

## Editor's Column

With the present double issue on Serbo-Croatian traditions, *Oral Tradition* comes to the end of its sixth year of publication. Devoting a special issue to this part of the world at this particular time is of significance in at least two ways. First, as these essays go to press, the postwar creation called Yugoslavia is in the throes of disunification, with Croatia and Slovenia having declared independence and Serbia attempting to maintain the nation-state. Warfare has broken out; lives are being lost and cities destroyed. We can only hope that some solution to the long-standing ethnic hatred can be found, for the sake of all concerned.

In the midst of this hostility, it may be difficult to remember that Yugoslavia was, with ancient Greece, the birthplace of what is historically one of the most important approaches to studies in oral tradition. In 1933-35 Milman Parry and Albert Lord undertook the field expeditions throughout Yugoslavia that would lead to an unparalleled acoustic and dictated archive of traditional oral narrative, primarily epic. This region served in effect as the "living laboratory" in which, they theorized, Parry's hypotheses about the dead-language tradition of Homeric epic could be tested. That beginning has led to investigations by hundreds of scholars in scores of different language areas,<sup>1</sup> and we have the *guslari* of the South Slavic lands to thank for helping to make possible this way of understanding oral tradition.

Thus it is especially poignant to report the recent death of Albert Lord, the co-founder of what has become known as the Oral Theory (but which by its demonstration in dozens of traditions has moved well beyond the status of a hypothesis).<sup>2</sup> With his classic *The Singer of Tales*, the editions of *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs*, numerous articles, and the 1991 *Epic Singers and Oral Tradition*, Lord transformed the original juxtaposition of Homer and the Serbo-Croatian bards into a genuinely comparative field of investigation, wherein today we can learn about similarities and differences among traditions from all over the world. Because it was Albert's work that, more than that of any of his contemporaries, created a need for this journal, *Oral Tradition* will dedicate its next issue (7, i) to his memory.

Before closing let me note that *OT* will be moving to a slightly

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<sup>1</sup>For an annotated bibliography of relevant studies, see Foley, *Oral-Fonnulaic Theory and Research* (New York: Garland, 1985), with updates in *Oral Tradition*; for an introductory history of the approach, see Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

<sup>2</sup>For an obituary notice and a complete listing of Lord's published oeuvre, see the *Journal of American Folklore*, 105 (1992):57-65.

different schedule and format starting with the 1992 volume. Instead of a tri-quarterly, which has proven unwieldy and expensive in the present economy, we plan to issue the journal as a biannual. But, although each volume will have two rather than three parts, the same total number of pages per year will be maintained. The greater single-issue length will also allow the introduction of a new feature: “clusters” of essays on particular topics or areas, amid the customary mix of articles on a variety of fields. One of the first of these clusters will focus on oral tradition and Jewish mysticism; another will confront the knotty problem of editing texts from oral tradition. We hope the new format will allow even greater representation of the heterogeneity of the vast collection of oral traditions around the world.

*John Miles Foley, Editor*