

Editor's Column

Each number of *Oral Tradition* attempts to foster understanding of individual traditions through reference to the remarkable variety of forms presented to us both as living phenomena and as works now preserved only as texts. If the conversation is to prove useful and enlightening, it must be as diverse as possible, striving to place verbal arts in their widest and deepest possible context. Because the study of oral traditions—for that matter, even their discovery—is so much in its infancy, we assume and expect that this interpretive context will continue to evolve, as analogues arise, connections are made, and distinctions are drawn.

The present issue of *OT* has as much potential for further articulation of our joint field as any so far published. Even a mere list of the subjects examined bears this out: Mexican folk drama, Tibetan religious works, African American novels, international ballads, and a focused cluster on “Editing and Oral Traditions” that treats Native American, ancient Greek, Anglo-Saxon, and Egyptian. Equally as heterogeneous, however, are the perspectives and approaches used by authors, including performance studies, ethnopoetics, textual analysis, oral theory, rhetoric, and religious studies. The result is a group of extremely diverse essays, each of them adopting a distinctive line of inquiry, that collectively illustrates the remarkable variety of paths toward understanding that characterizes studies in oral traditions at this point in their development. Another way to put the same matter is to say that this issue provides a representative overview of the composite field in the mid-1990's, and might well serve as a worthy introduction for students, graduate or undergraduate, in a wide range of courses. It will be performing that function this fall in the seminar on oral tradition at the University of Missouri.

Our next issue will begin *OT*'s tenth year of existence, a sufficiently ritualistic moment that we plan to mark with essays on topics such as the ubiquitous “frame tale” in the Middle Ages, the traditional oral character of South African cinema, the infamous Achaean wall in Homer's *Iliad*, and not least the chronicling of Nelson Mandela's release by oral praise-poets. With these and other examples of how Proteus modulates, changing form

from culture to culture and genre to genre, playing so many diverse roles in the social drama, we hope to continue to provide our readership with an ever-evolving sense of the human complexity of oral traditions.

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