and a reader of graffiti is struck not by their Rabelaisian vigor but by their poverty of invention and imagination. With the free speech liberalizing movement of the 1960s which extended even to the Journal of American Folklore, this folk epigraphy seems bland and puerile. Perhaps the inclusion of 'pictographs' mentioned by Mr. Read would have spruced up the text.


Reviewed by David Pace

For years structuralists have been bombarded with requests for a straightforward introduction to their field, which would elucidate the mysteries of Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and other prominent proponents of structuralism. Philip Pettit's The Concept of Structuralism is not the answer to this plea. In an area of contemporary thought already marked by complex and esoteric distinctions, Pettit has introduced a whole new technical terminology. His study is apt to remain impenetrable to anyone who lacks a familiarity with the works of the principle structuralists.

But for the reader who has already sampled the work of Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, and Barthes, Pettit has performed an invaluable service. Drawing from a thorough knowledge of the Structuralist literature and of contemporary philosophy, he has produced the most comprehensive and penetrating critique of the strengths and weaknesses of the structuralist paradigm, which is available in English. Unlike some previous commentators, such as Jean Praget, he has kept the concept of "structuralism" within reasonable limits, confining his comments to those areas of linguistics, anthropology, literary criticism, and semiology in which explicitly structuralist concepts have been applied. Moreover, he has avoided both a narrowly empirical approach, which would reject structuralism because it is too theoretical, and a slavish commitment to the model, which would endorse all applications of the structuralist paradigm on the basis of its initial success in linguistics.

Unfortunately, Pettit has avoided explicit treatment of the use of structuralism in folklore. But his work, nonetheless, remains vital both for folklorists who seek to apply structuralist concepts themselves and for those who wish to evaluate the structuralist folklore of others.


Reviewed by Simon J. Bronner

Charles Townsend has produced an impressive book, San Antonio Rose, filled with detailed information compiled from extensive oral interviews. An additional bonus is the book's revealing photographs which are generously distributed in the text. Townsend carefully documents his work and as a tribute to detail, he includes Bob Pinson's filmusicography and discography in the book.

Townsend states that the purpose of his book is twofold: to trace the life of Bob Wills and to place his music in the spectrum of American popular music. Toward the first end, he presents Wills' early years and later career in sequence, employing oral accounts and anecdotes to fill in gaps left by printed documents. The author's
The use of oral testimonies provides the book with a depth which is absent in other biographies based solely on printed sources. Through his interviews, Townsend touches on areas of special interest to folklorists such as the social traditions of house dances and ranch life, and the oral traditions of Wills' family. In recounting the events of Wills' career and employing his reservoir of oral accounts, Townsend maintains a relaxed flow of the narrative. Townsend does not simply heap praise on his subject. He honestly discusses Wills' drinking problem and other negative aspects of Wills' personality such as his paranoia and jealousy. Townsend paints a complex picture of Wills, colored by these traits and also by Wills' generosity and compassion. Readers should appreciate Townsend's deep probes to find clues to Bob's behavior, endeavors which provide some of the most stirring passages of the book.

The tradition of American music Townsend places Wills in is jazz. Townsend strives to erase the hillbilly label on Wills' music despite the high stature given hillbilly music in recent years. Although he acknowledges Wills' roots in the traditional music of his grandfather and father, the author presents a defensive posture throughout the text and repeatedly draws comparisons between Wills' music and 'legitimate' dixieland and big band jazz, while failing to note contemporaries of Wills working in similar veins of count music. Wills' jazz influence and his later recordings certainly deserve adequate space but Townsend misses the essential point—Wills was a country music figure. Barely any mention is made of Milton Brown and Al Dexter, two important western swing figures. No space is devoted to Adolph Hofner, Jimmy Reed, Bill Boyd, Cliff Bruner, Prince Albert Hunt, or even Spade Cooley. All these musical giants as well as others simultaneously reflected the formula of folk, hillbilly, and jazz music synthesized by Wills.

Townsend digresses briefly in chapter 21 to explain his view of the historical development of western swing and country music. This section is a rare attempt by the author at historical analysis. He insists on repeating the tired "southern thesis" which places the origin of country music in the Southeast and describes its subsequent movement to the West. Many pages have been spent attacking this thesis (see my articles, for example, in the Journal of Country Music 6 (1978): 29-59 and in the John Edwards Memorial Foundation Quarterly 13 (1977): 171-182) and Townsend offers no new convincing arguments. With all the attention given to the claim that San Antonio Rose is a scholarly book written by a scholar, one would have thought more analysis was forthcoming. If any portion of his book deserved more attention, this section did.

Despite my unhappiness with Townsend's neglect of the context of country music in writing Bob Wills' story, he offers an otherwise superb personal history. San Antonio Rose is destined to become a monumental work for students of popular music. After all, here is an important biography of a popular musical figure authored by an academic and published by a major university press. After the publication of Bill Malone's Country Music, U.S.A. (1968), the next step was just such a biography. Townsend's achievement, then, is admirable and will hopefully open the door for other serious examinations of country music.