Foreword

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Epic Singers and Oral Tradition, by Albert B. Lord, is a particularly distinguished entry in the Myth and Poetics series. My goal, as series editor, has been to encourage work that helps to integrate literary criticism with the approaches of anthropology and pays special attention to problems concerning the nexus of ritual and myth. A model of such integration and emphasis is Lord's 1960 classic study of the mechanics and aesthetics of oral-traditional poetry, *The Singer of Tales*. With the appearance, some thirty years later, of *Epic Singers and Oral Tradition* in the present series, we now have a new model. Representing as it does the wide chronological span of Albert Lord's scholarly activity and an even wider geographical span of his diverse cultural interests, this book constitutes a definitive introduction to the man and his work.

"Although much talked about in negative criticism," Lord writes in his introduction, "living oral-traditional literature is still not very well known, and I try over and over again in the course of this book to acquaint the reader with some of the best of what I have had the privilege to experience and to demonstrate the details of its excellence." Lord speaks from experience, the experience of fieldwork in living oral traditions, and this background confers on him a profound authority, despite his modesty about his work. *Epic Singers and Oral Tradition* makes plain, once and for all, the legitimacy and importance of exploring the oral-traditional heritage of Western literature.