

GEORGE MILBURN: OZARK FOLKLORE
IN OKLAHOMA FICTION

By

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PREFACE

Identifying George Milburn's use of folklore modifies the contention that Oklahoma Town is anti-rural literature, nothing more. My thesis helps explain an oral tradition which has been neglected, to my knowledge, by critics of Oklahoma Town.

I thank Mrs. Mary S. Milburn for her assistance. Special thanks to Dr. Peter Rollins for his patience, his confidence in me, and his bouncing footnotes. Thanks also to Dr. Clinton Keeler and Dr. Gordon Weaver. Finally, I thank my toughest critic, Paul Walters, Jr.

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GEORGE MILBURN: OZARK FOLKLORE
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George Milburn's first collection of short stories was Oklahoma Town, published in 1931. Critics of Oklahoma Town have generally focused their attention on the collection as anti-rural literature or as literature which recreates folklore. The first school of criticism looked to tales like "Nigger Doctor," in which the illiterate Apple Pie Smith prevents Doctor Johnson, a Negro, from voting, or to "The Holy Roller Elders," in which respectable Baptists set afire a Holy Roller Church. The New York Times Book Review, aware of anti-rural elements in Oklahoma Town, said Milburn's tales illustrated the prejudices of the Midwest and the South.¹ Harvey Ferguson, in the New York Herald Tribune Books, called Milburn's fictional small town a relic of "pioneer America with all of its brutality and bigotry."² And H.L. Mencken, who viewed the South as a "Sahara of the Bozart," thought the Oklahoma stories were "really something";³ he published nineteen of the thirty-six tales in the American Mercury.

But the stories of Oklahoma Town proved of interest to an entirely different school of criticism. This school, interested in the literary uses of folklore and composed of

collectors of oral lore, looked at tales like "Muncy Morgan," in which a would-be wrestler breaks his own leg, and at "Banker Brigham," in which the truculent banker is "injured" by a blast from a shotgun loaded with poke berries. Folklore collectors saw in these tales the reworking of two familiar motifs: a fool's deception which leads to self injury and a fool's inducement to believe he is dead. One Oklahoma folklore collector, Stanley Vestal, in Saturday Review of Literature, said of Milburn, "He is no Babbitt turned satirist like Sinclair Lewis. . . . George Milburn grew up in a small town, and he knows its folklore so well that the book [Oklahoma Town] itself is folklore."⁴ Vance Randolph, a collector of Ozark lore, recognized Milburn's reliance on folklore and praised the tales as "the finest short stories . . . that have ever been written about the Ozark region."⁵ An Oklahoma University professor and American folklore professor, Benjamin A. Botkin, published three of Milburn's stories in Folk-Say: A Regional Miscellany. Botkin was interested in them as "culture literature which brooding over folk materials and motifs, rehandles and recreates them."⁶

Although Milburn's use of folklore in fiction has received the passing attention of these collectors, no attempt has been made to study the folk elements in Oklahoma Town. Literary critics may have avoided such a study because "folklore" is a nebulous term. Folklore intrudes on cultural anthropology and literature. For example, the Standard Dictionary on Folklore, Mythology and Legend, edited

by Maria Leach, lists twenty-one definitions of folklore.⁷ Depending on professional bias, one authority limits folklore to verbal arts, and another stretches the term to include folk narratives, dramas, songs, costumes, medicine, beliefs, etc. Lacking an official definition of folklore, critics may hesitate to study its literary uses. However, Francis Lee Utley takes a practical, operational approach to definition. He suggests that students define folklore according to their own special problems. The literary student, if he chooses, can define folklore as "orally transmitted literature wherever found."⁸ This definition is appropriate for my purposes, but the implications of "orally transmitted" are important. If a narrative is "orally transmitted," the narrator and his audience are as important as the story itself. As David Ben-Amos has said, the telling is the tale.⁹ Literature which relies on oral tradition should reproduce the narrative and recreate the performance; only the literary artist who has directly encountered oral lore can recreate storytelling scenes.

In this paper, I propose to show George Milburn's reliance on Ozark lore in Oklahoma Town. If a reader examines Milburn's familiarity with folklore, his use of specific Ozark tales, and his recreation of storytelling scenes, that reader can better understand the apparent anti-rural elements in Oklahoma Town. In addition, such an examination points to the significance of literary uses of folklore.

The appearance of Ozark lore in Milburn's fiction is

natural because Milburn was an Ozarker, born in Coweta, Oklahoma, and immersed in oral lore. Coweta, which became the small unnamed Ozark community of Oklahoma Town, is located on the edge of the Ozarks in northeastern Oklahoma. In "Some Kind of Color: Notes on Being a Son," Milburn wrote about his childhood in Coweta. He recalled Sunday afternoons when "my father would take my brother and me for long walks into the country. . . . He would sing ballads, such as 'It's a Shame to Take the Money Said the Bird on Nellie's Hat' and he would tell us stories."¹⁰ The young Milburn's fascination with storytelling was mixed with an interest in the circus and in the railroad. At age fourteen, he rode the caboose of a cattle train to Kansas City. Cowpunchers on the train vowed to teach him the "facts of life" at a Kansas City bawdy house. Milburn eluded the lesson and returned to Coweta.

Milburn's first ride unnerved him, but his love for the railroad didn't die, and in 1927, at age twenty-one, Milburn "took to the road" as a railroad hobo. The product of his wanderings was Hobo's Hornbook, his first collection of folklore. That collection of hobo and tramp ballads was recorded, Milburn said, because hoboes are "anachronisms bound for extinction."¹¹ The Hornbook included a vocabulary of words from the hobo dialect. The interest in dialects, "linguistic lore" in a definition by the philologist and folklorist Louise Pound,¹² and Milburn's earlier interest in the circus led to "Circus Words," an article published in the American

Mercury. Milburn also published "Convict's Jargon" in American Speech and "Taxi Talk" in Folk-Say; information for the former was garnered from Daniel Conway, an inmate at Auburn Prison in New York State; information for the latter was gathered in Chicago's Huron Street taxicab garage.¹³ In Chicago, New York, and Coweta, Milburn directly encountered oral lore. He is not the "bookish writer," described by the folklorist Richard Dorson,¹⁴ who is dependent upon "folksy" and quaint details gleaned from printed sources.

In 1929, after Milburn's return to Oklahoma, he contributed to Folk-Say, an Oklahoma University publication initiated by Ben Botkin, Milburn's "dear and loyal friend."¹⁵ He also began writing the Oklahoma Town tales. Appearing in part in Folk-Say, Vanity Fair, and the American Mercury, these tales have close parallels in collected texts of Ozark folktales. For example, Milburn's "A Young Man's Chance" is the story of Julian Reynolds, who is invited to a possum hunt at Old Man Barker's.¹⁶ That night, after the hunt, Barker, Julian, and Barker's granddaughter sleep together in the cabin's one bed. During the night, while the moon is shining, coyotes attack Barker's chicken coop. Barker runs out to the coop. In his absence, Julian does not seduce the granddaughter, but rather, he jumps up to eat the beans left over from dinner. Julian is one of many folk characters who find strange bedfellows, but yet remain chaste.

The Ozarks contributed many tales about a couple's chaste sleeping together. "A Young Man's Chance" is a close

copy of this folk hillbilly anecdote recorded by Vance Randolph in Funny Stories from Arkansas.¹⁷

A traveller spent the night in a backwoods cabin. They had green beans for supper, but the stranger did not get as many as he wanted. He watched regretfully as the half-emptied platter was put back in the cupboard. There was only one bed, so the visitor slept with his host and hostess, the host occupying the middle of the bed. Late in the night, all three were awakened by a commotion among the poultry. The hillman sprang out of bed, snatched his shotgun, and rushed out, shouting something about chicken thieves. The wife whispered, "Stranger, now's your chance!" So the traveller got up, went out into the kitchen, and ate the rest of the beans!

Milburn's familiarity with Ozark lore is obvious in two other tales from Oklahoma Town. In "Imogene Caraway," a revivalist preacher warns his flock about the evils of pretending to be the Lord's sheep when they actually behave more like the Lord's goats. In response to his words, Mrs. Sweasey, the Baptist preacher's wife, points to Imogene Caraway's Bar-None brand flour sack skirt and says, "O, Lord God my witness, looky there! . . . It's the mark of the goat!" (p. 26). In an Ozark tale recorded by James Masterson, another preacher faces a literal interpretation of his words. Masterson's preacher says to an Ozark family: "I'm looking for the lost sheep of Israel." To that, one of the daughters replies: "I'll bet that is that old ram that was here yesterday."¹⁸ Stories and jokes about preachers are common in folklore; Americans, in particular, like to laugh about misunderstandings between illiterates and preachers, deaf persons and preachers, sinners and preachers.

The difficulties of parsons become the subject of humor-

ous tales, but if this seems blasphemous, it is no more sacrilegious than the black humor of stories about strange and inexplicable deaths. "Banker Brigham," an Oklahoma Town tale, concerns the strange death of a truculent banker injured by a blast from a shotgun loaded with poke berries. Brigham dies from a cerebral hemorrhage brought about by his refusal to admit any injury. In The Talking Turtle, Vance Randolph recorded "The Silent Rifle," an Ozark folktale about another inexplicable death attributed to a mysterious gunshot.¹⁹ The Ozark town in Randolph's tale has been frightened by sniper fire from a silent Yankee rifle, which is actually a slingshot loaded with Yankee bullets. When Tom Hopper, suffering from real wounds received during the Civil War, dies in the street, the citizens assume he was shot by the silent rifle.

These tales, "A Young Man's Chance," "Imogene Caraway," and "Banker Brigham," indicate that Milburn manipulates specific tales from Ozark lore. He reinforces the impression of an oral tradition by using natural, traditional storytelling scenes. In the Ozarks, raconteurs and gossipmongers congregate around the barrel of free crackers in the country store or around stoves and porches of other local establishments. Milburn consistently uses a first person narrator who tells the story as he observed it being told at such gatherings of storytellers or as he observed the actual events, events which most often are set at the local store or barber shop. This narrator is a member of "our town" (p.3)

but he does not appear in the story itself.

"A Young Man's Chance" is told by Abe Herzog in his store, Herzog's Bargain Depot. The story begins with this explanation from the narrator: "Abe Herzog used to tell this story on Julian Reynolds, one of his grocery clerks. It may not be true, but Abe told it on him for a long time" (p. 158). Included in the narrator's retelling of Abe's story are Abe's gestures; for example, the narrator reports, parenthetically, that Barker's granddaughter is a pretty girl, whose beauty is pictured by Abe's "slicing a buxom female form out of the air with his hands" (p. 160). In oral tradition, the performance of a tale is as important as the tale itself. Dorson has pointed out that the "narrator employs voice and body as well as words to dramatize his texts."²⁰ In "A Young Man's Chance," Milburn carefully preserves the original storytelling scene by including details about the delivery of a tale. He creates a vivid picture of a group of hillmen listening to Herzog tell the story about Julian's big chance.

The dominant scene of "Captain Choate" is the Deluxe Barber Shop, although Captain Choate also visits Abe Herzog at the Bargain Depot. The narrator begins by saying: "It didn't take much to get Captain A.J. Choate started. . . . For a long time he hadn't done anything except sit around the DeLuxe Barber Shop and wheeze and tell tall tales" (p. 124). Choate, an incorrigible liar, is deceived into saying that he knew Leon Trotsky. After Choate remembers many intimate details about Trotsky, he discovers that Trot-

ski never lived in Oklahoma. But the Captain does not reform. True to the folk emphasis on "saving face," Choate "went around telling every one, 'Well, it might not of been the same Trozitski, but I knowed a Trozitski here all right!'" (p. 130).

Throughout Oklahoma Town, men can be seen gathered together, gossiping and telling tales. August Kunkel's Wear-U-Well shoe repair shop is the scene of pleasant chats and vociferous arguments about religion. In "Soda Water Green," Green is sitting in the lobby of the Kentucky Colonel Hotel, talking to Old Man Cobb, when Bud Merrick rushes in to tell him that the pop factory is on fire. Floyd Evans, in "The Nude Waitress," sees his wife's nude photo being handed around by the patrons of the DeLuxe Barber Shop. David, the aspiring journalist, watches the sky in "Hail and Farewell," instead of listening to the dirty story being told in Fraunhoffer's Purity Bakery. The effect of Milburn's detailing of storytelling scenes is, for the reader, a perception of place and time, when men gathered to tell old stories and new, which were often combined and embellished for more interest. Milburn, like the Ozark raconteurs, also weaves old stories with new events, refining and embellishing folklore and fact, in order to create fiction.

The delivery of a tale is part of the cultural context of folklore. William Bascom, in his article "Four Functions of Folklore," emphasizes the need for a "general awareness of the importance of folklore as a part of culture."²¹ Mil-

burn's use of folktales disguised as regional fiction has been overlooked by most critics, and in that overlooking, critics have missed the richness of the tales, just as a reader unaware of Jewish traditions and customs would miss the significance of Bernard Malamud's stories, such as "The Magic Barrel." By themselves, without a reader's knowledge of cultural context, "A Young Man's Chance" and "The Magic Barrel" are interesting and enjoyable reading. But with the added perception gained by a knowledge of folklore, readers can better understand Milburn's stories. They can better understand the characterization, structure, and purpose of Oklahoma Town.

Initially a reader would expect from Oklahoma Town what he finds in Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio.²² Winesburg and Oklahoma Town, though Milburn's town remains unnamed, include stories about the people and events of a single small community. In both collections, the same characters walk in and out of stories, although individual stories focus on specific characters. The hotel in Winesburg is the New Willard House; in Oklahoma Town, it is the Kentucky Colonel Hotel. Hearn's Grocery and Cowley and Sons in Winesburg are equivalent to Herzog's Bargain Depot and Farnum's Old Iron-clad merchandise store in Oklahoma Town. George Willard, in Winesburg, wants to be a journalist and gets a job on a big city newspaper. Oklahoma Town's David wants to be a journalist and gets a job on the Tulsa Globe Telegram. However, a reader of Winesburg is prepared for George's emigration

because the reader has watched George come of age in his interactions with other characters. The reader of Oklahoma Town has not been introduced to David in previous stories; he has not watched David outgrow the small town. What lends continuity to Winesburg, Ohio is George Willard's maturation and the author's initial theme of the grotesque. Milburn offers no study of David's character; all characters walk on and off stage at the author's convenience and remain static, undeveloped types. The Oklahoma Town tales could be rearranged; their order of presentation could be altered without damage to the collection. The lack of character development and continuity in Oklahoma Town could be the result of a lack of sophistication and control in Milburn, a sophistication and control possessed by Anderson. However, these "defects" may more logically be inherent in the storytelling tradition which Milburn imitates.

Folktales are bound to cultural situations and established formulae. They rely on deliberate stereotypes, clear distinctions between good and evil. The oral tales are simply told, without subplots and subordinate themes. In addition, the storytellers who gather in the local store often engage in storytelling contests. Their stories are not necessarily related to one another, as Charles Morrow Wilson noted in The Bodacious Ozarks. After spending an afternoon with hillbilly raconteurs at Kennicott's Arkansas Store in northwestern Arkansas, Wilson said the hillbilly stories were marked by an "intriguing absence of continuity of discussion or

correlation of episodes."²³ Working within a group's tradition, Milburn imitates the simple characterization, single story line, and lack of continuity. Just as mechanical devices of folktales are related to culture, the functions of folktales are culture bound. One of these functions, according to Bascom, is that of "maintaining conformity to accepted patterns of behavior."²⁴ Moral purpose is important to oral tradition; entertainment is often secondary.

Milburn's tales are part of a moralistic "schwank" tradition, with its jokes and anecdotes about numskulls, about the trials and tribulations of married life, and about liars. Schwank, according to the Hungarian-American folklorist Linda Degh, are short and simple folktales which aim to provoke laughter and, more importantly, to satirize human frailty. As Degh said, they "try to reform people of bad habits by magnifying those habits or to express disapproval by scoffing at persons of bad conduct."²⁵ Milburn magnifies the habit of lying in "Captain Choate" and provokes laughter in doing so, but he also points to the tendency for lies to become unmanageable. Captain Choate's lies reach the Tulsa Globe Telegram, which glorifies but does not research Choate's claims, and the lies become the substance of a full-page article in the newspaper's magazine section. The Globe's lazy, careless journalists eventually are forced to print a retraction. In "Choate," Milburn comments on the implications of lying and on unprofessional journalism. Mrs. Sweasey, in "Imogene Caraway," is a funny character, but the

story expresses disapproval of Mrs. Sweasey's action. The narrator implies that Mrs. Sweasey attends the revival only to hear Imogene's public confession of sins.

Degh defined the humorous and didactic intent of schwank; the types and narrative motifs of schwank have been categorized by Antti Aarne in Types of the Folktale and by Stith Thompson in the Motif-Index of Folk Literature.²⁶ Ernest Baughman revised both volumes in the Type and Motif Index of the Folktales of England and North America.²⁷ A folktale type is a complete, independent tale, which may have one or more motifs. A motif is a single, narrative element so unusual and striking that it has the power to persist in oral tradition. Schwank, by definition not complex, have a single motif. The types and motifs of many Oklahoma Town tales follow those of traditional schwank. For example, one popular type of anecdote is the tale of a numskull like Muncy Morgan,²⁸ in the story "Muncy Morgan," who is a would-be wrestler. Muncy receives mail-order lessons in wrestling. Accustomed to practicing wrestling holds on himself, Muncy breaks his own leg in a match. The basis of this tale is Motif K1000, deception which leads to self injury.²⁹ Another type of tale is the tale of a liar, like Captain Choate.³⁰ "Choate" handles Motif X909.1, the incorrigible liar.³¹ "Myrtle Birchett," the story of a "loose woman" who is teased by Speedy Scoggins and answers him with a suggestion that his wife is also "loose," and "The Nude Waitress" are types of schwank about married couples.³²

"Myrtle" uses Motif H582, the enigmatic statement or riddle which betrays adultery,³³ and "Waitress" uses Motif K1550, the husband outwits the adultress and her paramour.³⁴

Milburn's use of schwank is interesting to American folklorists because it supports the theory that Americans, and other English speaking people, prefer short, simple tales.³⁵ His use of schwank also modifies the critics' identification of Milburn's stories as anti-rural literature. Oklahoma Town has been labelled as "an echo of the noise of the fight against the small town."³⁶ One reason for Milburn's association with that fight is the popularity of anti-rural literature in the twenties and early thirties. The leading figure in that attack upon American small towns was H.L. Mencken, who published so many of the Oklahoma Town tales in the American Mercury. Perhaps if the tales had been published in another magazine at another time, the tales would not have been so readily construed as anti-rural literature. In addition, Milburn has manipulated folktale anecdotes or schwank which, by definition, attack human frailty and intend to characterize persons and places through representative episodes. For readers unfamiliar with the schwank tradition, stories about small town ignorance and hypocrisy appear to be merely satirical sketches of small town life, nothing more. Anti-rural elements are, of course, present in Oklahoma Town, but importantly folk elements are visible also, elements which I have attempted to explain.

A reader wonders, certainly, if Milburn consciously used

schwank to criticize Coweta. George Milburn died in 1966, and his intentions will remain unknown. But his combination of fiction and schwank may indicate his ambiguous feelings toward Oklahoma, which he chose to leave permanently in 1932. Glenway Wescott said of his hero in The Grandmothers: "He did not like their [pioneers'] sufferings, their illiterate mysticism, their air of failure; but he understood them, or fancied that he did. It did not matter whether he liked them or not--he was their son."³⁷ Wescott was one of the many writers, described by Frederick Hoffman in The Twenties, who moved to other places but whose imaginations remained in the Midwest, "their being no other place in their experiences or their minds."³⁸

Sherwood Anderson was another displaced Midwesterner. In an introduction to Return to Winesburg, a collection of Anderson's writings for a country newspaper, Ray Lewis White wrote that "the pattern of Sherwood Anderson's own life demonstrates his recognition of both the agony and the beauty of small town life."³⁹ Some of that agony concerned the change from a rural to a partly urbanized way of life. The beauty lay in the hope of recapturing the small town of his boyhood. Anderson made periodic returns to small town life, in 1925 to the village of Troutdale in southeastern Virginia. Later, he bought a farm near Troutdale and then bought two small newspapers in Marion, Virginia. Milburn also tried to return to the small town. He did not move back to Coweta, but in 1935 he bought a farm near Pineville, Missouri,

another Ozark community.

Milburn wrote a story about his stay in Pineville. That short story, entitled "The Road to Calamity,"⁴⁰ published in 1936, concerns Ernest Forepaugh, a writer who has begun to drink more as he sells fewer and fewer stories. As Vance Randolph, who also lived in Pineville, said, ". . . this is the tale of Milburn's life near Pineville, Missouri. It is authentic stuff, and I recognize nearly all of the characters. In this story, Milburn sets forth his real opinion of Pineville and the Ozark region."⁴¹ The story begins as Mr. and Mrs. Forepaugh travel through Missouri to visit a friend in the fictionalized Pineville. While driving through the Ozarks, Forepaugh says, "Gold in them hills, podner, pyore gold" (p. 64), and he sarcastically comments on "That book of the Month Club selection while back, all in Ozark dialect" (p. 64). The Forepaughs eat breakfast at a local hotel and find that though "the eggs were too fresh to taste right, they both ate with more relish than they ever had for their wonted roll and coffee" (p. 64). Mr. and Mrs. Forepaugh wait until they leave the hotel to snicker about the lady choristers in "cheesecloth robes" and the men in "gilt-braided lodge uniforms" (p. 66). Ernest Forepaugh, George Milburn himself, considers hill folks ignorant; but he objects to literature, written by uninformed outsiders, which capitalizes on a trend for scorning those folks and imitating their speech. In addition, Forepaugh cannot reconcile his feeling of superiority toward the Ozark country people with his know-

ledge that, in a sense, those people are more honest than he. Although the Forepaughs decide to settle in the Ozark town, their attempt is disastrous. Once they were New Yorkers; they cannot now be hillfolks.

If in "The Road to Calamity," Milburn reveals "his real opinion about Pineville and the Ozark region," it is decidedly ambiguous. That story and Milburn's use of folklore in anti-rural fiction mark him as a son of the Ozarks, a place both loved and hated. However, if Milburn were only the Glenway Wescott of Oklahoma, Oklahoma Town would not be particularly significant. Oklahoma Town does point out the significance of literary uses of folklore. The folk motifs in Oklahoma Town give to the tales a sense of place and of people living in time. Much twentieth century fiction seems rootless; characters spring from authors' minds like Minerva from the head of Jupiter. As Guy Owen, Tar-Heel author of The Ballad of the Flim Flam Man, said, "People who have accumulated a body of folksayings, superstitions, songs, and the like have lived in time."⁴² Flannery O'Connor, William Carlos Williams, and the critic Frederick Hoffman have all emphasized that writers must have a sense of place.⁴³ O'Connor, for instance, was "startled" after reading stories submitted to the Southern Writer's Conference, because the stories contained "no distinctive sense of Southern life."⁴⁴ For O'Connor, a writer's aim is communication, and "communication suggests talking inside a community. . . . The best American fiction has always been regional."⁴⁵ Milburn's

use of folklore, specifically Ozark folklore, and the accompanying use of dialect,⁴⁶ give his tales a sense of place and at least fulfill one of O'Connor's requirements that fiction deal with the manners of a people.

If Milburn's use of folklore lends verisimilitude to regional fiction, that use also records oral tradition. The Hobo's Hornbook, said Milburn, was published because hoboes were "anachronisms bound for extinction"; therefore, Milburn may have recorded Ozark lore because he thought that it, too, was bound for extinction. Owen, who said he used Tar-Heel lore unconsciously in fiction, claimed that folklore was part of his childhood and youth. He said he was like Moliere's bourgeois gentleman who spoke prose without knowing it, but Owen added that his blending of folklore and fiction did preserve a pre-industrial world. Like Sherwood Anderson, Owen was aware of "the change."⁴⁷ The world of his childhood began to disappear when the automobiles and tractors arrived, when the rural post office was closed in the thirties. The Ozarks were undergoing the same changes in the twenties and thirties, as Wilson noted in his recollections of the Ozarks.⁴⁸ Milburn may have, consciously or unconsciously, recorded an oral tradition that he felt would disappear along with mules and wagons.

Because Milburn incorporates folklore in fiction and recreates storytelling scenes, should he be called a folklorist? He is different from literary artists who merely decorate regional fiction with folk superstitions and back-

woods dialect. But Milburn is not a scholarly folklorist, theorizing about the origins, survival, and diffusion of folklore. In Hobo's Hornbook, he is a folklore collector, one who popularizes folklore as did Ben Botkin. In Oklahoma Town, Milburn is the fiction writer described by Daniel Hoffman and Joseph Raben.⁴⁹ Milburn uses materials he collects as elements in his own fiction. In doing so, he records oral tradition, but such literary documents cannot substitute for the work of folklorists.

In "The Saga of George Milburn," Botkin wrote that he feared in Milburn's "cutting himself off from Oklahoma he [Milburn] might cut himself off from his sources."⁵⁰ Milburn's later regional fiction, written away from Oklahoma, does not rely on folklore to the extent of Oklahoma Town, and that fiction never had the limited success of Oklahoma Town. Botkin's observation may have been accurate; it may explain why George Milburn never became a great talent. Botkin also said that "Milburn's use of folk and popular materials constitutes his real importance as a short story writer."⁵¹ George Milburn's use of folklore constitutes not only his importance, though; it also contributes to the sheer pleasure found in reading Oklahoma Town.

NOTES

¹ "'Oklahoma Town' and Other Recent Works of Fiction," New York Times Book Review, 9 Feb. 1931, p. 9.

² "Small Town Sketches," New York Herald Tribune Books, 1 March 1931, p. 6.

³ Charles Angoff, H.L. Mencken: A Portrait from Memory (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1956), pp. 10-11.

⁴ "Life in a Small Town," Saturday Review of Literature, 7 March 1931, p. 643.

⁵ Ozark Folklore: A Bibliography, Indiana Univ. Publications, Folklore Institute Monograph Series, Vol. 24 (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Research Center for the Language Sciences, 1972), pp. 83-84.

⁶ "The Folk in Literature: An Introduction to New Regionalism," Folk-Say I: A Regional Miscellany, ed. Benjamin A. Botkin (Norman, Okla.: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1929), p. 10.

⁷ "Folklore," Funk and Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend, ed. Maria Leach, I, 398-403.

⁸ "Folk Literature: An Operational Definition," Journal of American Folklore, 74 (1961), 197.

⁹ "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context," Toward New Perspectives in Folklore, ed. Americo Paredes and Richard Bauman (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1972), p. 10.

¹⁰ Folk-Say IV: The Land is Ours, ed. Benjamin A. Botkin (Norman, Okla.: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1932), p. 32.

¹¹ The Hobo's Hornbook: A Repertory for a Gutter Jongleur (New York: Ives Washburn, 1930), p. xviii.

¹² "Folklore and Dialect," Selected Writings of Louise Pound (Lincoln, Neb.: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1949), p. 206.

¹³ "Circus Words," American Mercury, Nov. 1931, pp. 351-54; "Convict's Jargon," American Speech, Aug. 1931, pp. 436-42; "Taxi Talk," Folk-Say I, pp. 108-12.

- 14 "The Identification of Folklore in American Literature," Journal of American Folklore, 70 (1957), 5.
- 15 Letter received from Mrs. Mary S. Milburn, 21 February 1976.
- 16 Quotations from Milburn's stories are taken from Oklahoma Town (1931; rpt. Freeport, N.J.: Books for Libraries Press, 1959). Page numbers are cited parenthetically in the text.
- 17 (Girard, Kan.: E. Haldeman-Julius, 1943), pp. 23-24.
- 18 Tall Tales of Arkansas (Boston: Chapman and Grimes, 1942), p. 337. This book is a fully documented study of Arkansas humor.
- 19 (New York: Columbia Press, 1957), pp. 52-55.
- 20 Folklore: Selected Essays (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 1972), p. 102.
- 21 The Study of Folklore, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 285.
- 22 (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1919).
- 23 (New York: Hastings House, 1959), p. 38.
- 24 The Study of Folklore, p. 294.
- 25 "Folk Narrative," Folklore and Folklife, ed. Richard Dorson (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 70.
- 26 Antti Aarne, The Types of the Folktale, a Classification and Bibliography, tr. and enl. Stith Thompson (1928); Stith Thompson, Motif-Index of Folk Literature, 6 vols. (1934).
- 27 Ernest Baughman, Type and Motif Index of the Folktales of England and North America (1966).
- 28 Baughman, p. 28.
- 29 Thompson, IV, 375.
- 30 Baughman, p. 51.
- 31 Baughman, p. 408.
- 32 Baughman, p. 33.
- 33 Thompson, III, 330.

- 34 Thompson, IV, 421.
- 35 Baughman, p. xvi.
- 36 Ima Homaker Herron, The Small Town in American Literature (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1939), p. 427.
- 37 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1927), p. 18.
- 38 The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade (New York: Viking, 1949), p. 30.
- 39 Return to Winesburg: Selections from Four Years of Writing for a Country Newspaper, ed. Ray Lewis White (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1967), p. 4.
- 40 Quotations from Milburn's "The Road to Calamity" are taken from Southern Review, 2 (1936), 63-84. Page numbers are cited parenthetically in the text.
- 41 Randolph, Ozark Folklore, p. 385.
- 42 "Using Folklore in Fiction," Folklore Studies in Honor of Arthur Palmer Hudson, ed. Daniel W. Patterson (Chapel Hill, N.C.: North Carolina Folklore Society, 1965), p. 154.
- 43 See Flannery O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1962); William Carlos Williams, In the American Grain (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925); Hoffman, The Twenties, pp. 120-62.
- 44 "Writing Short Stories," Mystery and Manners, p. 103.
- 45 "The Regional Writer," Mystery and Manners, pp. 53, 58.
- 46 For a lexicon of the Ozark dialect in Oklahoma Town, see Julia Rackleff, "Folk Speech in the Short Stories and Novels of George Milburn," Thesis Tulsa Univ. 1949.
- 47 "Using Folklore in Fiction," p. 148.
- 48 The Bodacious Ozarks, p. 166.
- 49 "Folklore in Literature: Notes Toward a Theory of Interpretation," Journal of American Folklore, 70 (1957), 16.
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