

Editor's Column

With issue 26, i, *Oral Tradition* delves into a wide variety of traditions and media in multiple cultural contexts, seeking as always to chart new territory and to expand the horizons of our joint, interdisciplinary field. We see this emphasis on diversity as perhaps the most important role our journal can serve: to report on the international panoply of both longstanding and emerging forms of traditional verbal art.

Moradewun Adejunmobi begins the discussion with her examination of writing, performance, and new media in urban West Africa, explaining that verbal artists often portray themselves as writers despite their primary engagement with performance and digital technologies. Next in succession is Eric Shepherd's richly illustrated overview of Shandong "fast tales," a Chinese performance tradition over four centuries old; be sure to spend some time with the video and photographic content of the attached eCompanion to this article. From Africa and China, we move to central Asia, with Ildikó Bellér-Hann and Raushan Sharshenova describing how tales recounting the adventures of the folk hero Kuyruchuk depend on the different political worlds—tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union, and post-Soviet society—in which the continuously recontextualized tales have been told and received.

The Byzantine epic *Digenes Akrites* existed on the cusp of oral tradition and manuscript culture, and Christopher Livanos examines the titular hero's encounter with the dragon and the Amazon Maximou from a Freudian perspective, as well as in a broad Indo-European frame of reference. Robert Mann draws together new evidence from various redactions of related texts to argue that the Russian *Tale of Igor* was an oral epic within an active tradition that continued into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, highlighting the performer's dependence on (and fluency in) traditional poetic phraseology. Also within the Slavic realm, Aaron Tate provides a translation of the famous nineteenth-century collector Luka Marjanović's first report on his massive fieldwork expeditions in Croatia and Bosnia, along with commentary that places Marjanović's ideas in historical perspective.

Minako Sakata then offers a rare account of the structure and dynamics of folktales told by the Ainu, an indigenous people living in present-day Japan and Russia; she concentrates on shared motifs and the interactivity of individual tales within the tradition. Paul Koerbin's contribution treats the Turkish Alevi lyric songs associated with Pir Sultan Abdal, focusing on this figure's persona and the large body of lyrics, commentary, and texts that have accumulated since the early twentieth century. The final article in this issue, by Margo Kitts, addresses oath-sacrifice and commensal sacrifice scenes in the ancient Greek epics of Homer, maintaining that these scenes draw their structure from ritual paradigms as well as from Homeric poetics.

As the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition and the journal emerge from their twenty-fifth anniversary year, it seems timely to emphasize the recent launch of the International Society for Studies in Oral Tradition (<http://issot.org>). The aim of the ISSOT, which provides a sponsored virtual platform for exchange among scholars, performers, and students around the world, is to leverage electronic media in order to promote and facilitate communication that otherwise could not happen. We have identified four ways in which the society can benefit the field.

Member-to-member. In the spirit of person-to-person communication, members of the society, which is open-access and free-of-charge, are able to search our data-base to locate

colleagues interested in various areas, traditions, and topics, and to exchange ideas and media as they wish. (The initial connection works through an approval mechanism, so that members who are contacted have the opportunity to approve or not to approve the connection by clicking on a reply e-mail through the ISSOT site. After both members agree to the exchange, communication then proceeds directly and independently.)

Webinars. Second, we plan a series of webinars, or seminars broadcast live on the Internet, which will be captured as videos and posted on the ISSOT site for asynchronous viewing. Our first webinar, “Oral Epics in China” (<http://issot.org/events>) delivered by Dr. Chao Gejin, Director of the Institute of Ethnic Literature at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, was attended live in 13 countries; within a week of its posting as a video, scholars from 39 countries had accessed the presentation.

Interviews. Third, in an effort to familiarize colleagues with research, fieldwork, and performance in various areas within our general field, we plan a series of ISSOT interviews with scholars and performers from different parts of the world. Consisting of brief articles and video excerpts, these features will allow members to explain their activities in their own words, as well as to include links to pertinent texts and multimedia illustrations.

eResearch groups. In future months, a fourth ISSOT initiative will bring together members from widely separated locales to collaborate on topics that span multiple oral traditions. These eResearch groups, of perhaps six to ten people, will use the ISSOT facility to share their ideas, proposals, scholarship, and media over a four- to six-month period. When the group feels that its deliberations have reached maturity, it will have the option of creating a jointly authored position paper on their conclusions or opening their eDiscussion to the membership or the Internet community at large.

We are excited about the ISSOT initiatives and their potential for developing our field, and we encourage you to register for the society at (<http://issot.org/signup>) and to participate in its activities. Communication about these four programs should be addressed to Darcy Holtgrave (info@issot.org), Associate Editor for the ISSOT at the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition. Meanwhile, we continue to welcome your submissions to *Oral Tradition* and look forward to learning from your contributions.

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