

Editor's Column

With this issue *Oral Tradition* reaches a milestone: its tenth birthday. A decade ago quite a number of committed parties joined forces to bring the journal into being, at that point never imagining that anyone would be composing such a preface ten years and some 4000-odd pages later. There are so many people and institutions to thank that I despair of remembering even the most important, but on this unique occasion *OT* should make an effort to acknowledge—if not to catalogue in classic oral epic style—some of the parents, avuncular relations, and dependable friends without whom the inspiration for such a journal would never have jelled into an ongoing reality.

I think first of the University of Missouri-Columbia and of Deans Milton Glick and Theodore Tarkow, as well as Provost Gerald Brouder, who provided initial funding that partially subsidized *OT* over its first two years. With the creation of the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition, the university's commitment became a permanent one, with graduate student and faculty staff, part of whose responsibility it became to edit the journal. Dean Larry Clark deserves our gratitude for his continued and thoughtful support of the Center. The other stalwart in those early times, Slavica Publishers, also remains a full partner still today, and I am particularly grateful to its president, Professor Charles Gribble of Ohio State University, for his understanding, his creativity, and his savvy.

The editorial assistants for the journal have been its heart and soul, and we have recorded their names faithfully in every number of our publication. In addition to these noble colleagues, I want to acknowledge the essential contribution of the editorial board and the scores of other manuscript consultants, who responded to requests for their valuable opinions with, for the most part, alacrity and good will. We all wish that such generous participation could be tangibly rewarded; I hope the existence and function of *OT* is in some way such a reward.

Creating a forum would have served no purpose if no one had anything to say, but there has never been any danger of even a moment's silence in this venue. We receive many more manuscripts than we can publish, and have had to be highly selective over the years. But I am happy to report that this selectivity has not closed the door to younger scholars: assistant professors as well as eminent authorities are numbered among our authors in every issue, and graduate students have been contributors as well. This seems a healthy arrangement if the conversation is to be as broad-based and lively as possible, and we aim to continue to promote as diverse a symposium as we (all of us) can manage.

Along with diversity of authorship, we have strived to make the contents of the journal as various and inclusive as the multidisciplinary field it serves. Thus, along with occasional special issues on such topics as Arabic traditions and Hispanic balladry, *OT* has spent most of its allotment on miscellaneous issues—sometimes with clusters on this or that area—but always with the overall goal of presenting the richness of diversity. Perhaps that commitment goes back to the moment when the journal had to be assigned a title, and I hesitated over *Oral Tradition*, singular, versus *Oral Traditions*, plural. While the former

seemed a more effective scholarly moniker, it is in the spirit of the latter that we have tried to proceed.

With these things in mind, it is a pleasure to introduce the intriguing slate of essays that make up our tenth anniversary issue. It is absolutely fitting that Walter J. Ong, who has done so much for our collective enterprise, should begin the discussion with a fascinating treatment of hermeneutics as conditioned by voice, digitization, and other phenomena. Bonnie Irwin then deflects our critical gaze away from the narrative “center of things” to the frame that encloses and contextualizes that center, ranging over numerous traditions from East and West. Mark Amodio concentrates on the Old English *Beowulf*, but his essay has much larger implications for the kind of poetics we ascribe to oral traditions and oral-derived traditional texts across a wide spectrum.

Three contributions on Africa follow this opening triad. First, Russell Kaschula shows how the praise-poem tradition participated in chronicling and interpreting Nelson Mandela’s first visit to his home in Umtata after his release from prison. In a wholly different medium, Keyan Tomaselli and Maureen Eke demonstrate the effect of oral tradition on the making and understanding of film in South Africa. Yet another medium—this time the highly literary novel—is the subject of F. Odun Balogun’s essay on the Kenyan novel *Matigari*; this discussion should be of special value for those interested in Native American novels as well, since they wrestle with many of the same combinations of structures and signals Balogun uncovers in this syncretic African genre.

The issue closes with three additional articles, the first of them by Jesse Byock on the nature of Icelandic saga in social context and the fundamental role of the audience who served as “partner to the poet.” The final two essays, both on the Homeric poems, together help to complete a kind of ring-composition, a mnemonic and artistic design so typical of Homer (and some other oral epic narratives as well), in that they end this conversation in ancient Greece, just where one of its originators, Milman Parry, began it. Mustering ancient sources and modern comparisons from South Slavic oral epic, Timothy Boyd examines the compositional questions associated with the famous Achaean wall. Steve Reece then echoes the same pattern by demonstrating the ring-composition that underlies and informs the naming and killing of the suitors toward the end of the *Odyssey*.

All in all, it seems best to close this tenth anniversary column by looking forward to the next decade of *Oral Tradition*. Given the explosion of information and perspectives that the years since 1986 have witnessed, what remarkable advances—and welcome complications—await us as we move past the millennium? I urge all who are listening, and all those you can cause to listen, to let us know what you hear.

John Miles Foley, Editor