

The Hell-bound Train: A Cowboy Songbook. By Glenn Ohrlin. 100 selections. Pp. xix + 290, Foreword by Archie Green, Bibliography by Harlan Daniel, Musical transcriptions and "A Note on the Music" by Judith McCullough, Line-drawings by Glenn Ohrlin, Photos, 33 1/3 rpm soundsheet of six selections performed by Glenn Ohrlin (University of Illinois Press MAL 731), Index. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1973. \$12.95 cloth.

Reviewed by Jens Lund.

The singing cowboy is a complex phenomenon in American popular culture. On the one hand, the persons engaged in the occupation of cattle-driving during the years of the open range formed an occupational folk-community with its own song traditions, not unlike the singing coal-miners unearthed by George Korson. On the other hand, the motion picture industry's singing cowboy was developed during the 1930's and 1940's as a theatrical type, as quick to sing a song as to draw a Colt revolver.

Although many of the skills of open range cattle-driving are still used in the care and maintenance of the modern ranch herd, the survival of such picturesque tasks as bronc-busting are largely due to their development into a competitive exhibition sport in the form of the rodeo. The rodeo is thus a synthesis of the trade of the cattle-drover with the showmanship of the motion picture cowboy, sustained by both the athletic prowess of the participants and the popular romanticism of the cowboy image.

The Hell-bound Train is a collection of one-hundred songs and poems from the repertoire of Glenn Ohrlin. Ohrlin was born in Minnesota of Scandinavian parents and has worked as a stablehand, painter, and cattle-drover, as well as leading a successful career as a rodeo performer and concert-singer. His singing talents were first discovered at a University of Illinois folk-song club concert and he soon became a fixture at folk-song revival events. The song-texts in this work were chosen by Ohrlin himself from his own repertoire as examples of the type of material found in the loosely defined cowboy-singer tradition of today. Although many of them are occupational songs from the early days of the cattle industry, their survival and present form, especially as they appear in The Hell-bound Train, are a legacy of the rodeo. The rodeo performer's singing of cowboy songs is a deliberate use of traditional material to solidly cement the romantic cowboy image. Although essentially a professional athlete, the rodeo rider maintains the trappings of open-range cattle-driving.

The Hell-bound Train is by no means a seminal or definitive collection of songs in the cowboy genre. Most folklorists are probably aware of the initial significance of the N. Howard "Jack" Thorp and the John Lomax collections. Likewise the two volumes

assembled by Austin and Alta Fife, Cowboy and Western Songs (New York: Clarkson and Potter, 1969) and Heaven on Horseback (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1970); and Richard E. Lingelfelter, Richard A. Dwyer, and David Cohen's Songs of the American West (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), already contain the most complete representative samples of songs of this genre. What then is the significance and utility of The Hell-bound Train as a new collection of cowboy song material? Ohrlin, as stated above, is part of the rodeo cowboy subculture, which occurs at the intersection of the spheres of occupational cattle-driving, professional athletic competition, and Virgin Land romantic entertainment. Consequently, songs representing each of these areas are present, as they would presumably be in the repertoire of a rodeo cowboy. The hand of Archie Green, author of the Foreword, seems to be present in the organization of this book, because of its emphasis on interchange between oral tradition, printed songsters and folios, and commercial disc recordings. The book's appendix consists of a valuable Biblio-discography assembled by Harlan Daniel, a leading expert in the field of popular culture ephemera. Daniel lists all of the printed and recorded sources for each example, including scholarly and popular collections, 78-rpm records, and LP-record albums. Looking at any one of the songs in The Hell-bound Train, it is possible to instantly trace its occurrence in popular and scholarly literature and on popular recordings. As Archie Green so often emphasizes, the life of a folk-song in the twentieth century, regardless of origins or authorship, is often dependent upon such nontraditional channels of diffusion as the disc recording and the printed page. This point has already been made regarding hillbilly and mining-song repertoires, and The Hell-bound Train illuminates the process for cowboy material.

One shortcoming of the book, from the folklorist's perspective, is the absence of variants. Being an assemblage of one performer's repertoire, only one version of each song (with a few exceptions) is present. The versions included seem to have been chosen for their propriety, as it is a known fact that much of the traditional drover's repertoire was obscene and scatological. It would, however, probably be difficult to sell a book containing some of the more "honest" examples to public and school libraries. The Biblio-discography does function as a guide to the occurrence of variants in other sources.

The Hell-bound Train is an interesting collection selected by a traditional singer from his own repertoire, presented with a few words of explanation for each example. In a sense, it constitutes a facet of the life-history of a twentieth century cowboy, giving the reader a look at the cowboy's trade today, and a retrospective glance at those areas of the profession's past that linger in the contemporary cowboy's memory.