

Lead Belly, Burl Ives, and Sam Hinton, with Replies, Rejoinder, and Last Word  
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# LEAD BELLY, BURL IVES, AND SAM HINTON

BY SVEN ERIC MOLIN

WITH REPLIES, REJOINDER, AND LAST WORD

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## I. LEAD BELLY, BURL IVES, AND SAM HINTON

*"... you know, hosses was in style den, jus' like  
late-model cars is now ..."*

Lead Belly to John Lomax

WITH the recent appearances in juke boxes of a song whose title on the record label is given as "Bo Weevil" (Coral 61590), sung by Teresa Brewer in accentuated rhythms to a string band accompaniment, and with the evidently increasing success of Burl Ives as a popular folklore anthologist, it is time, I think, to raise again some questions that have been asked (and sometimes answered) in folklore circles. The Brewer record, although a recognizable variant of a recognized folk tune, will probably not be given any of the formal acknowledgments bestowed by folklorists on such phenomena: review, analysis, or classification. Burl Ives's books, however, have been so acknowledged. As each has appeared, it has been reviewed in at least one of the current folklore periodicals—sometimes more. Further, these reviews provide specific examples of a general feeling about Burl Ives that has been in the air for some time: he is a source of embarrassment. What is more, the reviews are themselves embarrassing to read. I propose to ask, first, how the reviews are embarrassed or embarrassing, and second, why they need be so. In the course of suggesting an answer, I should like also to touch on the career of that prototypical folklore success, Lead Belly; on a recent public confession by the practicing folksinger Sam Hinton; and on some current accepted notions concerning the folksinger and society. These phenomena taken together—Teresa Brewer's record, Lead Belly's career, Burl Ives's books and their scholarly reviews, and Sam Hinton's confession—provide interesting case histories of social change, and they raise again the eternally important and vexing problem of the relationship of the scholar to his materials. Additionally, they raise some questions peculiar to the field of folklore, for, with the exception only of the Brewer record, I gather all my information from currently accepted scholarly folklore sources: journals, books, and records.

A book review, by its very existence, of course recognizes that the book is worth consideration. What is curious about the three reviews of two of Ives's books which I

am about to discuss is not only that they proceed, each independently, in very similar ways, but that each stands in some kind of awe of Ives: he is Folklore Made Good, or he is, because he is popular, a power. D. K. Wilgus is explicit in seeing *The Burl Ives Song Book*<sup>1</sup> as part of “the serious attempt to introduce folksong into middle-class . . . life”—a movement that in America is now “in full flower” (with Ives’s paper-back edition a prime example), but that is ambivalent, at once a potential “cause for alarm” and yet possibly revealing “also . . . the beginning of intelligent, honest, and creative use of folk material.”<sup>2</sup> Further, while these reviews take Ives seriously, all three object in more or less vigorous language to some of his practices. Wilgus finds him ethically reprehensible for giving a blanket acknowledgment of his extensive debt to his sources in a preface rather than in individual annotation of each song, and he chides him as well for his announced practice of altering any song just as it suits him. These charges are also brought by Charles Haywood against *The Burl Ives Song Book*<sup>3</sup> and, not so solemnly, by William Tillson against *Tales of America* (Cleveland, 1954).<sup>4</sup> In one sense, of course, this is to accuse Ives of being a folksinger and not a scholar, although it could be argued against me that in the present context he is a professional anthologist, not a singer.

But what happens next in these reviews, after the serious beginning and after the objections have been registered, is not, as one would expect, a condemnation of the books; rather, it is either an outright approval of them or else an avoidance of the issues that are raised. Charles Haywood, for example, goes right down the line in documenting Ives’s departures from accepted scholarly folklore practice: in *The Burl Ives Song Book*, Haywood finds “careless statements unsupported by historic fact,” “arbitrary subdivisions” of classes and “gaping omissions” of certain other classes of songs; he finds that Ives disregards “the fundamental issue . . . that the *origin* of a song is of crucial importance whether it is to be considered and classified as a folk song, ‘art song,’ or ‘popular song’”; and he notices that Ives pours his great diversity of song material into a similar mold with guitar/piano accompaniment, 6/8, 4/4, or 3/4 rhythm, and popular modality. How, then, does Haywood conclude? “The above critical observations on specialized aspects of folklore data, ought not deter anyone from purchasing a copy of this songbook. Those who love to sing the songs of our land, and all those who just love singing, will find in this volume endless hours of pleasure.” Wilgus does not so obviously throw over all of his standards, but he does reveal an inability to decide by what standards he is judging or to what audience he is talking; he ends by hypothesizing a diversity of audiences—which hypothesis, when we consider that the book is already published anyway, says nothing: “Fanciers of the Burl Ives way with a song will treasure the book; certain scholars may find it helpful in identifying the source of song-versions collected in future years; and others may find the paper-back edition worth fifty cents.” And Tillson, who notes “occasional errors of history or terminology” which he finds it “out of keeping to quibble over” (in a scholarly journal), recommends *Tales of America* in these terms: “If the gathering of the material and the writing of the book helped Burl through sleepless nights after concerts, these tales may act as an insomnia cure for others. . . . Anyway, here is a good glimpse of that legendary Burl Icle Ivanhoe Ives, beer drinker, dance caller, singer, actor, sailor, collector, impresario, do-gooder, and now story teller.”

Anyway, before Burl Ives follows the path of other legendary heroes and gets too far removed from the Burl Ives of fact, I’d like to take my folklore more seriously

than just as an insomnia cure and to quibble over a few questions of history and terminology. How, I ask, can we account for the dissociation of scholarly standards from emotive response that we find in these reviews, this apparent necessity to disintegrate our moral and intellectual standards from our judgment of desirability, whereby we are asked to approve of a book we have every reason to condemn?

Fortunately, several articles exist that address themselves exactly to the problem we see here exemplified, the problem of the scholar and the folksinger. One of them, entitled "The Scholar and the Ballad Singer," by Joseph W. Hendren (*Southern Folklore Quarterly*, XVIII [1954], 139-146), gives us just the vocabulary and analysis necessary, if not for answering, at least for discussing it. Hendren starts from the sound basis that "the charm of a great ballad"—and we may extend his category to include all great folk music—"is human rather than fashionable," but he finds that in the past, although "scholar and mountaineer both love a ballad when they hear one," "yet they have seldom thought about them in the same way" (p. 139). Times have changed, however: "Nowadays students of the subject are finding it necessary to revise their ideas concerning the position of balladry in American culture." His suggestion is that now the ballad singer and the scholar share a closer unity of thought about the ballad.

What, according to Hendren, has happened? Folk music (I again extend his own limitation to the ballad) has become widely popular, and this is partly—indeed "largely"—the result of scholarly effort. Child's, Wendell's, Kittredge's, and other scholars' popularization of the ballad is well known, he observes, and he continues: "Not so well known is the extent of their responsibility likewise for the current popularity of musical presentation, and on all levels from the graduate seminar to the juke-box. The availability of this music as well as the recognition of its value must be regarded as the result of learned enterprise in which, strange as it seems, English teachers of all ranks and descriptions have played an indispensable role" (pp. 141-2). Or, as he phrases it toward the end of his article: "Scholars have not furnished the seed or soil, but the rich harvest could not have matured without the stimulus of scholarly pollination. Our contemporary situation, gradual and continuous in building up, does not show the earmarks of a passing fad. It looks like an important cultural movement, one in which scholar and ballad singer have been collaborating in a healthy and significant fashion" (p. 145). The introduction of folksongs into middle-class life, to use Wilgus' phrase, "is in full flower."

But let us look at some of the evidence for this healthy and significant collaboration between scholar and singer. If such an item in the contemporary situation as Teresa Brewer's record is ignored, and if Burl Ives's books are by serious standards dismissed, we can still find at least one other interesting flower of scholarly pollination, one that has been turned up by a careful student of the ballad. Under "Notes and Queries," *JAF*, LXIV (1951), 131-132, A. H. Scouten reports the background of the issuance by a well-known folklore scholar as authentic of a Library of Congress recording of a Child variant which had been found in southern Virginia. In this case, however, the scholar seems to have pollinated by actually furnishing the seed (to continue Hendren's metaphor), for Scouten assembles very strong evidence that the singer on the record had learned the song, then unknown to her, from that very collector on one of her field trips in the same region twenty years earlier. Here the source of the record is indubitable, although the source of the song is at one remove from that which the information on the record label would lead us to believe. Indeed, when we insist on

sources, as we have seen Haywood do above, we may find that the situation Scouten turned up is only the reverse of another we may not care to face. We ignore the Brewer variant of "Boll Weevil" not at all because the song lacks a respectable folk origin, but because her record does. We would be loath, I think, to define as its collector a Coral record executive, his field, New York City.

Hendren gives us a concise statement of what I take to be the currently acceptable standards for the legitimate folksinger, one of a class that he calls "folksingers *par excellence*": "(1) He lives in a rural or isolated region which (2) shuts him off from prolonged schooling and contact with industrialized urban civilization, so that (3) his cultural training is oral rather than visual" (p. 143). This singer, be it noted, is clearly neither Teresa Brewer nor the current Burl Ives. Hendren continues immediately by offering a perceptive and complete description of the conditions in which this ideal folk singer operates—a description that just as completely defines by negation the current situation of the modern urban American: "If you want a good psychological explanation of ballad origins, imagine yourself living in a community stripped of theater, motion pictures, orchestras, night clubs, radio, television, books, magazines, newspapers, big-time athletics, and mechanical transportation; where for recreation you and your neighbors would have to turn to whatever resources you had in your own memories and imagination." To the list should be added perhaps only one other item, the tape recorder, which modern civilization has developed greatly to the field collector's benefit.

Now, Hendren's imagined world is obviously the world of which it has become almost a ritual for field collectors to lament the passing. Further, his real world is the world of folklorists, of Brewer, and—in a peculiarly complete way—of Burl Ives's success: "beer drinker, dance caller, singer, actor, sailor, collector, impresario, do-gooder, and now story teller," or, phrased differently, radio, TV, night club, movie, recording, and Broadway star, paper-back best-seller, and object of interest in newspapers and magazines. Still further, Burl Ives has bridged Hendren's two worlds. In becoming popular, he has recognizably left the first world behind him. But not entirely. While, as the reviews attest, he can no longer be viewed as an "authentic" folksinger, nor yet as an acceptable scholar, still he must be considered seriously in the scholarly journals, and he is surely the best known of folksingers as well as best known as a folksinger. What has happened, I submit, is that in Burl Ives's career we see in one man the process of the disappearance of "folklore" in its current limited sense, which is to say, we see a case study of social change; what is more, we see in that career a valid criticism of those segments of current folklore opinion that try too sharply to dissociate Hendren's two worlds, that discuss "folksingers *par excellence*" without regard for the folksingers (whom they usually put in quotation marks in the journals) in our midst, and that cannot find the terminology for discussing Burl Ives, the Popular Folksinger.

Everyone knows the story of Lead Belly, at least in its general outlines: his convict background, his meeting with the Lomaxes, their trip north, his success accompanied by the return of his truculence, and his departure south into personal oblivion. It is a sad story, both as the Lomaxes tell it in their book and from other points of view as well. One can sympathize with the Lomaxes as they watched their star performer disintegrate, show up drunk, run out on dates, become at times "grudging," "gruff

and unpleasant," and "less attentive," and depart "an arrogant person, dressed in flashy clothes, a self-confident boaster."<sup>5</sup> As the King of the Twelve-String Guitar Players of the World regained his confidence, he began to be choosy about his audiences; marriage, a bank account, and home life only made him want to get away. Lead Belly too became popular in the civilized world Hendren implies (it had fewer gadgets then), and one of the results is that now folklorists shake their heads over his recordings and distinguish between an "early" and a "later" Lead Belly, for—just as with Burl Ives—the singing techniques and the choice of materials changed, and Tin Pan Alley had its perceptible influence.

But why not? This prototypical lover of wine and women had always got by on his song. It had always earned him better money on the work gangs, garnered him prestige, and sprung him from jail—the very prerequisites for wine and women. As he moved north he made money undreamt of before, he had an almost sure means of staying out of prison, and he was admired by the best that our civilization can offer: cultured people of Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. His native wit and his native ear had always led him accurately to judge what his audience wanted. What he heard, in the bars of this strange civilization around him, was one of the popular products of this civilization. In such a situation, when Cab Calloway could offer him a thousand dollars for a single appearance, who would not alter his techniques in imitation of Calloway, of what he heard, of what would get wine and women?

One would think that this was success, of the Burl Ives type, but of course it wasn't. At night on his own, Lead Belly evidently could achieve perfect integration with his surroundings, and on his own familiar terms. But to what did this lead? A refusal of Cab Calloway's money, rebukes for drunkenness, a brush with the law in Buffalo, regular, scheduled concerts, in his prison outfit, for people with whom he could not talk (whose speech he could hardly even articulate), a doled-out allowance, regular daytime houseboy duties, a suburban home in Connecticut with a duly married wife, and, worst of all from the folklorist's point of view, the assertions (since often enough repeated) that his native ability to adjust to his audience—the ability that had always seen him through—was playing him false, and was doing so by standards of authenticity of text, tune, and performance he had no reason ever to comprehend. Or perhaps it was the disintegration of having two audiences, one of which paid him in terms he understood in return for a singing style he could acquire by instinct, the other of which wanted songs in his old style and in return demanded also suburban respectability, with only stories of his past.

Have I overstated this view of the disintegration of his career? I hope no one who reads this thinks that I am making any accusation of mistreatment whatsoever against the Lomaxes or that I am applauding Lead Belly's later recordings for their musical style. Rather, Lead Belly's and Burl Ives's careers are significantly parallel. They show, I think, variants of a pattern that one could predict when he considers individual reactions to environments almost as different as the ones imagined and implied by Hendren, the ideal folk (the real world of Lead Belly's and Ives's early life) and the real contemporary (the world into which they moved). Assuming that Lead Belly and Burl Ives are both individuals of exceptional individual talent, we see the one disintegrate, the other succeed. But the more important transition, in current folklore terminology, is that from folk to popular, a transition over which folklorists once found adequate cause for rejoicing, but whose results they now reject as a betrayal of stand-

ards. By this token, both Lead Belly and Burl Ives underwent the same transition and met the same defeat. And yet look at the problem again. What do we expect from an individual of talent, particularly when he has been raised in an environment with the characteristics we normally ascribe to that of the folk? It is a commonplace of field reporting to note the identity of interest of the folksinger and his audience, of the rapport between them; it is by now a cliché to extol folksongs for their artistry and folksingers for their unconscious acquisition of technique, and to hear them as deeply, humanly, and culturally expressive. Shouldn't we, then, assume that what happened to Lead Belly and to Burl Ives would happen to any folksinger worth his salt? Shouldn't we assume that he would adapt himself to altered circumstances—changed musical stimuli and changed audiences; that he would expand his repertoire and change his style; and that he would do this in accord with the popular taste that meant his singing success in the smaller sphere in the first place and that, in the altered circumstances, assures it in the second?

Not only is this what Lead Belly did and Burl Ives has done; it is also a partial description of the transition of those ideal isolated communities that have been disappearing, that evidently, almost as soon as they get the chance, drop their home-bred products to obtain (if not to grasp and grab) the products, including Tin Pan Alley tunes, of the expanding industrial civilization. The result is that folklore standards condemn them or stand appalled at what is taken to be a great shift in taste. Restricting ourselves to Burl Ives, we can see that the condemnations of his book are of two different kinds. On the one hand, there are the objections that he is not a scholarly enough folklorist: a little more effort in research would have cleaned up those head-notes, gotten the historical facts right, and acknowledged sources of individual songs. On the other hand, there is the objection in effect that he is too popular a folksinger: he is taken to task for altering any song just as he pleases, in the manner of eighteenth century ballad collectors. But this manner, one must note, is also the manner of actual one hundred percent authentic folksingers, who, whatever one may say about traditional limitations on their scope of improvisation, feel none of the compunctions about total fidelity to source that bother the collectors and reviewers. It is his manner too, I presume, that made Burl Ives successful—first and last.

He is, at any rate, by no means that I can see, a symbol of disintegration, in the manner of Lead Belly, say, or of the reviews of his books. One of the hidden points of those reviews, possibly, is to provide for him a scholarly conscience, just as reviewers always charitably point out in any book faults that can be corrected. These would be faults of the first order. Those of the second order, however, bite deeper, and if he were to accept them as valid failings, he would find that he was deprived of his originality, which is to say, of his personality, his manner, and his key to success. To ask him to stop altering tunes on no better guide than his whim is to ask him to throw away what he was born with, a whim that has, at least in the past, enchanted us all. What we would ask in the name of our scholarship, in short, is the sacrifice of his individual talent and—as too with Lead Belly—the preservation of a cultural stasis, when his own talent and culture have taught him how to change.

But if, in the face of this dilemma between stasis and change, between scholarly standards and emotional response, between folklore and popular lore, we are inclined to regard Burl Ives as a man without the conscience we would like him to have, then we can turn for whatever balm he provides to a folksinger who undoubtedly has a con-

science, for he has publicly discussed it: Sam Hinton, whom I find described in the news column "Folklore and Folklorists" in *Western Folklore* as a "well known southern California folk singer" and who, in the same volume (XIV [1955], 170-173), publishes an essay entitled "The Singer of Folk Songs and His Conscience." The essay is described in a note as "An abridgment of the opening lecture of a course given to an enthusiastic class of folk song singers at the Idyllwild School of Music and the Arts. . . ." But the honesty of Sam Hinton's conclusions makes one wonder just what this class, assembled for a course at an institution of higher learning so sophisticated as to spell its name "Idyllwild," was enthusiastic about. Sam Hinton first of all condemns it ipso facto to having an uneasy conscience: "A professional singer who allows himself to become known as a singer of folk songs," he begins, "is bound to have trouble with his conscience." Why? In the intelligent, honest, and creative use of folk material (to use Wilgus' phrase), there is evidently, when one wants to be honest, a real conflict between intelligence and creativity. Or, as this practicing singer Sam Hinton puts it, the artist "will pride himself on timing and other techniques designed to keep the audience in his control; these techniques often require slight changes to be made in his songs. On the other hand, his respect for genuine folklore reminds him that these changes, and these techniques, may give the audience a false picture of folk music."

Sam Hinton, in short, is in exactly the position of Lead Belly and Burl Ives—with, however, two important exceptions. First, he has the scholarly conscience they lack, and second, because of it he is embarrassed by his artistry. His enthusiastic class therefore heard him state and restate his own inabilities: "I must regretfully class myself as an outsider in relation to any folk song, since my own community . . . has not yet produced a distinct body of folk music of its own," he says, and later, ". . . I am driven to the sad conclusion that I cannot sing authentic folk music, no matter what I do." What, then, does he do? What does he sing? Well, on the way to reaching these conclusions, he finds a way to disavow the techniques of singing that embarrass him and to deny that musical criteria apply; he says, ". . . there is no criterion of folk music that will enable us immediately to recognize it as such, and to separate it from other kinds of music." But if, according to Sam Hinton, the ear won't do, our unconscious emotions will: "For folk music," he continues, "is not so much a body of art as it is a process, an attitude, and a way of life; its distinguishing features lie not within the songs themselves, but in the relations of those songs to a folk culture." Hence Hinton salves his own uneasy conscience by using his artistic techniques to control his audience, which is to say, by changing the songs, but by aiming at preserving and believing he can "preserve intact" their "emotional content."

There are several more clues in this essay, however, that tell us what is happening. In a parenthetical aside, half humorous but certainly accurate, Sam Hinton characterizes his own community—the one within which he can class himself, the one that he says "has not yet produced a distinct body of folk music of its own"—as the "Urban Literate Southern California Sub-Group of the Early Atomic Period." And this, we realize, is the community with some of whose characteristics we are already familiar: the community we have seen Hendren define in reverse earlier in this paper; the community of Lead Belly's disintegration, Burl Ives's success, and Teresa Brewer's "Bo Weevil;" the community of scholarly book reviews; and the community that interested Sam Hinton in folk music, gave him his standards and his guilty conscience, and

assembled for him an enthusiastic audience at Idyllwild. It is a community part of whose way of life is to go to hear Sam Hinton sing folksongs and which finds when it gets there that he is going to produce a distinct body of music of his—and, if he holds his audience as well as I assume he does, its—own. For one of the pastimes of our Urban Literate Groups of the Early Atomic Age is to listen to their own variants of those songs whose charm is human rather than fashionable, but whose fashionable variation has been the object of prime interest to, among others, the folklorists.

On the Editor's Page in *JAF*, LXIV (1951), Wayland D. Hand expressed what I take to be one of the highest aims of the study of folklore today—its possible contribution towards the integration of knowledge. "The integration of knowledge," Hand began, "is a major challenge of our day," and he went on to outline some of the specializations of knowledge whose fragmented and isolated existences one would expect—or hope—the study of folklore "should be able to make an effective contribution" to integrating: psychology, literature, history, anthropology, and so on. It is a familiar yet pressing problem. But disintegration of knowledge has more shapes than merely academic and scholarly divisions into fields of study or specialization, and several of these shapes we have been observing. We folklorists, I think, ought to examine some of our own distinctions for signs of disintegration before we hope too highly to reform all academia, much less to reorientate all of modern, urban, commercialized society. As a start in our field, we might take as a basic truth Lead Belly's parenthetical explanation to John Lomax that I have used as an epigraph for this paper. It suggests, among other things, a unity of purpose and a clarity of goals and aims that tend to belittle us who would like to see ourselves as superior in understanding to Lead Belly. It suggests too that, for Lead Belly at least, and probably for Burl Ives, the change from one to another of what Hendren sees as two worlds is not a sharp split, is not the total collapse of the world of "folksingers *par excellence*" replaced by a world of "folksingers'," but rather is characterized by an emotional continuity, with only a change in objects of interest. As members of various Urban Literate Sub-Groups in the Early Atomic Period who, along with Lead Belly, Burl Ives, Sam Hinton and his enthusiastic class, and Haywood, "love to sing the songs of our land" and "just love singing," in which we find "endless hours of pleasure," we might examine more closely the emotional content of some of our own songs—among them, Teresa Brewer's "Bo Weevil," the songs of *The Burl Ives Song Book*, and Sam Hinton's urbanized variants. If we want a psychological explanation for the increased popularity of folk music, we might at least ponder over one more clue that Hendren provides for us. It lies in his choice of words when he asked us to imagine the world in which true ballads originate, a world, he says, "where for recreation you and your neighbors would *have* to turn to whatever resources you had in your own memories and imagination" (emphasis mine).

It is curious to consider, finally, that, while Haywood, Wilgus, and Tillson all imply a basic distinction between the intellectuality of the discipline of folklore study and the emotionality of its popular acceptance, while Hendren thinks that balladeer and scholar now share what was once two communities of thought and emotion, and while Sam Hinton carefully disavows musical technique in favor of emotional content, one sure method of distinguishing among folksongs and folksingers is not at all in the tenuous realms of emotion, but rather in the thoroughly intellectual realm of

musical analysis. The early and the later Lead Belly, the early and the recent Burl Ives, Lead Belly's "Boll Weevil" and Teresa Brewer's "Bo Weevil," Burl Ives's "Lolly Toodum" and "Rolly Trudum" as sung by May K. McCord of Springfield, Missouri (No. LC 1396 AAFS 59 A), all of these are indistinguishable when we judge them by our love of singing or by their indefinable place in the emotions of the singer or his audience. Yet they are distinguishable (indeed, to not even a well trained ear) in their differences on musical grounds—which is to say, since the subject is music, on grounds capable of the firmest kind of scholarly analysis, and that an analysis of an undisputed sensory, hence emotional, experience.

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## 2. REPLY

In raising again "the eternally important and vexing problem of the relationship of the scholar to his materials," Sven Eric Molin casts a net that is either too wide or not wide enough. In so far as the "popularization" of folk materials is a phenomenon of western culture, any folklore scholar *must* be emotionally involved with his materials. It is his "judgment of desirability" which has given him his "moral and intellectual standards." To the extent that folklore is a humanistic study, to the extent that the folklorist is a part of his culture, "the firmest kind of scholarly analysis" may be little more than a convenient fiction. Within the specific cultural situation—where I judge Molin to be—the problem is somewhat different. The folklorist's categories and distinctions may be only relative, but they have a validity necessary to the existence of the discipline. Molin cannot have it both ways: he cannot view the folklorist as a part of his culture and at the same time berate him because he is a part of that culture. Therefore, since Molin as a folklorist—not as a Martian historian of twentieth century terrestrial culture—has apparently misunderstood my review of *The Burl Ives Song Book*, misrepresented both my statements and my views, and taken issue with both what I did write and what I did not write, I trust I may make clear what my position is and was.

In the first place, Molin fails to recognize (or at least to indicate) that in my review I was considering not one book, but three books, and that "the beginning of intelligent, honest, and creative use of folklore" was applied to the other two books—books which Molin does not even mention, though they are a part of the cultural movement which is larger than, but includes, Lead Belly, Burl Ives, and Sam Hinton. And he does not hesitate to use my phrase later in his paper where it may not necessarily apply. Secondly, by paraphrasing sections of my statements, he accuses me of denying Burl Ives the right to alter any song "just as it suits him." Instead, I questioned the "ethics of the professional singer who pillages scholarly collections for material which he changes to suit his taste or the taste of his audience, *then publishes as, in a sense, his own,*" without precise acknowledgment (*italics added*). Is there no difference? Finally, in treating my inability to discuss in a necessarily brief review the complex problems of acculturation and popularization as "an avoidance of the issues that are raised," he contends that my indication of various appeals and values of the book, "when we consider that the book is already published anyway, says nothing." Whatever my "hypothesis" did not say, it expressed a judgment which

Molin does not and cannot deny. My review may have had but one audience; *The Burl Ives Song Book* has several.

I confess that I fail to find in my review that “dissociation of scholarly standards from emotive response” discovered by Molin. I do plead guilty to believing that it is good to sing and that it is good to sing folksongs even if the performance is not absolutely authentic (i.e., duplicates the distinctive performance of the folk culture in which the song has been current), while at the same time believing that material labeled “folk” should be circulated with some responsibility. To insist on absolute authenticity is unrealistic, for reasons of which Molin gives only a few. There is no reason for a “straight or bent leg” controversy; nor is there an excuse for a misleading performance. But Molin offers the false dilemma of a musical-esthetic stasis or the acceptance of any professional product as a “case study of social change.”

Molin demonstrates his confusion by introducing a consideration of Teresa Brewer’s “Bo Weevil” recording. The recording and what it represents are important to the folklorist. And I do not believe they will be ignored. (The number of letters concerning discographies—descriptive and analytical—crossing my desk alone in the past weeks testifies to the growing interest in commercialized and acculturated materials.) But the problem posed by “Bo Weevil” differs from that posed by *The Burl Ives Song Book*. “Bo Weevil” is not clearly labeled “folk” and does not make its way under the aegis of that near-magical word. Teresa Brewer is selling music; Burl Ives is selling something else as well. *The Burl Ives Song Book* and “Bo Weevil” may be part of the same large cultural phenomena, but they do not travel under the same banner. To try them by the same standard would be to treat as equivalents Francis James Child and “The Unknown Soldier of Sandgate,” or Bishop Percy and Jeremy Catnach. But Burl Ives, who—like Roy Acuff—is a symbol of “Folklore Made Good,” also makes a noise like a folklorist. And when he does, his product is “worth consideration,” if only because of its label. Reviews of the productions of Burl Ives should be no more “embarrassed and embarrassing” than a consideration of *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* or *Cowboy Songs*, which might also ask us to “approve of a book we have every right to condemn.”

I do not believe that anyone is denying the right to sing a folksong as one chooses. And the folklorist may even applaud the action without approving the result. But Molin avoids the issue posed by my review. What are the ethics of the professional singer who publishes, without responsible annotation, his versions of the collectanea of others? The folklorist may view Burl Ives the folksinger as a product of social change; but he must view Burl Ives the popularizer as an editor with the obligations that Phillips Barry set forth long ago in *The Maine Woods Songster*<sup>6</sup>: “. . . different obligations bind the maker of a scientific work to be thrown to the lions of scholarship and the maker of a practical work for people who like to sing. . . . The editor of a practical work has the right and is under the duty to make both singable and understandable, the song he edits . . . both singer and scholar, nevertheless, into whose hands the book may fall, have today a right . . . to know both the extent and the sources of editorial changes and restorations.”

I hope my comments have not denied the significance of certain of Molin’s remarks. Molin is quite concerned—and rightly so—with the presence and transmutation of folksong in the mass entertainment industries and with the attitude of the folklorist toward the process and the results. The folklorist can and should—here I

think is Molin's point—study the phenomenon “in the thoroughly intellectual realm of musical analysis.” If he needs new terminology to discuss some of the newer forms, he has been given a start by Charles Seeger's notes (*JAF*, LIX [October, 1946], 512-13; LXI [April, 1948], 215-17). But he must be careful that, in applying “the firmest kind of scholarly analysis,” he does not on a musical-esthetic basis deny the validity of certain acculturated forms, and that he does not impute to fellow students statements they did not make, opinions they do not hold, and attitudes they do not possess.

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D. K. WILGUS

### 3. REPLY

Molin accuses the reviewers on a number of counts. He tries hard to build up an imposing and lengthy case but, after all is said and done, most of his argument, however interesting, is in the main irrelevant. It appears that Molin does not realize that he and the “three defendants” are dealing with two different issues: his main concern is with Burl Ives, the folksinger, the performer; the reviewers are dealing with Burl Ives, the author. And that is of considerable difference. We are concerned here with Ives as the author or anthologist (Molin recognized this point, but he passes over it rather quickly) of a book to be sold, read, and studied and sent to scholarly journals to be reviewed. Under these circumstances it is very important to call attention to the fact that the many workers, who have spent years collecting, analyzing, and collating these songs, are not even mentioned by the author. As to “sources,” a review in *Western Folklore* or *JAF* is addressed to specialists, to scholars. These journals are not “popular magazines.” (Would that their sale were as good.) The reviewer is obliged, must, go into details, examine every pertinent aspect, and make comment on matters that are of utmost importance and relevance to his colleagues in order that the standards of the discipline may not fall. The reviewer in a folklore journal has a right to insist on knowing the source of the tunes in a collection, and not be “embarrassed,” or not “care to face” collectors, singers, records, professors, or cities.

Ives is a professional singer, although he carries the label “folksinger,” (or is it “Wayfaring Stranger” that he prefers?), subject to all the allurements of the market place. His contact with the cultural milieu, from which many of his songs have come, has been very tenuous; at least it has run dry for a good many years. The bulk, if not all, of his quite extensive repertoire of folksongs has come from published sources. Then in all honesty, it is insisted, he should say so. Of course, in performance there is no need for that sort of declaration; there his job is to sing. He does that well, and scholars, as well as all other members of the “Urban Literate Sub-Groups in the Early Atomic Period,” can wholeheartedly enjoy his lovely voice and songs without the palling guilt of dissociating “scholarly standards from emotive response.” Yes, Molin, because we really love to hear and “sing the songs of our land.” Sad would be the day for American folklore research if the researchers could not derive pleasure from the singing of the three singers under discussion, in spite of certain reservations towards, or even limitations of, their performance.

What seems to disturb Molin is how a reader can reconcile a reviewer's criticism of certain shortcomings, weaknesses, historical or technical inadequacies of specific items in an anthology with a final laudatory expression for the whole volume. I think

it is perfectly justifiable to find fault with individual items or sections, and yet recommend the whole collection. To paraphrase a famous saying: "the whole is better than its parts." Out of a total of 115 songs some are severely criticized for musical, cultural, type of arrangement, failure to mention sources, and other reasons, but the songs themselves, the tunes, are good. I don't have to bother one whit with Burl Ives's esthetic concepts of folksong creation, and still, not only enjoy a good many of the tunes, but even strongly suggest that others can derive the same pleasure by buying a copy. And for fifty cents, why not? There is no mention of condemning or dismissing Burl Ives's book; that is Molin's unwarranted inference.

When Burl Ives declares that his collection of songs is arranged in "historical perspective," then we must insist that such perspective be maintained, and criticize him if he fails to follow, at least reasonably, a logical sequence of historical chronology, and one need not be a professor to know what that is. And why shouldn't the author be taken to task (it is a pity that Molin felt "embarrassed" reading those strictures) when, in a volume that purports to represent America in "historical perspective," the opening song is "Tobacco's But an Indian Weed," (a tune found in seventeenth and eighteenth century English songsters). Is this supposed to represent pre-Columbian American music? I can't believe that Ives is that naïve, or that he is totally unaware of the Bulletins of the Bureau of American Ethnology, of the work of Frances Densmore and a score of other eminent students of Indian music. There is no doubt left in the reader's mind that the above-mentioned song was intended to represent Indian life and culture because the second number, our old friend "Little Mohee," is described as "a song about the chieftain's daughter, Mohee (and that it is), a beautiful derivation from the bawdy sailor ballad "The Indian Lass." And so, with these two "Indian" songs the America before Columbus is dramatically presented. If there still be doubt in anyone's open mind that the above two selections were so intended by the folksinger-historian, it will definitely be dispelled by the chronological events represented in the next few hymn tunes taken from the *Ainsworth Psalter*, which the Pilgrims brought with them. And thus the first settlements and Colonial America are introduced in *The Burl Ives Song Book*.

Molin sees a continuous and uninterrupted line of cultural growth in Burl Ives and Lead Belly when they transferred their rural contact to the teeming activities of urban life. He accepts all their changes in vocal style and expansion of repertoire as mere adaptations "to altered circumstances." And this, he asserts, is what "any folk singer worth his salt" would do. (Please note that he persists, as we pointed out above, in dealing with them as singers and not as authors.) But what about these changes in vocal style? Are they to be uncritically accepted just because they are changes? Indeed, "das Volk dichtet nicht," but the *Volk* does select and reject. It has always opposed artificial ornaments, excessive vocal alteration, and fancy tricks with voice or body. It is a sociological phenomenon, indeed, but a bad one, and must be exposed as such, and not be condoned. And if the folk has been victimized by all sorts of musical and mechanical gadgets, gimmicks, and gags so that its own sense of value regarding folk traditions has been distorted, then it is the job of the folklorist to expose these distortions. It is one thing to transmit folklore as one hears it in a simple, straightforward and unaffected manner, and quite another matter when contrived vocal effects and alterations are introduced because they "lie better in the voice," or because they gain applause. Any connection with the folk becomes merely coincidental.

What a sad spectacle it was to hear and see Lead Belly in the last few years of his life sing such a simple song as "Take this Hammer." Gone was the forceful dramatic simplicity, and the searing impact of the continuous unaltered rhythmic pulse struck on his guitar, and the voice hammering out words and melody of burning portent. Instead, he adapted "himself to the altered circumstances"—night clubs and popular taste. In the place of strong rhythms the guitar was toying with delicate arpeggi and delightful arabesques, filling in between verses with swaying body movements, marching up and down the stage, swinging the guitar over his head, strumming an accompaniment while holding the instrument upside down, or behind his back. This was a sad and tragic sight, cheap vaudeville claptrap. Students in my classes, who had seen him some years before, were distressed by such performance. And when this happens, whether in an auditorium or a book, it is the folklorist's job, I repeat, to point out these defects, if folklore is to continue as a science and not as a fad.

Burl Ives tells us that he changes the words of a folksong when he feels that he has better ones, and that he frequently alters the tune when he thinks it would help the song. We are informed that he often spends "weeks working on one song." This is the work of an arranger—professional adaptability to popular taste. This is not the spontaneous expression of the folk but rather the conscious effort of what Charles Seeger aptly calls "fine art," and the concert hall. Listen to the ornate and overloaded arrangements of Belafonte's (he could well be the subject, I imagine, of a similar paper by Molin) *Calypsos*, or Leonard Warren's operatized *Sea Chanties*. Indeed these are sociological phenomena of our culture, but rooted and controlled by the box office and the publicity agent. When these singers lose contact with the simplicity of the folk, it is the folklorist's duty to point out these "arty" alterations and "cute" mannerisms.

With a number of Molin's perceptive observations (quoting Hendren) on the relationship and impact of social, political, and economic factors on the folksongs of the people in a dynamically changing society, I can raise no objections. However, the "eternally important and vexing problem," and in particular reference to this discussion, as I see it, is not "the relationship of the scholar to his materials," but rather the relationship of the singer or performer of folksongs (not to be confused with the native or indigenous folksinger; call him "folksinger *par excellence*," if you will) to his material.

In summing up his case, Molin suggests the path on which more firm and realistic appraisal of folksong material is possible, namely, the music itself, "on grounds capable of the firmest kind of scholarly analysis." It is unfortunate that he waits until the last paragraph to come up with this statement, in the meantime using many paragraphs to charge the reviewers with inconsistency, with "dissociation of scholarly standards from emotive response," with standing in "awe of Ives," with throwing "over all standards," and other similar solemn pronouncements. The fact is, as a musician, that my comments on the song material are always concerned with musical matters—with the structural aspects of the melodies, with rhythmic and harmonic problems, as well as with the character of the accompaniment. It is precisely these observations that I emphasize in my review. I have a faint suspicion that Molin may have let his own emotional enthusiasm for his trio, plus the recording, somewhat becloud his "scholarly standards," without being in the least bit "embarrassed."

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CHARLES HAYWOOD

4. REPLY

The other reviewers with whom Molin has found fault suffered more direct blows than I, and perhaps with less cause. My review of the anomalous *Burl Ives' Tales of America* (for that is its official title) does not fit so neatly into the frame of elaborate reference, devised by Molin for Hendren and Hinton, in which he wishes to ensnare us all. To apply these tenets to the Ives book would be like criticizing a Mickey Spillane novel through the sophistry of the New Critics, except that Spillane could be condemned categorically. Burl Ives cannot be dismissed so summarily.

First, I must explain that my review was unsolicited; I wrote it because I thought it raised some important though tangential questions concerning folklore. If my critic had chosen to review my article without bias, he would have found that I mentioned these things: 1) Ives does not call his miscellany folklore; 2) he mentions those who helped put the book together; 3) he honestly admits that these are just stories he likes and wants to share. In a short review one need only point out examples of errors, and I added only that I thought it not worth while to track down the sources since Ives operates in the tradition of folk transmission by retelling in his own words things he loves. Who can quibble with such a forthright point of view? The fact that I read myself to sleep with just such a book does not mean that I do not take my folklore seriously. I just did not consider this serious folklore; hence my approach was less "solemn." The approach was personal and the verdict was and is that the book is good; and if this embarrasses anyone, then it must be only the accuser (on whom falls the burden of proof).

So tenuous and tentative does all this seem to me that I cannot but feel it has been a storm in a teapot. I feel a little like the recruit who wished an officer a friendly "howdy" only to receive a lecture of some minutes' duration on matters of decorum. To all this the recruit replied, "I never would of spoke in the first place if I'd knowed you'd take on so."

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M. W. TILLSON

5. REJOINDER

The first two replies accuse me in strong language of misinterpreting their reviews, so perhaps at once I ought to disabuse them of their own misinterpretations. Aside from the minor matter that Wilgus evidently overlooked my second footnote and what sees to me a clear parenthetical explanation, I am rather startled to find that my article came out against singing; that it "uncritically accepted" and even revealed an "emotional enthusiasm" for Ives, Lead Belly, Sam Hinton (whom I have never heard), and Teresa Brewer; that it deserved a lecture on history (as if it accepted Ives's version); and that it is notable for treating Ives and Lead Belly "as singers." That which is to Haywood an uncritical and emotional acceptance is to Wilgus a denial "on a musical-esthetic basis" of "the validity of certain acculturated forms." Wilgus attributes to me a feeling of Martian objectivity when my main awareness is of "folkloristic" activity all around me that he, at least, ignores. Haywood emphasizes that, whether I realize it or not, he and his colleagues deal with Ives "the author," whereas the honorific section of his review is about Ives's audience ("all those who just love singing") and nine-tenths of Tillson's is about Ives the social phenomenon and per-

sonality. But Haywood is right in thinking that Harry Belafonte would suit my thesis exactly, precisely because his records, with all their demonstrable faults of performance, might get favorable unsolicited reviews on the theory that they encourage folksinging.

The initial point of my article remains the same: if one reads those three reviews of Ives's books, he will find that the analyses reveal only faults (they are amplified by Haywood in his answer), while acceptance (indeed, promotion) of the books is phrased in entirely different emotional terms. Is this really a case of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts, or is it, as I say, a revelation of dissociation? The joy and encouragement of singing impress me as being valid and self-contained reasons, but in these reviews they are given a vague superiority that contrasts markedly with the range and precision of the analytical faultfinding. I am not for all singing at any price, and the label "folk" in this case does seem befuddling.

Are there some areas of agreement among us, or, lacking that, are there clear-cut lines of disagreement? I wish I could accept wholeheartedly Wilgus' statement that it is the folklorist's "'judgement of desirability' which has given him his 'moral and intellectual standards.'" That to my mind is just the way a unified sense and intellect should work. What confuses and perplexes me in these answers (as well as in the reviews) is that it does not seem to work this way. The reviews give me definite and comprehensible reasons both for buying the books and for not buying them. Evidently if I buy them because I want to sing the songs and read the stories (as they recommend), I am getting a corrupted knowledge of the folk and am encouraging intellectual dishonesty. (I cannot, by the way, think of another scholarly field where book reviews end with a recommendation of purchase and where the reviewer even tells his reader how to use the book after he has bought it.) If I do not buy them, then at least Wilgus and Haywood imply that I do not like singing. In either case they want me to have the same bad conscience that Sam Hinton has (although not quite so bad, for Haywood reminds me that it will cost me only fifty cents). What am I to do? My answer is that the conundrum posed is a false one. If the songs are at once good songs to sing and yet a crassly commercial pillaging, then it is a question of what a "good" song is. I accept almost every unfavorable judgment of Ives that Haywood details, but say that they all avoid what would seem to be basic: the words and music of the actual songs in the book. Are "the songs themselves, the tunes, . . . good"? In spite of Haywood's assertion that they are, he does not like their "musical, cultural, type of arrangement." It seems to me that the exact way we distinguish between good and bad song books of any kind (assuming that we already know the tunes, as in Ives's case folklorists obviously do) is on our judgment of their arrangement.

Here is where Wilgus, Haywood, and I part company, for their primary concern with Ives is not as an arranger (Wilgus defends alteration on principle "without approving the result," although he did mildly approve of the result in his review, and Haywood finds the whole idea of arrangement distasteful). They are bothered by his failure to acknowledge sources. Both of them state that the problem I raise, that of the relationship of the scholar to his materials, is not the crucial one; the real problem according to them is the relationship of the professional singer and anthologist to his scholarly sources. In other words, they change the terms of the problem so as to avoid an examination of themselves in order to castigate Ives again. In their answers, both of them repeat and amplify their original charges against Ives on this count. And yet, while this would seem to be a scholarly and disinterested kind of judgment, there

is an aura of emotion about it, a sense of pique. The reviewers are put out that Ives doesn't acknowledge the efforts of folklorists and the Bureau of American Ethnology, and what is worse, that he is successful at it. Unlike the students and fellow folklorists who acknowledge Wilgus' superiority by allowing their papers to cross his desk, Ives submits to his own judgment and gets away with it. Wilgus implies and Haywood states explicitly that the public accepts as folklore something of which they don't approve. Isn't there a sense of martyrdom and neglect and a positive desire for popularity in all this? Would that the *JAF* sold as well as Ives, says Haywood.

There is also a strange fear of money and of professionalism here. The popular folksingers' tastes are "rooted and controlled by the box office and publicity agent" and Teresa Brewer "is selling music; Burl Ives is selling something else as well." What Ives is selling is folklore, the special province of the folklorists, and the public in its ignorance does not realize that Wilgus and Haywood have already staked their claim. Hence they regard Ives as a pirate, and they are elaborately concerned, like any tradesman, with their own label, "folk." The sense of pique, in other words, results not so much from a conflict of standards as from a rivalry of interests. The folklorists are promoters of and publicity agents for Library of Congress recordings and AFS research, and the only people who care, the only public that applauds them, is a small group of fellow specialists. Said another way, the public at large is indifferent to Wilgus and Haywood, and they respond by berating the public taste. Am I depreciating scholarly research and promoting Teresa Brewer? Not that I can see. But the dismissal of her "Bo Weevil" because of its financial motivation seems to me a distortion and oversimplification. She too is "selling something else as well," and in a modern civilization where juke box noises are an unavoidable part of living, where our sense of musical values cannot help being influenced by such sounds, I want a fuller explanation of "Bo Weevil."

What Wilgus and I evidently share is a sense of confusion, but it is confusion over different matters. I find it odd to appear in public insisting to one of our authorities on folk music that he ought at least to listen to a record entitled "Bo Weevil" and odder still that he would think me wrong should I dismiss this music "on a musical-esthetic basis." From my point of view, the title should attract folklorists as quickly as, say, a previously unheard version of "Green Grow the Lilacs," and, like it, should be judged after hearing. This would be to "applaud the action" of someone's singing a folksong as he chooses without necessarily "approving the result." I am suggesting that in this case Wilgus does not want even to acknowledge the action, much less applaud it. Thus he (and Haywood too) disparages it because of what they say are the motives behind it, and with a wonderful prescience they know the music is not "folk" before they have heard it. In any case, it strikes me as sanctimony to accuse a critic of confusion in one place for having considered the record at all and to accuse him in another of denying "the validity of certain acculturated forms." We are debating over standards in this field. It seems to me paradoxical that while folk music is now getting the serious hearing it has long sought (as the pages of the *JAF* attest), folklorists should disavow musical-esthetic judgement.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps, in spite of my general agreement with Haywood's analysis of Burl Ives's recent career, he and I remain farthest apart in the most clearly definable way. Evidently our whole conceptions of folklore differ. To me, the interest and importance of folklore study lie in its attempt to understand other people by examining what

they both accept and reject. Haywood has the missionary approach, and he wants to impose on the folk his own values. Just as he distrusts popular taste, so he distrusts folk taste. Here is his description of the folk and of the folklorist's job: ". . . if the folk have been victimized by all sorts of musical and mechanical gadgets, gimmicks, and gags so that their own sense of value of folk tradition has been distorted, then it is the job of the folklorist to expose these distortions." This statement reveals to me a problem of the relationship of the scholar to his materials. I lack Haywood's confidence. I am not sure that my own position amid "the teeming activities of urban life" gives me a true sense of what someone else's values should be. I do not want to lecture any folk on what they should like as opposed to what they evidently do like. The consequence of thinking "das Volk dichtet nicht" is the belittling of one's subject. With Haywood's attitude, I would be loath to label any group of people "folk," for it would be an insult to do so.

But whether or not Haywood really thinks that his review in a learned journal exposes distortions to the folk for their own benefit, I should like to close with the third answer. Our sympathies in the story about the army are quite clearly with the recruit, but the story itself is a remarkably perfect example of Freudian inversion. Through telling it, the writer admits the superiority of his antagonist. If folklore really be a science, if it involve discipline of mind and training in ideas and awareness of situation, then I want to be the officer in that army. If it be not a science, if it be simply an enthusiasm, an emotional response without rigor, and a bonhomie over fads, then, of course, I would prefer to be the genial recruit. How can I be both?

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SVEN ERIC MOLIN

## 6. LAST WORD

There is no doubt that my writing would improve if it could often be subject to this sort of discussion—preferably before publication. To see one's words enclosed in quotes is to see them with a pitiless clarity, and blunders of syntax and logic clamor for rectification. Thank goodness Molin did not find it necessary to add the word "sic" to any of my statements, but it's bad enough as it is, especially on those occasions when he quotes me correctly. For instance, he quotes my note to the effect that my original paper was delivered to "an enthusiastic class of folk song singers at the Idyllwild School of Music and the Arts," then wonders what reasons might have existed for the enthusiasm. He takes that word "enthusiastic" and plays with it as Mark Antony played with "honorable," and Brutus could have been little more embarrassed than I . . . . But honest, Molin, it's a simple case of transposed words; I meant to say that the members of the class were enthusiastic singers of folksongs, not necessarily that they were an enthusiastic audience, as you call them later. In this same early paragraph there is a remark about "an institution of higher learning so sophisticated as to spell its name 'Idyllwild.'" The sophistication of the school is not to be denied, but it may be of historical interest (especially to a member of an institution of higher learning so scholarly as to locate itself in a town named "Athens") to note that the enthusiasts responsible for the name were the real estate people who named the town some fifty years before the school was founded there.

There are several serious areas of misunderstanding in Molin's discussion of my

paper. He says that I appear to recognize “. . . a real conflict between intelligence and creativity.” There is a conflict, of course, but I can’t agree that it is between intelligence and creativity, as if the two were mutually exclusive. Later, he says that Hinton “. . . finds a way . . . to deny that musical criteria apply,” apparently in the field of performance. My only statement about musical criteria was that they do not apply as an infallible means of identifying folk music as such; skillful composers can make songs which, by musical criteria alone, cannot be distinguished from folksongs. But this has nothing to do with such criteria as applied to the performance of folksongs.

Molin appears to misunderstand both my problems and their solutions. He says: “Hinton . . . is embarrassed by his artistry, . . . he finds a way to disavow the techniques of singing that embarrass him . . . , Hinton carefully disavows musical technique in favor of emotional content . . .” and “. . . hence Hinton salves his own uneasy conscience by using his artistic techniques to control his audience, which is to say, by changing the songs.” What I intended to convey was quite different. “Controlling the audience” and “changing the songs” are far from being balm to my smarting conscience; these are the very practices that trouble my conscience in the first place, since they require me to do things that are not part of any folk tradition. Thus I do not “disavow” musical techniques at all; it is my use of musical techniques peculiar to my own (non-folk) culture that gives rise to my dilemma. As to emotional content, my avowed aim is to use musical and other techniques in such a way as to do the least possible violence to the emotional intent of a song; if the song, among the folk, is considered a sad one, I think it wicked to make something funny of it.

It may be presumptuous of me to disagree with any of Molin’s statements not bearing directly upon my own article, but here I go just the same. In one place, Molin deplors Haywood’s accepting the tunes in Ives’s book while criticizing their arrangement; Molin says, “It seems to me that the exact way we distinguish between good and bad song books of any kind . . . is on our judgment of their arrangement.” In my opinion (and I’ll bet Haywood will agree) you might as well base your judgment on the typography, or the binding. Sandburg’s *American Songbag* is an excellent and enjoyable book, but many of its arrangements (which are not Sandburg’s work) leave a lot to be desired; Hilton Rufty used some fine material in his books, but to get at it, one must wallow through some mighty sticky arrangements; and Cecil Sharp has not gone without censure in this respect either. Many review articles in the folklore journals mention the matter; a recent one by Bertrand H. Bronson (*Western Folklore*, XV [April 1956], p. 146ff.) is typical in wishing for a less elaborate, more folksy type of piano accompaniment.

I agree with Molin when he concludes his article with the statement that we can distinguish among the singing of Burl Ives, Teresa Brewer, Lead Belly, and May K. McCord, although I am not so sure that we can call the process “the thoroughly intellectual realm of musical analysis.” If this process of distinguishing lead to judgment, we will find good performances and bad ones among both the commercial recordings and the more authentic field recordings. And, in a great many cases, many of the Library of Congress performers are superior when this “thoroughly intellectual” yardstick is applied. One of the first things I do with each of my classes in folk music is to compare selected performances of both types: Burl Ives’ “Divil and the Farmer’s Wife” vs. Horton Barker’s L.C. recording of the same song; Dyer-Bennett’s “Barbara Allen” vs. that of Rebecca Tarwater; my own commercial recording of “Long John”

vs. the L.C. field recording of "Long John" sung by a chain gang. The techniques are different, but both kinds show artistry, and, after a critical, unprejudiced listening, most listeners find the commercial recordings comparatively pallid and lifeless. I am delighted to know that Molin considers such preference to be based on "grounds capable of the firmest kind of scholarly analysis," even though most of the musical criticism I know is scarcely on so high a plane.

Molin says, "The public at large is indifferent to Wilgus and Haywood, and they respond by berating the public taste." This, I think, is quite unfair. Wilgus and Haywood are not berating the public; they just don't approve of the public's being fooled into thinking it is getting representative folk music when it isn't getting anything of the kind. Molin says as much in an earlier paragraph: "Wilgus implies and Haywood states explicitly that the public accepts as folklore something of which they don't approve." Both statements, implied and explicit, seem to me to make it clear that the disapproval is not of the material, or of the public, but of the material's masquerading as genuine folklore. And write me down, Molin, as one who joins in their disapproval.

Because of all these obvious misunderstandings, I feel it necessary to restate my position—more briefly, and I hope more clearly, than before. First of all, some sort of folk society must exist, or have existed, in the United States. It is true, as Herskovits has pointed out in *Man and His Works*,<sup>8</sup> that this societal concept is of questionable validity if considered as a polar extreme opposite an urban, literate society; but even so, the existence of a folk society is usually accepted. By even the most liberal definition of such a society, I myself am excluded from membership. My relation to folk music is in some way similar to my wife's relation to Indian pottery. She is an excellent potter, and has studied American Indian techniques; nevertheless, if she chose to copy those techniques, her work could still not be considered as representative of Indian work. And my singing is not representative of a folk culture—it is a translation into another cultural language.

It seems to me that there are, among others, two important characteristics which set folk music apart from other types of music: 1) folk music represents a folk society, 2) folk music is a fluid, dynamic thing, and its every singing can be, in its native habitat, a fresh act of creation.

Music possessing these characteristics is so satisfying to me that I want not only to hear it, but to sing it myself. In so doing, however, I feel that I am forced to violate at least one of the basic characteristics. If I slavishly imitate the singing of a member of the folk society, the result may be in some small measure representative of that society, but I will have done nothing creative. If, on the other hand, I put my own changes into a song, the requirement of creativity is satisfied, but since my musical customs and prejudices are the products of another society, the song cannot then be said to represent the folk society. It has become a translation.

My own answer is to follow the second path, and give creativity a chance; at the same time, I feel duty-bound to do this creating in a very careful manner, and to make my translation as faithful as possible. If textual or musical changes are required to make a song more intelligible, or to keep my audience from laughing at a song that is supposed to be sad, I like to think that my changes approach the sort that might have been made by a member of the folk society.

My conscience doesn't hurt because I sing non-authentic folksongs; anybody can

sing any kind of song he likes, with my blessing. But when I let my audience think of me as a folksinger, I start worrying. Am I misleading that audience? Am I pretending to be something I'm not? And above all, am I doing justice to the great tradition of folklore? Wanton changes in folksongs can produce a false picture of a folk society, or can cut short the continuity of tradition. For example, elementary school teachers in California are familiar with a little green book of folksongs distributed by the State Department of Education. Its preface raises the pertinent point that today's children are tomorrow's travelers, and that if they are not taught something of our folk heritage, they might not be able to respond to a request by the people of some other country to sing a song representative of our culture; the book's excellent aim is to provide the proper material. But the songs in the book are edited and bowdlerized (mostly by previous editors, from whose works these pieces are borrowed) until they present, at best, a distorted picture. A sea shanty, usually sung "They call me Hanging Johnny,/ They say I hang for money," becomes "They call me Smiling Johnny,/ Because my smile is bonny." If the children like to sing it that way, that's just fine; nothing is more important than to get the kids to sing. But there's no reason why they should be led to believe that this is the way American sailing men used to sing. And a number of such changes, accumulating in the children's minds, will take them a long way from the truth.

In another song book for children, we find "Let's hunt for a wren,/ Said Robin the Bobbin" changed to "Let's hunt for a crow,/ . . .," presumably because the wren is a dear little creature and crows are fair game any time. And I, as a member of the Audubon Club and an enthusiastic bird watcher, agree that wrens shouldn't be shot. But the substitution ignores a stream of tradition that may have flowed unbroken since before the Roman conquest of England. The pages devoted to the ceremonies of the hunting of the wren in Frazer's *The Golden Bough* are extremely interesting, and it seems a shame to deprive the children of a possible feeling of identification with so distant and fascinating a past.

It cannot be denied that many changes of this sort are made by the folk themselves, without impairment of authenticity; but I still don't feel that I have any right to do so if I'm going to pass off the result as folk music. Other things being equal, I prefer to stay as close as possible to the folk tradition.

Molin has put his finger on the sore spot when he says that ". . . we see . . . the process of the disappearance of 'folklore' in its current limited sense." These are hard words, but true. Either we must admit that folklore is on its way out, and go back to the old idea of studying "antiquities," or we must redefine folklore so as to include the processes that are going on now. This redefinition is well under way. John Greenway, in his *American Folksongs of Protest*,<sup>9</sup> discusses the matter with courage and insight, and arrives at a definition which includes a great deal of material that would otherwise have been left out. Several reviewers criticized his definition with severity, but that did not alter the trend. Whole panels of learned people have talked it over, as reported in the pages of the *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* (especially in III [1951], V [1953], and VII [1955]). One of the most experienced folksong collectors in this country, Sam Eskin, sums the matter up in his usual succinct manner in a spoken footnote to his record, *Songs of All Times* (Cook Laboratory's "Sounds of Our Times" Series). Eskin says that the old ways of singing folksongs are just about gone. "Folksongs," he says, "have a future as well as a past, and

they get there via the present." "The sounds of our times get into these songs, and make them interesting to today's listeners, who might find the style of the old-timers strange. And this is not to negate what we can learn from the old-timers, such as knowing our place in the long stream of cultural tradition." All these writers and speakers, as well as Molin and the other four protagonists of the present paper, agree that the distance between folk society and literate society is ever decreasing, and Teresa Brewer will yet shake hands with Mrs. Texas Gladden. But until that happens—until my own culture, and Teresa Brewer's, develops a folk tradition of its own—if I want to learn something about real folk music, I'll stick with Mrs. Gladden.

The very fact that Haywood, Tillson and Wilgus recognize the increasing closeness of the two theoretical worlds mentioned by Hendren, results in what Molin chooses to see as a dissociation of scholarship and emotive response. It is logical to expect an open, two valued viewpoint from people who are members of one society and students of another, but who nevertheless realize that the two societies are not very far apart. In fact, it seems to me that all five of us are in essential agreement even while each of us wonders what the other four are trying to say. Differences arise only because we feel our responsibilities impelling us in different directions; if I do not appear to keep pace with my neighbor, perhaps it is because I am paying a different piper.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> New York, 1954.

<sup>2</sup> "Folksongs" (a review of Ives's and two other books), *JAF*, LXVII (1954), 330. Subsequent quotations of Wilgus are from this review, pp. 330-331, passim.

<sup>3</sup> In a review, *Western Folklore*, XIII (1954), 214-216, passim, from which subsequent quotations are also taken.

<sup>4</sup> *Western Folklore*, XIV (1955), 222, from which subsequent quotations are taken.

<sup>5</sup> John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, *Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly. "King of the Twelve-String Guitar Players of the World," Long-Time Convict in the Penitentiaries of Texas and Louisiana* (New York, 1936), pp. 55 and 64. The epigraph to this paper is from this book, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Cambridge, Mass., 1939, pp. 5-6.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Seeger's vocabulary for discussing new forms, to which Wilgus refers me, is tantalizing and inadequate, and perhaps should be discussed in a separate paper. I assume that Wilgus is recommending Seeger's distinction between hillbilly and citybilly, which even in its own terms needs clarification. In Seeger's first paper (which is part of a conference on folklore), the difference is in kind. Hillbilly (*hb*) is "the type of popular music that a folk singer makes when he gets before a radio microphone," and city-billy (*cb*) is "the kind of music a city person makes when he is suddenly seized with a fervor of admiration for the 'folk.'" (Strictly speaking, to these he should add folkbilly: the kind of unpopular music a folksinger makes when he gets before a tape recorder.) In his second paper (a record review), the difference is in degree, described metaphorically as "two alternate highways leading from the comparatively authentic folk idiom (*f*) to the comparatively authentic fine-art or concert idiom (*c*) and vice versa." Using Seeger's symbols and the above definitions, I hypothesize the following possible developments, not all of them two-way (as I have indicated with arrows):  $f \longleftrightarrow hb$ ,  $cb \rightarrow f$  (this, I imagine, is Sam Hinton's aim and, according to Charles Seeger, Peter Seeger's partial accomplishment);  $cb \rightarrow hb$ ; also  $f \leftarrow c$  and  $cb \rightarrow hb$ ; but never  $f \rightarrow cb$  or  $hb \rightarrow cb$  because of the difference in the singers' origins. Thus I

think Seeger is right when he implies that a concert singer can develop a true folk style by a certain kind of discipline, for this is a matter of singing technique.

I am not sure, however, that he would assent to my change of the metaphor of the highways and that he really intends to place folk music and concert music in a continuum. The tenor of his first paper is to distinguish the two idioms absolutely, as when he speaks of the "two types of content restricted to each," bases his case on a difference between oral and written music, and mentions "the irrational field of folk music" in contrast to "the rational field of written music." These remarks evidently led Stith Thompson, who was at the same conference, to say shortly later that he sees "no sharp distinction between oral and written materials, which exist as a continuum." My point is that in music there are no "written materials" whatsoever, but only heard sounds. The written materials of music—scores and transcriptions—are themselves a means of study; they are a posteriori musicological and mnemonic devices. The rational field of written music already includes all folk music that has been transcribed. In short, Seeger falls into the same confusion with the word "music" that he finds in the word "folklore," namely, a confusion of the study (which uses writing) with the materials studied (which are sounds). His new terminology—as the definitions of "hillbilly" and "citybilly" show—is an uneasy mixture of sociology and music with a basis in morality. But after this, I should say that his practical criticism of records emerges more clearly from his discussion than does his theory.

<sup>8</sup> New York, 1950, p. 605.

<sup>9</sup> Philadelphia, : 953.

## NOTES & QUERIES



REJOINDER TO RAGLAN AND BIDNEY:—After presenting my paper at the annual meetings of the American Folklore Society and the American Anthropological Association in Santa Monica (printed in *JAF*, LXX [1957], 103-114), I felt that I had not given Lord Raglan due credit for the service he has performed in challenging the historicity of verbal traditions. These are, as he says, too often accepted as "history" in lieu of written documents, or without even bothering to investigate the documents that are available. Myths which account for a people's origin by emergence from a hole in the ground may be discounted without hesitation, but other traditions temptingly invite unjustified historical interpretations, as Raglan has shown by comparing some of them with the documentary evidence. Since one objective of my article, which I may make explicit here, was to invite more comparisons of this kind, I wish to acknowledge his contribution in this regard.

Lord Raglan's reply (*JAF*, LXX [1957], 359), which gives me this opportunity, however, has not caused me to change my evaluation of the myth-ritual theory. Since he objects to "prove," let me use his own words and say that he has not "shown" that "the savage can have no history," that "the savage can take no interest in the past," or that "tradition never preserves historical facts." These statements can be disproved by the instance of Gamba, who ruled the Gwambe 400 years ago. The Gwambe have not been taught their own history by missionaries. Gamba is not the title of the Gwambe ruler, but a personal name which is mentioned in reciting the succession of Gwambe rulers, rather than in answer to leading questions. As the one who led them from Karanga territory to their present home, it would not be surprising if his name were mentioned in rituals, but what has this to do with his historicity?

This is admittedly but a single instance, but one instance is sufficient to disprove these propositions, so crucial to Raglan's argument. I do not doubt that other examples could be found, and hope that this exchange will stimulate interest in this problem. As I have indicated, however, it will not be easy to find others because Raglan stipulates that the documentary evidence must be more than 150 years old, and because we must be able to