conversational style and Ruth Finnegan’s 1989 Milman Parry lecture. As we hope has become our own modest “tradition” over these five years, we welcome submissions to the journal in any and all areas; in short, we look forward to learning more about oral tradition.

John Miles Foley, Editor

¹ For a full discussion of Parry’s work and its antecedents, see John Miles Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), chaps. 1-2.

² Originally published in Foley, ed., *Oral-Formulaic Theory: A Casebook* (New York: Garland, 1990), pp. 3-30.

³ *Oral Tradition*, 1 (1986): 66-109.