

REVIEWSBooks

The Voice of the Folk: Folklore and American Literary Theory. By Gene Bluestein. Pp. ix + 170, index. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972. \$9.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Sandra K. Stahl

The author of The Voice of the Folk teaches American literature and Folklore at Fresno State College in California and is a Folkways recording artist. From this happy combination we might expect some important insights to emerge, reflecting the interworkings of literary theory, folklore scholarship, and the performer's competence in one sensitive, integrating mind. Unfortunately, except for the Appendix on the five string banjo (which has very little to do with the rest of the book), the reader is offered a superficial defense of a thesis few people would have bothered to argue with anyway. Bluestein purposefully lifts his title from Herder's Stimmen der Volker in Liedern, and thereby takes full advantage of the folklorist's embarrassing confusion as to what the or a Volk really is. With the conveniently vague "distant other" concept of "the folk" fed into the literary theorist part of his mind, Bluestein computes an ideological chain linking Herder, Emerson, Whitman, and more recently Constance Rourke and the Lomaxes. (The computer imagery is not suggested facetiously; Bluestein considers the demonstration of any actual historical influences unnecessary.) Herder's folk ideology, the author argues, offers "empirical proof that the major values of a national literature resided in the abilities of common men to create a folk tradition from which a formal, sophisticated literature developed." (p. 11) Though the thesis of the book is acceptable, at least the first three chapters (in which he deals with the Herder ideology and its manifestation in the Emerson-Whitman tradition) are weakened through a failure to discuss in any concrete way the "folk tradition" itself. Instead, the "voice of the folk" comes across purely as a theoretical concept; and it is not until the last chapter, "The Clues as a Literary Theme," that we see any convincing analysis in terms of a real "folk tradition."

This organizational problem is suggestive of the main weakness of the whole book. Basically, the author has gathered various of his published materials, selected what appears to be a unifying thesis, and, with a bit of annoying reiteration of the thesis throughout, tied the "chapters" together. Better for Mr. Bluestein had he started over, with his materials and the scope and demands of the genre "book" in mind rather than trying to patch together a series of related articles with a bit of clever editing. In terms of overall content, however, certain valuable contributions are made. The fourth chapter, "Folklore and the American Character," is a helpful review and extension of much of the material in Constance Rourke's American Humor. And Chapter Six, "The Blues as a Literary Theme," stands separately as a fully developed essay with Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man brought forward in a long-awaited concrete analysis. The chapter on "The Sources of American Folksong" is devoted mainly to the views of John and Alan Lomax (especially as they relate to Herder's conception of Humanität). And, had Bluestein not so entirely restricted himself to the views of the Lomaxes, he might not have puzzled so over such things as the place of the Child ballad in America. Bill Malone, for one, in Country Music U.S.A., discusses the importance of stringed instruments and harmony in the "hybridization" process, or the development of country music style among the singers of traditional ballads.

The Voice of the Folk is mediocre or at least uneven as a book, but there is material for several good articles. Separately, Chapter Six, the Epilogue ("The Poetry of Rock"), and the Appendix are fine essays, definitely worth reading. Perhaps the main advantages in having the materials in book form is the convenience and the index.

Nā Mele o Hawai'i Nei, 101 Hawaiian Songs. By Samuel H. Elbert and Noelani Mahoe. Pp. 110.

Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, second printing 1971. \$2.00 paper.

Reviewed by Norma J. Engberg.

Nā Mele o Hawai'i Nei, 101 Hawaiian songs collected by Samuel H. Elbert and Noelani Mahoe, is an anthology of post-missionary songs composed sometime between 1850 and 1968. Both traditional selections embracing a variety of subjects central to the Hawaiian culture of these years and Christmas carols are included. Such songs owe their musical origin to missionary hymns and are not technically the same as chants, although some are chants which have been edited and set to music. In most cases the composers are known; indeed, some of the songs are written by composers who are still active. In these respects the material is not, strictly speaking, folklore; however, in subject matter, in style, in its reliance upon the oral tradition, that is, the use of memory not notation to record and transmit verses, and in the attitudes of many Hawaiians themselves toward these songs, the material is folk.

These mele honor places, persons, or events; a few are patriotic or religious; several concern themselves with food or drink, but the greatest number are love songs. The love songs are of particular interest in their imagery: described for us are native birds and plants wrapped in a misty rain, but the beloved is identified only by an anonymous and sexless pronoun (maua is first person plural dual exclusive):

'Elua wale iho nō māua,  
I kolu i ka hone a ka 'ehu kai.  
(from "Hanohano hanalei")

She and I are two,  
Three with the rustle of sea spray.

Thus, the words of "Aloha 'oe," commonly thought of as a song of farewell, show it to be as its composer Queen Liliuokalani asserted, a love song:

Ha'aheo 'ē ka ua i nā pāli  
Ke nihi a'ela i ka nahele  
E ukai ana paha i ka liko  
Pua 'āhihi lehua o  
uka.

Proudly the rain on the cliffs  
Creeps into the forest  
Seeking the buds  
And miniature lehua flowers of  
the uplands.

As explained in the chorus to "Ka Makani Kā'ili Aloha," the fragrant flower lei adorning the lover and turning the mind to love, comes to symbolize the beloved when the lovers are parted:

Ku'u pua, ku'u lei, Ku'u  
milimili e,  
Ku'u lei kau i ka wēkiu,  
A he milimili 'oe, a he  
hiwahiwa na'u,  
A he lei mau nō ku'u kino.

My flower, my lei, my  
toy,  
My lei placed supreme,  
You my toy, my  
pride,  
A lei forever for my body.