

Editor's Column

I am pleased to present to readers *Oral Tradition* Volume 34, comprising four essays that demonstrate, in the diversity of their topics and approaches, the broad reach of the study of orality and oral tradition. This volume brings together traditions from three continents—as well as, perhaps unexpectedly, the work of one of the twentieth century's most famous novelists. Dorian Jurić opens the volume with a critique of the ways in which the ballad “The Building of Skadar”—which Alan Dundes called “the most studied ballad in the history of folkloristics”—has served the political agendas of folklorists and other scholars. Edmund Asare examines the use of proverbs at an Akan royal court in eastern Ghana, demonstrating the remarkably multimodal character of a discourse that is conducted in speech, in the languages of drums and horns, and even in court iconography. Anthony K. Webster, following the trail of a Navajo chipmunk, reflects on the ethical burden of ethnopoetics in relation to John Watchman's narrative of “Coyote and Skunk.” Finally, Nicole G. Burgoyne explores the strategic use of forms of oral discourse by the narrator of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, and the ways in which those oral forms are ultimately undermined by the solipsistic pleasure the narrator takes in the act of writing.

These essays appear at the conclusion of a difficult year. Throughout this period of global crisis, scholars have been, for the most part, in the very fortunate position of being able to continue their scholarly work, even if many have had to contend with closed libraries, quarantine restrictions, and other challenges. New technologies—above all platforms for video conferencing—have made it possible for them to collaborate with colleagues, engage with students, and enjoy the support of friends and family even as they endure physical isolation. The mediated socialization that characterizes our current moment stands in contrast with the direct, embodied interactions normally presupposed by oral tradition. The essays presented here, and in previous volumes of *Oral Tradition*, thus stand as a reminder of what we miss for the time being, and what we can look forward to regaining. At the same time, the past months have highlighted the remarkable ability of mediated oralities to bridge vast distances and to bring together physically isolated individuals. This is a topic that I am certain will find a place in the pages of future issues of *Oral Tradition*. As always, I invite scholars to submit essays on any topic that opens a perspective on the world's traditional arts of the past or present, but I hope especially that some will take up the challenge of exploring new technologies of the spoken word, new paradigms for mediated performance, and new forms of dispersed community—in short, the ways in which the spoken word, disseminated in new forms, has made the present moment of shared isolation a little more bearable.

David F. Elmer
Editor, *Oral Tradition*

This page is intentionally left blank.