

Editor's Column

Under its new format of a biannual, but with at least the same number of total pages per annual volume as in past years, *Oral Tradition* closes 1992 with this issue. The shift in format is the result of two principal concerns, the one economic and the other academic. Happily, this modification will not at all affect the number and quality of the articles and other features we will continue to bring to our readership, since the overall capacity of the journal will not change. We are committed to an annual volume of 380-400 pages, a figure which has actually translated to more and more space as the methods of typesetting have evolved.

Because *Oral Tradition* serves a very diverse readership, we have been contemplating a way of increasing the heterogeneity of the contents of each issue in an effort to keep readers informed of activity in as many different areas as possible. At the same time, we hoped to be able to feature "clusters" of from three to five essays on a particular subject, approach, or area to complement the variety inherent in a miscellany. Longer single issues, on the order of 180-200 pages, as opposed to our standard triquarterly length of 120-130 pages, promote both greater heterogeneity in coverage and increased opportunity for the focus provided by clusters (without sacrificing variety). We trust this new format will serve the interdisciplinary field well.

The present issue, like its immediate predecessor, illustrates the flexibility made possible by the new format. Among the eight articles included are Emmanuel Obiechina's lead essay on the role of what he calls "narrative proverbs"—imbedded stories from oral tradition—in the African novel. Professor Obiechina goes far beyond mere identification or structural analysis to an inquiry into the dynamics of employing oral traditional material, with its attendant resonances, in a highly literate genre. Next Sioned Davies offers a meticulous and synthetic view of storytelling in medieval Wales; among her concerns are traditional "themes" that recur in numerous sources and inform the narrative in particular ways. Traditional structures and their implications are also emphasized in Marilyn Desmond's essay on "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Tradition," in which she traces significant patterns in the Old English poem and weighs their

importance to a "reading" of this oral-derived traditional text.

We are fortunate indeed to be able to include the third part of Mark Edwards' magisterial survey of scholarship on Homer and oral tradition in this number. While the first two installments (*OT*, 1 [1986]: 767-808 and 3 [1988]: 191-228) treated research associated with the formula, this section covers the type-scene or theme. Following the Edwards essay is our initial cluster, this one on Slavic Oral Traditions. The first of three articles, by Mary P. Coote, deals with the composition of South Slavic women's songs (*ženske pjesme*), a comparatively neglected genre, at least in North American scholarship, that deserves to be better known. The middle paper in the cluster is by the very gifted comparatist Svetozar Koljević, who has according to latest report safely left war-torn Sarajevo for the comparative safety of Belgrade; his forward-looking remarks center on the knotty problem of repetition and invention in the South Slavic epic songs. Alla Astakhova, a colleague from Moscow State University, rounds off the triad with an intriguing study of East Slavic charms. In the Symposium section Hiroyuki Araki offers a very useful overview of studies in oral tradition in Japan.

Future issues of *Oral Tradition* will feature a cluster of essays on ancient Greek (8, i), as well as articles on the Finnish *Kalevala*, Hispanic balladry, Old French *chansons de geste*, Arabic women's songs, American frontier preaching, and African American rap music, among other areas. Special issues on Native American and African oral traditions are nearing completion, Lord-Parry lectures by Ursula Schaefer and Richard Bauman are pending, and a six-essay cluster on editing and oral tradition is in the planning stages.

Let me close this column by calling attention to the Albert Bates Lord Studies in Oral Tradition, intended as a companion to the journal. To date nine volumes have appeared: Jacob Neusner's *Oral Tradition in Judaism*, Stephen Glosecki's *Shamanism and Old English Poetry*, Ruth Webber's *Hispanic Balladry Today*, Judith Seeger's *Count Claros: Study of a Ballad Tradition*, Murray McGillivray's *Memorization in the Transmission of the Middle English Romances*, Edgard Sienaert's and Richard Whitaker's translation of Marcel Jousse's *The Oral Style*, Karl Reichl's *Turkic Oral Epic Poetry*, J. Michael Stitt's *Beowulf and the Bear's Son*, and *De Gustibus: Essays for Alain Renoir*. Books by Carolyn Higbie on Homer and Zinta Conrad on African trickster tales are in press. The Lord series is published by Garland, and can be ordered from that firm.

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