

## **“With This Issue . . .”: A Record of *Oral Tradition***

**Compiled and edited by the current editorial staff**

During *Oral Tradition*'s 26 years under John Miles Foley's leadership, "with this issue" became a formula of sorts, a phrase employed in his editorial columns with predictable regularity to signal new opportunities, exciting developments, and future plans in store for the journal. "With this issue," a phrase that appears in some form or another in almost every volume of *Oral Tradition*, is thus freighted with both celebration and promise, reminding the reader that it is best to look forward while still investing the time to take stock of present events. While each editorial column in its original context elegantly introduced the contents of a given issue, as a synthesized document these columns can now serve both to chronicle the many exciting changes that advanced *Oral Tradition* into the successful global and open-access journal that it is today and to highlight the steadfast philosophies and goals that John Foley himself used to steer the journal's direction over the many years.

What follows are abridged versions of selected columns written by Professor Foley between 1986 and 2011, collected with the aim of demonstrating the patterns of scholarship within *Oral Tradition* as well as milestones in the journal's development.<sup>1</sup> Within these columns we find both a dedication toward the journal's original mission and also the necessary flexibility that allowed the journal to take advantage of (and overcome the obstacles associated with) developments in technology and increasing globalization among *Oral Tradition*'s contributors and readership. Thus, alongside his commitment to the democratization of knowledge and his insistence on broadening conversations to include a wide range of disciplines and traditions, John also maintained an openness toward discovery that has worked over the years to bridge generations of scholars, performers, and readers alike.

With this issue, we mourn the passing of John Miles Foley, dear teacher, scholar, colleague, and friend. Yet we also celebrate his life and his legacy, and we invite you to join us as we continue his unwavering commitment to inclusivity, plurality, and forward thinking that has guided this journal so productively from its inception and now enables further progress into a largely uncharted and unwritten future.

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<sup>1</sup> With this goal in mind, the more detailed description of individual issues' contents have been omitted; however, all of these columns (as well as those written by the guest editors of the journal's numerous special issues) can be consulted in their entirety at <http://journal.oraltradition.org>.

**Vol. 1.1 (January 1986)**

Tradition demands that an editor of a new scholarly journal perform the ritual gesture of justifying the birth of the new academic child, and certainly any periodical named *Oral Tradition* cannot afford to ignore either the demands of tradition in general or ritual gestures in particular. Nonetheless, those of us assisting at the delivery feel strongly that in this case the proverbial claim that the new medium “fills a gap” really does contain a modicum of truth. For nowhere in the hallowed halls of academia have we found a journal devoted exclusively to the study of oral tradition in its many forms, nowhere a single, central periodical through which scholars in this wide variety of specialties might communicate. And in recent years this simple “gap” has grown into a chasm: there are now more than one hundred separate language areas affected by studies in oral tradition, among them ancient Greek, Anglo-Saxon, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Old French, medieval Spanish, and dozens more; and the disciplines summoned to this collaborative undertaking include, at a minimum, literary history and criticism, folklore, anthropology, linguistics, and history. Thus it is that *Oral Tradition* is being inaugurated to inform specialists of parallel developments in their own and different areas, to build and maintain bridges among disciplines in order to promote the healthy growth of the field as a whole.

Our publishing program has been tailored to correspond to the various aspects of research and scholarship on oral tradition and on “literary” forms with roots in oral tradition. In addition to individual scholarly essays, *Oral Tradition* is committed to other kinds of forums for dissemination of the best and latest thinking in this multidisciplinary consortium. We shall be publishing a number of *special issues* on particular areas or genres, each of them edited by a scholar of eminence. This inaugural issue presents a sample of the mix of survey and analytical essays that we hope will be typical of *Oral Tradition*. We invite all members of the community interested in studies in oral tradition to join this enterprise, and not only by entering personal and institutional subscriptions to *Oral Tradition* (always a high priority) but also by contributing manuscripts, responses for the Symposium section, copies of books and offprints of articles for review and report in the bibliography, ideas for special issues, and suggestions about any aspect of the journal’s operation or contents. We who work in this rapidly evolving field have long needed a place to communicate about moving the field forward by sharing our ideas and by responding to the ideas of others. It is our hope that *Oral Tradition* will serve these purposes.

**Vol. 1.2 (May 1986)**

In this second issue of *Oral Tradition* we have some happy news to convey. As of July 1 of the present year, the University of Missouri at Columbia will be the home of a Center for Studies in Oral Tradition, a place and a modest facility which we hope will serve as a focus for studies in this emerging field.

The Center will, of course, assume responsibility for the editing of *Oral Tradition*, and in addition will serve as the editorial base for two other publishing ventures. One of these will be a monograph series on oral traditions; the series will include between one and four volumes each year and has been named in honor of Albert Bates Lord. In addition, the Center for Studies in

Oral Tradition is in the process of creating an archive of primary and secondary materials, with special emphasis on fieldwork collections. We shall be pleased to serve as a deposit facility, so that scholars with taped and manuscript records can store a safety copy in our library.

The first annual bibliography will appear in the next issue of *OT*, along with a wide selection of survey and analytical essays. Fittingly, Albert Lord has provided the lead article, a sequel to his "Comparative Perspectives" essay of 1974 that comments on recent work on oral traditions, for the very issue that houses the first annual Milman Parry Lectures on Oral Tradition, delivered in April 1985 by Joseph J. Duggan. Once more, we invite submissions for *Oral Tradition*, as well as for the new monograph series (the Albert Bates Lord Studies in Oral Tradition) and for *Southeastern Europe*. We also look forward to detailed and cogent responses to articles as they appear, to be published in the Symposium section of *OT* as soon as possible after they are received. In addition, notices of pertinent upcoming events and reports on conferences and symposia are always welcome.

### 1.3 (December 1986)

With this issue *Oral Tradition* comes to the end of its first year of existence, and it thus seems an appropriate time to thank all those concerned with producing the first volume: the authors, reviewers, editorial board, editorial assistants, and not least the readership. The staff at Slavica Publishers deserve special gratitude for their heroic efforts.

The May issue, under the editorship of Ruth H. Webber, will be devoted to Hispanic balladry. In connection with the recently established Center for Studies in Oral Tradition at Missouri, we are happy to announce an upcoming international symposium commemorating the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, the great Serbian ethnographer, linguist, and collector of oral traditional narrative. To celebrate this occasion, six Yugoslav colleagues will be coming to Columbia to join six Americans for a five-day symposium on the topic "Vuk Karadžić: Oral and Literary Art." Let me close this brief column with an invitation for all readers to take an active part in formulating the early history of *OT*. We welcome your comments and suggestions for the journal, as well as your bibliographical assistance and responses to previously published articles for the "Symposium" section. Notes of conferences or other events of interest to the readership will also be a regular feature. In short, we welcome whatever contribution you wish to make to the shaping of our collective enterprise.

### 3.1-2 (January 1988)

With the present double issue (volume 3, numbers i-ii), *Oral Tradition* returns to the format of a miscellany, that is, of a collection of essays on a wide selection of traditions intended to familiarize specialists with parallel or analogous developments outside of their home areas. The annotated bibliography of research and scholarship, which follows six essays, now extends through 1985. It has profited from the readership's suggestions and contributions, but we continue to ask for your assistance in making this research tool as useful as possible.

### 3.3 (October 1988)

With the present issue we are pleased to observe that the typographical format of *Oral Tradition* has changed. Typesetting will from this point on be done at the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition at the University of Missouri-Columbia. Advances in technology and lowering of equipment costs have combined to make it feasible to assemble text in the various alphabets used by the journal without leaving the editorial offices, and without making concessions in the form of either deleting original-language quotation or depending solely on transliteration.

### 4.3 (October 1989)

With this issue of *Oral Tradition* we reach a benchmark of sorts: the end of the journal's first four years of publication and the end of the sixth year since its inception as a scholarly enterprise. Over those four volumes and twelve issues we have tried to bring before a diverse readership an equally diverse collection of essays on the world's oral traditions and their impact on literary and other written traditions. A significant percentage of *OT*'s pages have thus been devoted to miscellaneous topics, with forays into such areas as Australian, central Asian, ancient, medieval, and modern Greek, Biblical, Old and Middle English, Old Irish, Middle High German, Chinese, Arabic, Hispanic, African, Italian, Persian, Old French, Welsh, Asian Indian, Serbo-Croatian, Rumanian, and modern American traditions. Some of these essays have consisted of surveys of research and scholarship; others have been analytical articles that concentrated on a single work or subject within the broader framework. *Oral Tradition* has also mounted several special issues—a tribute to Walter J. Ong in 1987, a collection on Hispanic balladry in 1988, and, most recently, the double issue on Arabic in 1989—and annotated bibliographies of recent research and scholarship in the field.

As we look ahead to the next decade, *OT* will endeavor to maintain a similar array of contents, making every effort to act as a forum for interdisciplinary work on oral tradition. The present issue represents the kind of heterogeneity we hope to continue to encourage: two of the articles concern living traditions (Hungarian folk dance and central Asian epic) on which their authors have done extensive fieldwork, while the others treat oral-derived texts best understood, it is argued, from the double perspective of orality and textuality. Finally, William Scott, Milman Parry lecturer for 1989, gives us a perceptive and extremely readable discussion of the dynamics of oral composition in the *Odyssey*, with special attention to the portrait of the singer.

We continue to seek the aid of our readership in proposing books for review and relevant research for annotation in *OT*'s bibliographical supplements. We would also be grateful to hear from individuals who would like to undertake the kind of review-article exemplified in this and other issues.

### 5.1 (January 1990)

. . . In future issues of the journal we plan a variety of contents, with approximately every third number devoted to a special area or topic. Upcoming special issues include Ruth Finnegan's and Margaret Orbell's collection on the oral traditions of Oceania (5, ii-iii); a group of essays on Yugoslavia, edited by John Miletich; and a third number on Native American traditions, under the joint supervision of Barre Toelken and Larry Evers. For every such highly focused collection we plan two miscellanies or "potpourri" issues, with emphasis on the variety of oral traditions—modern, medieval, and ancient. We see the documentation (if this is not too "un-oral" a term) of that heterogeneity as our primary mission; indeed it is our hope that an increased awareness of the richness and complexity of oral traditions worldwide will help all specialists to a greater understanding of their own particular corners of that world.

Toward such an end this issue presents a wide variety of scholarship on oral traditions from various places and eras. As we hope has become our own modest "tradition" over these five years, we welcome submissions to the journal in any and all areas; in short, we look forward to learning more about oral tradition.

### 6.2-3 (May 1991)

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 post-war 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, 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). 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 different schedule and format starting with the 1992 volume. Instead of a triquarterly, 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. We hope the new format will allow even greater representation of the heterogeneity of the vast collection of oral traditions around the world.

### **7.1 (March 1992)**

With the present issue *Oral Tradition* embarks upon its new editorial program of two per volume and year, each to be approximately fifty percent larger than the standard triquarterly number. This format is intended to make possible certain changes in the journal: in addition to bringing costs more under control and providing the same annual page allotment, it is designed to make for greater heterogeneity in each issue. The increased space will of course mean that more different traditions can be examined in a given number, and it will also make room for "clusters" of essays on a particular subject or in a particular field, groups of articles that will constitute a focus amid the natural diversity of *OT*'s responsibilities. We will also maintain the possibility of devoting an entire number to a single area, so special issues such as those that have appeared in the past will remain part of the editorial program. Since the journal was established in order to facilitate communication among scholars sharing an interest in oral tradition but segregated by the disciplinary structure of modern academia, this enhancement of diversity in *OT*'s contents seems appropriate.

### **8.1 (March 1993)**

This first issue of 1993 marks the beginning of the eighth year of publication for *Oral Tradition*, and with the new year comes a resolution and a change in policy. Readers will notice that this issue contains an extensive *Books Received* listing in its final pages. This digest, and those to follow at regular intervals, will constitute an invitation for specialists in various fields to contribute a brief review of approximately 500-1000 words on any of the volumes listed. We look forward to working with you on this new project.

With this issue we also present another cluster of essays, this one on ancient Greek poetry. It was of course this area in which Milman Parry began his epoch-making research. This cluster illustrates some of the major directions that scholarship on Homer and his colleagues have taken since Parry's original work. Ursula Schaefer's 1991-92 Lord and Parry Lecture closes the volume by urging a reassessment of medieval texts with roots in oral tradition, specifically from the vantage point of reception theory.

Upcoming issues will feature articles on rap music, Hispanic ballads, the Finnish *Kalevala*, Arabic bridal songs, Tibetan oral traditions, the performance of Old English poetry, and many other topics. On the horizon are special collections on Native American and African traditions.

## 8.2 (October 1993)

What we might call the “bookends” to this second and final issue of *Oral Tradition* for 1993 represent a new direction for the journal. One of them consists of an interview with George Sutherlin, aka DJ Romeo, a traditional oral artist whose specialty is rap music. At the other extremity of the present issue lies a transcribed performance of sorts, in this instance a group discussion of “Orality and Deafness” that was conducted on the electronic network ORTRAD-L sponsored by the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition at Missouri. Within the fascinating and often bewildering mix of media that constitutes contemporary Western expressive and perceptual repertoires, we hope these two examples of (textualized) non-print, performance-based interactions shed some light on the complex processes associated with oral tradition. Within the bookends this issue’s potpourri includes contributions on Finnish, Hispanic, Anglo-Saxon, Arabic, Greek, and French traditions. All in all, we trust that this heterogeneous selection fulfills *OT*’s commitment to maintain a broad comparative view.

In our next issue, that perspective will be focused on the tremendous variety and richness of African oral traditions. Special editor Lee Haring has assembled a valuable collection of nine essays, plus his introduction, on topics as diverse as Chokwe storytelling, Igbo epic, Somali women’s poetry, and Hausa rap artists.

## 9.2 (October 1994)

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-1990s, 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.

With 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.

### 10. 1 (March 1995)

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.

## 10.2 (October 1995)

With this issue of *Oral Tradition* we offer our readership a *salamagundi* of essays on an international variety of fields. . . . The next issue of *Oral Tradition* (11, i) will present a unique glimpse of epics along the famous “Silk Roads,” an immense stretch of territories and peoples across northeast Europe and vast parts of central Asia. With this issue readers may expect to hear, perhaps for the first time, of Mongolian, Tibetan, Chinese, Indian, Palawan, Caucasian, and Khalkan epics as well as of the Finnish *Kalevala*, more familiar to those of us laboring in the Eurocentric vineyard.

## 11. 2 (October 1996)

Eleven years ago the journal was founded to provide a forum for comparative exchange, a kind of “pituitary gland” to help organize a cross-disciplinary discourse that often suffered from reinventing the wheel. In these first ten annual volumes of *OT*, an electronic index to which will soon be available at the web site maintained by the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition [now available at <http://oraltradition.org>] we have tried to bring scholars from disparate areas into an unprecedented, productive dialogue. Issue 11, ii illustrates this editorial policy, treating a rich variety of oral traditions and performances, from ballads to Shakespeare to Japanese storytelling, medieval English poetry, Finnish narrative, and African American rap music. Our editorial premise is clear: the best chance for understanding any single tradition lies in a realistic grasp of the plurality and heterogeneity of oral traditions. *OT* has been and will remain committed to this premise.

Future issues will address the complexities of oral traditions in various ways. Issue 12, i will focus on South Asian women’s traditions, opening up an understudied area to closer inspection. Similarly, number 13, i will feature Native American traditions, concentrating on the challenge of cotranslation by a native speaker and an outside scholar. Let me close by emphasizing our wish to broaden the ongoing discussion by whatever means are available. Thus we actively solicit your manuscripts, in any and all fields. We also plan an enlargement of our web site to include not only the annotated bibliography of oral-formulaic theory (already in place) and the index of volumes 1-10 of *OT*, but also titles and abstracts for future contents. Let us know how we can better serve your academic needs.

**12. 2 (October 1997)**

Let me start this editor's column with an invitation before the menu. As always, we seek to publish the best available scholarship on the world's oral traditions, oral-derived texts, and related forms. Perhaps even more insistently than in prior years, as we near the turning of the millennium, studies in oral tradition need both greater breadth and increased depth. That is, *Oral Tradition* is eager to print articles treating both living traditions (whether fieldwork- or archive-oriented) and manuscript- or text-based works. We welcome your voice, and look forward to your joining the conversation.

The present number of *Oral Tradition* reflects the heterogeneity for which we have been striving since the inaugural issue in 1986. Finally, Catherine Quick adds to our annotated bibliographical series with the 1986-1990 installment of books and articles pertaining to oral-formulaic theory and related approaches to the study of oral tradition. We plan to bring the series up to 1995 soon. All new installments, as well as the original 1982 bibliography, will be available electronically at the website for the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition: <http://oraltradition.org>.

**14.1 (March 1999)**

The first number of volume 14 opens with a new emphasis for *Oral Tradition*. Devoted entirely to Jewish traditions, it examines the interplay of orality and text across the centuries from the foundation of sacred writings (and sayings) through to the present day.

Let me also take a moment to welcome aboard John Zemke, Associate Professor of Romance Languages, as assistant editor. A specialist in Hispanic and particularly in Sephardic oral traditions, Professor Zemke has been of enormous help in preparing the present issue and will be playing a prominent role in the editing of the journal from this point forward.

As ever, we welcome your submissions and your subscriptions with equal and genuine enthusiasm, and look forward to new and exciting developments within our shared field.

**14.2 (October 1999)**

With the present issue *Oral Tradition* returns to its more common—and in many ways most fundamental—format: a digest of articles on a wide variety of traditions and expressive forms. The rationale for this diversity stems from our editorial commitment to study oral tradition comparatively, to learn more about our “home fields” by juxtaposing verbal arts from all over the world and throughout history.

Further in our future lies a special issue on the minority oral traditions of China, a project undertaken in partnership with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing.

We continue to welcome your best ideas about our shared field of oral tradition. Whatever your specialty—geographically, ethnically, chronologically, or medially—our journal stands ready to present your perspective to a broad, interested audience.

**16.1 (March 2001)**

Over this and the next issue *Oral Tradition* will be following a double path it charted a decade and one-half ago and seeks still to follow. The present number houses a miscellany of articles on Basque, Ndebele, ancient Greek, Native American, Old English, and Old Norse traditions, and their authors employ perspectives as diverse as politics and nationalism, comparative anthropology, myth studies, lexicography and semantics, performance studies, and rhetorical theory. In this way we hope to encourage a “polylogue” that avoids the special pleading of disciplinary focus and welcomes a host of divergent viewpoints on what is after all a remarkably heterogeneous species of verbal art.

We are also very pleased to present the Albert Lord and Milman Parry Lecture for 2001, on “Performance and Norse Poetry,” by Stephen Mitchell. Indeed, there is some special justice in Professor Mitchell’s having delivered this lecture, since he serves as Curator of the Milman Parry Collection, whose contents Albert Lord initially brought before us, as well as co-editor of the second edition of Lord’s *The Singer of Tales*. In the next issue of *Oral Tradition* we will honor the other half of our ongoing commitment: to devote an occasional number to a somewhat narrower focus on a single tradition or area. Dr. Chogjin, a Mongolian specialist who spent twelve months at the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition at Missouri, is responsible for recruiting the thirteen authors who have written for this unprecedented collection of essays. Not a few of them are in fact the very first professional scholars their ethnic groups have produced, so the special issue they help to constitute promises to be a landmark publication in many ways.

**17.1 (March 2002)**

With this seventeenth volume *Oral Tradition* offers what has become its stock-in-trade: a cornucopia of articles on the natural diversity of the world’s oral traditions and related forms. Indeed, the miscellaneous character of this issue, and of many of our collections over the past decade and one-half, is straightforwardly mimetic of the field itself. Almost weekly one hears of a recently discovered tradition, or a new genre within a well-known oral poetry, or a freshly encountered interface between orality and literacy. If the study of oral traditions initially made its way by attempting to distinguish itself from “literature” and to define itself quite separately as an implicitly homogeneous type of verbal art, so now all indicators seem to be pointing in the other direction. Oral traditions dwarf their textual counterparts in size and variety, and many of the most intriguing challenges arise from the intersection of orality (in all its guises), literacy (in its own many-sidedness), and even the ever more important electronic media. To put it simply, such miscellanies only become more appropriate vehicles for the presentation of research and scholarship as time goes on and our perspectives deepen.

Here the reader will find essays on Native American, modern Italian, Irish, and Indian verbal arts, as well as the New Testament and uses of orality in the Romantic period and the late twentieth century. Finally, we urge our readers to visit our new web site at [www.oraltradition.org](http://www.oraltradition.org), where we are beginning the construction of an e-archive for oral tradition. At present, visitors can listen to South Slavic epic and charms, as well as watch a videotaped performance of slam

poetry; searchable bibliographies are also available there, and much more will be mounted in the months to come. We welcome your suggestions and contributions to this facility, which is intended, like the journal *Oral Tradition*, as a resource that fosters cross-disciplinary exchange.

### 18.1 (March 2003)

*Oral Tradition* for 2003 presents something quite different from its usual contents. Over this and the next issue we will explore the “state of our art” across the multiple academic disciplines and hundreds of individual traditions, ancient through contemporary, that collectively constitute our field. That is, this and the next issue of *OT* will be devoted exclusively to sampling the heterogeneity of studies in oral tradition, to gaining some insight on the variety and limits of investigation and understanding as of the year 2003.

We start not just by admitting but by stipulating that “oral tradition” is in numerous practical ways anything but a unified field. Most obviously, it refers to all verbal art that comes into being and is transmitted without texts, and recent years have shown that it must also encompass myriad forms and genres that interact in many fascinating ways with texts, and now with electronic media. Hopefully, over the past seventeen years the pages of *Oral Tradition* have contributed to this ongoing reassessment and rebalancing, participating in helping to make us aware of some of the wonderful richness and complexity of “oral tradition” while offering both tradition-specific insights and comparative analogies that can be useful to a responsible citizen of the twenty-first century. That at least has been our goal.

Amid the hurly-burly of these nearly two decades’ worth of exchange, *OT* now seeks to “take the pulse” of the field, a composite field construed as broadly as possible. We do this without in any way suggesting that the measurement is or can be precise or exhaustive; indeed, such is the heterogeneity of our subject that any claim of this sort would be illusory at best. Instead, we aim at a random sampling of what the concept of “oral tradition” means to individual scholars and practitioners, and at what they see as the next challenge(s) in their particular corner of an ever-expanding world of investigation. Among our emphases in the present issue are performance, the Bible, African, Tibetan and Chinese, ancient Greek, Japanese, and Lithuanian, along with entries on Arabic, Basque, South Slavic, and Madagascar. The next issue will feature sections on the medieval world, the ballad, and Hispanic, along with responses on Finnish, the Philippines, and Celtic. The more than eighty contributions over the two halves of the 2003 volume touch on many other fields as well.

We hope that the result is thought-provoking for our readership. The very nature of the exercise precludes expounding anything at length or saying anything “final,” of course, but that isn’t the point. This collection of perspectives draws whatever strength it may have from its diversity and suggestiveness, that is, from the extent to which its contents awaken ideas within readers’ own disciplines and conceptualizations of “oral tradition.” Think of these often telegraphic responses as an invitation to dialogue, comparison and contrast, and new directions that might translate fluently to your own field.

Finally, as the dedication page at the beginning of this issue indicates, the collection as a whole is offered as a *Festschrift* for Robert Payson Creed, who introduced me to Old English

poetry and oral tradition. I remember vividly how he made both subjects vital and very much alive via his daily seminar performances of scenes from *Beowulf* in the original Anglo-Saxon. As one of Albert Lord's early students, and as an accomplished scholar and thinker who has contributed essentially to our grasp of (as he himself put it) the "making of an Anglo-Saxon poem," Bob has made a singular difference in many of his students' lives. I present him this tribute on behalf of all of us. *Wes þu, Robert, hal!*

### 19.1 (March 2004)

With the first issue of volume 19 we return to *Oral Tradition's* most customary (even archetypal) format: a collection of six medium-sized essays on a variety of areas spanning both geographical and historical space. Volume 18, which comprised two anthologies of brief reports on the world's oral traditions and related phenomena, aspired to bring before our readership some reflection of the enormous diversity of the subject to which this journal has attended for nearly twenty years. Now we resume what has become our conventional style, but perhaps with an increased awareness of the remarkably diverse background against which studies in oral tradition must be understood.

Prior contents are now listed in a searchable database [now available at <http://journal.oraltradition.org/articles/advancedsearch>]. As always, we welcome your reactions, your advice, and especially your manuscripts.

### 19.2 (October 2004)

With this issue of *Oral Tradition* we offer our readership perspectives on a cornucopia of traditions from around the world and from ancient times to the present day, and at the same time we inaugurate the new feature of *E-Companions* that will become a staple of our publication program.

From this issue onward, *Oral Tradition* will, whenever feasible and helpful, enlist the opportunities afforded by the internet to flesh out its contents in as realistic and genuine a way as possible. Specifically, we plan to supplement the articles that appear in the physical and virtual pages of the journal itself (as published in paper format by Slavica Publishers and in virtual format as part of Project Muse) with a facility we call the *E-Companion*. Consisting of such supplementary aids as streaming audio and video, photographs, and ancillary text-based items such as bibliographies and appendices, these *E-Companions* are meant to accomplish what the published article by its very nature cannot: to fill in some of the background of real-life context and experience that is by convention eliminated from even the most carefully prepared textual document. Hopefully, they will help the reader to become a better, more faithful audience for the oral tradition under consideration. . . .

In closing this column let me share the happy news that the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition, the original and continuing home to the journal *Oral Tradition*, will next year celebrate its twentieth year of existence. And in that very year the CSOT will be welcoming an

infant sibling at the University of Missouri: the Center for E-Research. The CER is being established to study and facilitate computer- and internet-based research across the disciplinary spectrum, with a view to helping coordinate communication among different areas. Toward that end it will inaugurate an online journal, *E-Research*, as well as undertake cooperations with other institutions in this emerging area of inquiry. We welcome proposals and news items from all quarters.

### 21.1 (March 2006)

With the present issue *Oral Tradition* enters a new era in its history. After twenty years as a bound paper volume, with online availability since 2004 through subscription to Project Muse, *OT* is presently in the process of migrating to a web-only, gratis publication. In 2006 it will be published in both media, but as of 2007 it will become a freestanding electronic entity posted on the [Center for Studies in Oral Tradition website](#).

Why have we chosen to follow this path? First and foremost, we aim, as always, to foster productive exchange among an interdisciplinary, international constituency, and to make that exchange as smooth and barrier-free as possible. *OT* was founded in 1986 to facilitate communication across disciplinary boundaries and among colleagues who otherwise would share no common forum. Since the internet has become the communicative instrument *par excellence*, creating a massive network with immediate and universal access, we feel it's time for scholarly exchange to leverage its enormous potential to the fullest.

Second, we are committed to making *OT* a free, gratis publication for the greater good of all concerned. Along with correcting problems inherent in distribution networks for paper publications, we intend to remove all financial barriers as well. Prospective readers of the journal will need no more than a web connection and a browser; all of our content from this issue onward will be open and continuously available worldwide without subscription fees of any sort.

Third, although we are beginning our online version of *OT* with the first issue of volume 21, we plan to make all back issues of the journal available in the same virtual format over the next few years. We will start with the inaugural volume (1986) and progress through back issues until the entire run of the journal is posted.

Concurrently, and in the context of this fundamental media-shift, much will remain the same. The vetting procedures for manuscripts submitted to *OT* will not change: our journal will be refereed in precisely the same fashion as during the last two decades, with one specialist and one generalist reviewing every submission before an editorial decision is made. Likewise with our recently introduced feature of eCompanions, the electronic appendages (audio, video, photos, etc.) meant to accompany the text of articles. Only in this case readers will no longer have to manage texts and eCompanions separately; the links to ancillary materials will be embedded in the online text of the articles in question.

We at the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition are extremely excited about the latest chapter in the journal's biography. We believe that this migration will be generally helpful to all readers and contributors, and especially important for scholars and students in those parts of the world that (as letters to the editor testify weekly) have through no fault of their own seldom or

never had access to our journal. Ironically, these are also some of the areas with the most thriving oral traditions. We very much hope that an online, gratis *OT* will correct this systemic imbalance and encourage both new readers and new contributors in what is, after all, our joint project.

The current addition to that project consists of what has become *OT*'s stock-in-trade over the past twenty years: a miscellany with articles on a wide variety of oral traditions from various parts of the world and from ancient to modern times. As always, and as a result of our move to the internet more inclusively than ever, we solicit your contributions to what will be modulating into an even more broadly based "eConversation."

## 21.2 (October 2006)

The present issue of *Oral Tradition* represents the end of one era and the beginning of another. Volume 21, number 2 marks the final appearance of *OT* in printed format; as of volume 22, number 1, the journal will be available only as *eOT*, an online, open-access, and free-of-charge periodical.

We are excited about the early reaction to migration from paper to electronic format—within two weeks of launching in mid-September, 2006, the *eOT* site <http://journal.oraltradition.org> experienced more than 4000 non-identical hits and twice that many page-views. Perhaps more importantly, our tracking software indicates major readerships in Asia, Africa, and South America as well as Europe and North America. Likewise, we have begun to receive submissions from scholars and researchers in heretofore under-represented areas, and we heartily encourage more voices to join the discussion. Enlarging our readership and authorship to areas usually difficult to reach through text-based Western distribution networks was and remains the primary reason for our conversion of *OT* to an online, open-access, and free-of-charge medium.

The current miscellany follows our customary pattern of offering perspectives from diverse oral traditions, in the hope that comparative observations and examples may prove broadly useful to our (ever more) diverse readership. On the near horizon, *OT* will devote 2007 to two special issues on strikingly different topics. The first will focus on the American folk singer Bob Dylan and his relationship to oral tradition, deriving from a conference at the Université Caen and guest-edited by Catharine Mason and Richard Thomas. The second issue will present an in-depth view of Basque oral traditions. We are confident that these two collections will prove interesting and valuable across the wide and multidisciplinary field of studies in oral tradition.

As always, but now with a broader purpose, we urge you to send us your work on oral tradition for publication in online *OT*. Our reviewing policy will remain the same as in the past: one specialist and one generalist will read the submission before an editorial decision is reached. But now we can offer an enormously larger and more diverse audience for your ideas, an audience that paper publication media simply can't reach. We will continue to publish online eCompanions (audio, video, and other support for text) as needed, as embedded links in articles that can be downloaded free of charge by anyone with a web connection and a browser. Please join us as the second generation of *Oral Tradition* begins in the virtual community.

**23.1 (March 2008)**

With the present issue, *Oral Tradition* begins its twenty-third year of publication. We are happy to report that the entire run of the journal, from the inaugural issue in 1986 through the present number, is now available as an open-access, searchable, and free-of-charge online resource. In other words, scholars and students from anywhere in the world can read or download any of approximately 500 articles on the world's oral traditions, amounting to some 10,000 pages—all without subscription fees of any sort. And the tracking software on our server strongly indicates that they have been doing just that: people from 109 different countries, using browsers in nearly 50 languages, have visited the site. Just as importantly, we are now receiving submissions from a much wider range of potential authors, many of them based in areas where they have firsthand experience of thriving oral traditions. We look forward to helping more people join the international conversation that *Oral Tradition* was long ago established to support.

**24.1 (March 2009)**

With this issue of *Oral Tradition* we offer our readership a highly diverse group of articles that treat traditions from around the world and from ancient times to the present. Moreover, the contributors take a rich variety of approaches to their subjects, reflecting the mix of disciplines that make up the composite field of studies in oral tradition.

Our first paper, the Albert Lord and Milman Parry Lecture on Oral Tradition for 2009, describes and analyzes the living Sardinian tradition of *mutetu longu*, a competitive performance-poetry in which three to five contestants vie with one another over a topic they are assigned just before the event begins. On the horizon are two special issues of *Oral Tradition*, one entitled “Sound Effects” and dedicated to the long oral-aural history of verbal art in English; and the other a collection treating the role and importance of oral traditions for core texts in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

As always, we invite all of our readers to become contributors by sending us their best thinking on the world's oral traditions.

**25.2 (October 2010)**

With this issue *Oral Tradition*, founded in 1986 at the University of Missouri, reaches a milestone: the conclusion of its twenty-fifth year of publication. The raw numbers are significant—more than 500 articles comprising more than 11,000 pages treating close to 100 different oral traditions worldwide from ancient to modern times. But two other measurements are perhaps just as telling. Since 2006, when the journal first became available online, open-access, and free-of-charge (with all review procedures intact and in force), our constituency has increased from a maximum of 1200 paper subscriptions to an annual readership of over 20,000 from 216 countries and territories internationally. Just as importantly, we now receive submissions for possible

publication from a much wider range of colleagues studying a much more diverse group of traditions from more markedly varied theoretical perspectives. In addition, many articles now feature audio, video, photographic, and other support in the form of eCompanions, thus providing multimedia experiences of performers, performances, audiences, and the like. In this way the electronic medium has liberated the understanding of oral traditions from what can be contained in a text, just as it has radically democratized access and contribution. In short, by taking advantage of the natural homology between humankind's first and most recent communications technologies, an OT-IT homology explored in the [Pathways Project](#), the journal is well placed to continue its growth as a comparative, interdisciplinary forum for scholars and students around the world.

Earlier this year, on February 10th, the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition celebrated its own quarter-century anniversary with several memorable events. Chief among them was the donation of the personal libraries of Albert Bates Lord and Mary Louise Lord to the CSOT and the University of Missouri. We are enormously grateful to Nathan and Mark Lord and their families for this remarkable act of generosity, and are excited to be able to offer this unique resource to visiting scholars and students as well as our own campus community. To mark the donation of the library, the College of Arts and Science at the university has created the Lord Fellowship, which will provide a stipend for visiting researchers who wish to use the collection and other resources of the CSOT. The inaugural recipient is Agnieszka Matkowska of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. As another aspect of the February commemoration, Mark Bender of Ohio State University delivered the 25th Lord and Parry Lecture, entitled "Butterflies and Dragon-Eagles: Processing Epics from Southwest China," which will be published in *Oral Tradition* next year.

On the same evening of February 10th we also announced the launch of a new initiative patterned after the online migration of the journal: the [International Society for Studies in Oral Tradition](#). The purpose of this Internet-based association is to further the original and continuing mission of the CSOT as a whole—to facilitate the study of oral traditions by promoting and facilitating exchange among all constituencies. With the electronic platform and a variety of virtual tools in place, we will support such activities as individual, person-to-person contacts; group discussions over topics of mutual interest; eSeminars and eConferences; and an eArchive for the deposit of primary and secondary materials. Membership in the ISSOT is free and open to all, and we have built a system that optimizes access while protecting identity through gatekeeping. We hope that the Society will contribute to enhanced democratization of work in our shared field, a goal that harmonizes with the core nature of our joint inquiry. Fittingly, this twenty-fifth year of *Oral Tradition* closes with a bibliography of Albert Lord's writings, as compiled by Morgan Grey from an obituary article and Mary Louise Lord's additions. Neither the Center for Studies in Oral Tradition nor this journal would exist without Albert's encouragement and fundamental contributions, and we hope that giving pride of place to his seminal work makes that point. In a real sense, and notwithstanding the explosion of comparative, interdisciplinary research and scholarship on oral tradition that has made this field so rewarding and intriguing for an ever-growing international constituency, the quarter-century comes full circle, ending where it began.

Let me close with an inadequate word of thanks to all those who have participated in the birth and nurturing of *Oral Tradition* as it has evolved from a rough-hewn idea through blue-penciled manuscripts to the (then-)miracle of in-house typesetting and now to a digital avatar on the Internet. Charles Gribble was an indispensable member of the midwifery team, with his and George Fowler's sponsorship of the journal's publication by Slavica for almost twenty years. Deans Milton Glick and Ted Tarkow, and now Dean Michael O'Brien, have trusted the CSOT and *OT* initiatives and have been essential partners in the ongoing project from the start. Generations of graduate editorial assistants, more than two dozen in all as chronicled in the succession of mastheads, have performed faithfully and often brilliantly the tasks of copyediting, proofing, and communication with authors, while the Center's IT managers, Mark Jarvis and Jamie Stephens, have enabled the journal's transition from paper to the web and all that has followed in the wake of that migration. Closer to home, a supremely supportive family has created a context that both supports and places in proper perspective all academic undertakings: in addition to more recent arrivals Joe and Bella, my deepest thanks to (in chronological order) Isaac, Lizzie (about coeval with *OT*), Joshua, and especially Anne-Marie.

### 26.1 (March 2011)

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.

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.

*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](mailto: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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