

cit and necessary in order to encourage the subject to speak freely, but all too often, poorly trained interviewers monopolize the "conversation" instead of skillfully eliciting information from the subject.

Chapter Six is the best contribution to the book. In this chapter, the authors get into technicalities of permission and release forms, transcription, organizing of the oral materials. In a very readable manner they deal with producing a manuscript from the scores of texts collected, and how to do such mechanical things as footnote and organize taped sources into bibliographic form. This information is not available in such a clear form in any other manual. Their best piece of advice in arranging the manuscript is to integrate the oral texts into the written narratives. "By no means should the oral material be lumped together into a separate chapter and labeled 'folklore'" (p. 105). Finally, from this statement we realize that the subject of this book is indeed folklore, albeit disguised as oral sources (history?). I criticize this masking and find it the weakness that pervades the entire book.

The Alabama Folk Lyric: A Study in Origins and Media of Dissemination. By Ray B. Browne. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1979. Pp. iv + 480, index. \$25.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Joseph P. Goodwin.

Ray Broadus Browne, a former Alabamian and sometime folklorist, is the father of the study of popular culture; he teaches classes in this field at Bowling Green University and is director of the Popular Press. His **Alabama Folk Lyric**, based on his 1956 doctoral dissertation at UCLA (which is almost impossible to obtain), appears to be a welcome addition to the body of material available on Alabama folklore. Along with Browne's other works-- **Popular Beliefs and Practices from Alabama** (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1958) and **"A Night with the Hants" and Other Alabama Folk Experiences** (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1978 [?])--**The Alabama Folk Lyric** could have provided a solid

basis for the study of three major genres of Alabama folklore. Unfortunately, this book does not adequately address the subject matter its title promises; the large collection of texts that it provides can not even be used as variants in studying the traditional songs of Alabama.

An initial glance at *The Alabama Folk Lyric* reveals the poor quality of the book's production and the presentation of its contents. Typographical errors abound, and sometimes more than one mistake occurs on a page. Paste-up is equally sloppy; on some pages several lines creep toward the upper margin while others slant toward the bottom. *The Alabama Folk Lyric* also contains a lot of wasted and inconsistently utilized space. Many pages are blank except for running heads and page numbers, but some (such as pp. 231, 300, and 303) are entirely blank except for folio numbers. Contrary to standard practice, the initial pages of chapters and half-title pages of *The Alabama Folk Lyric* carry a page number at the top outer margin.

The half title pages for most sections appear as right-hand pages with the versos blank, followed by another blank page; the text then resumes on the left (as with pp. 164 and 402) instead of on the right. Occasionally, the half-title page appears on the verso of the last page of text of the preceding section (pp. 111-12 and 147-48, for example). And, although running heads generally should not appear on half-title pages and the first pages of chapters, such heads can be found at the top of almost every page of Browne's book.

None of these facts, of course, affects the contents of the work, but all of it intrudes, providing a constant annoyance for the reader.

An additional problem of presentation is more critical. All of the music and lyrics are direct copies of the handwritten transcriptions and typed lyrics used in Browne's dissertation in 1956. The music should have been mechanically reset and the lyrics typeset, since the sloppiness of the notes renders the music hard to follow and the faint impression of the typescript makes many of the verses too dim to read. The complete lyrics following the music are set in very small type, which compounds the problem of using Browne's compilation as a reference for folksongs of Alabama.

The term "folksong" is, perhaps, a misnomer; Browne states in several places that he is trying to document the "folk lyrics" of Alabamians in the early 1950s, which he defines as songs that Alabamians sang at that time. (Although he collected many ballads, he chose to deal with lyric songs only, since past scholarship has emphasized narrative folksong.) Drawing upon Phillips Barry's concept of communal recreation and Hans Naumann's notion of *gesun-
nes Kulturgut*, Browne feels that folk lyrics are frequently derived from art songs that are reshaped by the folk.

This idea is not, in itself, objectionable as a basis for a definition of folk lyrics--or folksongs in general. But Browne goes farther in developing his definition, relying heavily upon John Greenway's *American Folk Songs of Protest* (1953), which he quotes at length: "a folksong, therefore, is a song concerned with the interests of the folk, and in the complete possession of the folk. All other qualifications...are to be considered only as helpful tests in establishing either or both of the basic conditions of the definition" (p. 5). Thus, Browne can define the folksong as "any piece, regardless of authorship or date of origin, which is sung by a member or members of the folk and is not subject to the corrective and stabilizing influences of an art form or any non-folk medium of communication." Indeed, according to Browne, "an independent existence among the folk" (p.15) is sufficient for a song to qualify as a folksong. Browne assumes that songs sung by the folk are folksongs--unless "the art form stabilizes and 'corrects' the folk version" (p. 7). To use Brown's example, "America the Beautiful" does not qualify as a folksong because, when it is sung, it always adheres to the "correct" text.

Noticeably absent from Browne's definition of and his assumptions regarding folksongs is the notion of tradition. Most of the songs included in *The Alabama Folk Lyric* were derived from mistrel shows, music halls, songsters, chatauquas, and the like. While some were learned by word of mouth, a number of songs were learned and shared during evenings spent around a piano or organ going through a songbook. This practice is hardly a traditional means of learning folksongs. And many of the nontraditional songs that Browne cites, although differing from the original versions of the songs, are not really folksongs; they

are popular songs with minor variations. While the songs might have been passing into folk tradition, their extremely limited oral circulation among Browne's informants indicates that they probably did not endure. A follow-up study could shed light on this process, although its value would be questionable.

The author divides the songs in this volume into nine categories. Browne states that his original collection of twenty-five hundred songs and ballads covered twenty-one categories and enigmatically claims that, while the twelve groups not represented in the book were "distinctive," the nine included are "somewhat more coherent" (p. 29). His explanation of this position does not, however, provide a rationale for his omission of, for example, the whole category of religious songs. It seems to me that religious songs would provide a really good illustration of the point that Browne seems to be trying to make: that many of the "folksongs" being sung in Alabama were derived from nontraditional sources by the folk and were learned through a variety of printed media and other means.

Much has, of course, been written about shaped-note singing, most notably by George Pullen Jackson, although little has been said about the appropriation of such songs by the folk. The same holds true for the Stamps-Baxter songs and other gospel hymns. Yet a number of the people whom I have interviewed in Alabama knew only songs of this type. The omission of major categories of folksongs reduces the usefulness of the volume.

Equally unfortunate for the value of the work is its lack of revision since its submission as a dissertation twenty-four years ago. In his preface, Browne relates the manuscript's history, pointing out that the only copy of his initial revision was destroyed in a fire at the University of Alabama Press in 1970. In the winter of 1977-78, Browne revised the material again, rewriting "the Introduction and the headnotes to the individual songs in so far as needed" (p. ii). But the only significant change I noted is the shift from "what the people of Alabama are actually singing at the present time" (1956) to "what the people of Alabama were actually singing during the early 1950s" (p. 29). Apart from this essential alteration at the beginning of section four of the Introduc-

tion, the manuscript has been little revised.

Browne did not update his references, both "because such bits of information would not be of great value and because my purpose in this volume is really something else—to demonstrate what songs were sung by the folk of Alabama in the early 1950s and the origins and the media from they which did get (sic) or might have got this song literature" (p. ii). This disclaimer is inadequate. To assert that the information that has become available in the last quarter of a century has little value is incredible in light of the growth of American folklore scholarship during this period. If providing comparative notes to works that have appeared since Browne's initial research is irrelevant because such references would not help illustrate "what songs were sung by the folk of Alabama in the early 1950," then why include any references at all? Certainly knowing that a text is found in Vance Randolph's *Ozark Folksongs* (4 vols, 1946, 1948, 1949, 1950) or volumes 2, 3, and 4 of *The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore* (1952) does not reveal anything about its presence in Alabama in the 1950s.

The most regrettable change from the dissertation to the book is the excision of the bibliography and the list of songsters. A substantial part of the introduction deals with the songsters in which many of the verses included in *The Alabama Folk Lyric* were published, so that the deletion of the list of these song books detracts from the reference value of the work. Similarly, the deletion of the bibliography makes many of the references in the headnotes to the songs obscure. Granted, the most common references provided are to "Brown" and "Randolph," each followed by volume and page numbers, but to the uninitiated these names will mean nothing.

Neither in the dissertation nor in the book does Browne provide tunes for some of the songs. In *The Alabama Folk Lyric* some twenty of the songs lack tunes, which is a lamentable omission for a work the stated purpose of which is to present as many songs as possible that have not previously been recorded. Inclusion of the melodies would seem to be even more important in this instance than in other kinds of collections of folksongs.

Given Browne's interest in popular culture and the thrust of **The Alabama Folk Lyric**, perhaps the work should be titled **The Alabama Popular Lyric**, which would describe more accurately the contents of the volume. Actually, it might have been best if the publisher had rejected the manuscript; certainly, its price is unjustified. An interest in Alabama's folksongs is better pursued by consulting Byron Arnold's **Folksongs of Alabama** (1950) and Harold Courlander's **Negro Songs from Alabama** (1960, revised and enlarged 1963).

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