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# Traditional Elements in the Selected Columns of Allan M. Trout

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Webb,

J. Vaughan

1977



TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS IN THE SELECTED COLUMNS  
OF ALLAN M. TROUT

A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
the Department of Intercultural and Folk Studies  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
J. Vaughan Webb  
June 1977

TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS IN THE SELECTED COLUMNS  
OF ALLAN M. TROUT

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TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS IN THE SELECTED COLUMNS OF ALLAN M. TROUT

J. Vaughan Webb

June 1977

89 pages

Directed by: Dr. Burt Feintuch, Dr. Lynwood Montell, and Dr. Jim Miller

Department of Intercultural and Folk Studies

Western Kentucky University

The first and last three months of Allan M. Trout's newspaper column "Greetings" were analyzed to show Trout's use of traditional material in that feature. An overview of previous scholarship concerning folklore in literature revealed a lack of study of the modern newspaper as a transmitter of folk items. The type of feature which Trout wrote was shown to have developed from pre-Civil War journalism. Trout's conception of folklore as a rural, kinetic process was presented through quotations from his books and columns, and "Greetings" was defined as a part of that process rather than as a static literary work. The traditional material in the selected columns was identified and classified under the genres of folk speech, belief and custom, legends and anecdotes, author-title jokes, riddles, song lyrics and poetry, and games. The shortcomings of "Greetings" as a folklore collection were identified. Allan Trout was defined as a nonacademic, passive collector of traditional items who worked through a popular medium. Speculation was made as to Trout's roles as a transmitter and a popularizer of folklore. The value of the bound "Greetings" volumes was shown to be hindered by the lack of an index for the column.

## INTRODUCTION

The study of a writer like Allan Trout presents an interesting situation for the folklorist. His fame rests upon the term "folklore," and at least one reader of his "Greetings" column regarded Trout "as America's foremost authority on our folklore."<sup>1</sup> But he was not a folklorist in the professional sense. His product is in many facets a folkloric one, but few would consider Trout to be a folk artist or craftsman.

A well-educated, highly literate man, Allan Trout worked within a popular medium, the modern American newspaper. Through this medium passed a steady stream of traditional, oral material which Trout recognized as folklore. He encouraged the flow and added to it. He did not use folklore to enhance fiction, but rather used folklore to comment on modern reality. The result was the longest running newspaper column in the United States. This study seeks to reveal the traditional nature of "Greetings," both in content and process.

Certain problems arise during research of such a phenomenon as "Greetings." The study of folklore in print pays little attention

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<sup>1</sup>Allan M. Trout, "Greetings," Louisville Courier-Journal 23 October 1967. Due to the nature of the "Greetings" column, the names of all contributors whose statements are quoted in this study will not be included. They will simply be referred to as "reader" or "contributor." The columns themselves were bound by Trout into yearly scrapbooks now housed in the Kentucky Library of Western Kentucky University. These volumes lack pagination, therefore no pagination will be given in footnotes for the newspaper versions of the columns. Dates for items not dated in the text will be given in footnote form unless otherwise noted.

to the modern newspaper. Old newspapers of the nineteenth century seem to be sacred and are valued in the eyes of the literary folklorist, and much work is done with other genres of literature such as the regional novel. Yet even though most theory and methodology is directed toward other literary forms by name, they prove to be adaptable to Trout's column. Included in this study is an overview of previous scholarship relevant to the purposes of this project.

An interesting case can be made for placing the same value on "Greetings" as on the nineteenth century newspapers. Indeed, Trout's column is somewhat an anachronism. Though not presently found in many newspapers, this type of column is part of a rich heritage with its roots in the 1830s. In order that the reader may fully understand the nature of Trout's work, a history of this literary form in America has also been included here.

#### A Foundation of Scholarship

The problems of dealing with folkloric items in written literature have long plagued the folklorist in his attempt to establish an academic identity. In dealing with such material, the folklore scholar is by necessity a literary scholar. Yet he complains upon finding himself teaching out of an English department for he is analyzing literature from a different perspective than that of the English professor. Additionally, he can argue that the printed word, sacred in the realm of academia, is actually detrimental to various forms of folklore and corrupting to oral literature. He can choose to restrict his study to the "purer" forms of folklore, but to do so is to ignore the expansion of literacy and the power of print. The modern folklorist is aware that traditional materials abound on all levels of print from comic books



to the classics and that items are transmitted not only from oral currency to print but also from print back into oral currency.

Another problem encountered in a study of written expression, one which will not be dealt with at length in this study, is the naming of a piece of written material as literature. The bulk of modern scholarship on folklore in literature has been concerned with the novel, the regional novel in particular. MacEdward Leach goes so far as to describe regional folklore collections as regional literature.<sup>2</sup> Other scholars have come to use the term "sub-literature" in referring to more popular forms of the printed word such as newspapers and almanacs.<sup>3</sup> Most of the articles on methodology for studying folklore in print are directed toward the "higher" forms of literature. Since many of these concepts can easily be applied to traditional materials found on sub-literary levels, for the purposes of this study, the term "literature" will be used to describe all printed sources regardless of their supposed artistic merit.

Folklore in literature has been a subject of interest for at least a century. William John Thoms and George Laurence Gomme both dealt with literary sources in England in the late nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> The most prolific literary-folklore scholar in this country has been Richard M. Dorson, who has written articles on the subject for thirty years. In 1945 he published an article in which he suggested that

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<sup>2</sup>MacEdward Leach, "Folklore in American Regional Literature," Journal of the Folklore Institute 3 (December 1966):383.

<sup>3</sup>Richard M. Dorson, American Folklore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 49-63.

<sup>4</sup>Richard M. Dorson, "The Use of Printed Sources," in Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 468.

folklorists "acknowledge the function of print in spreading, perpetuating, and preserving American popular tales, and the value of printed sources as repositories of folk tales." He went on to point out that print may increase the distance over which a tale is transmitted or may lengthen the lifespan of a tale in a particular region. Literature commonly read by a group acts as a cohesive force within that group. The study of that literature can indicate both tale traditions that have died out and the popularity such tales enjoyed.<sup>5</sup>

In 1946 Dorson published a book of New England tales gleaned from printed sources. Concerning the relationship of written and oral transmission, Dorson wrote, "Probably no really popular American tale has escaped the influence of both methods of storytelling." Here he continued to emphasize the importance of literary tales and sources, particularly the pre-Civil War newspaper. He noted that following the Civil War individual creativity and urban humor replaced communal, backwoods humor, but the local legend grew in popularity as community attachments strengthened.<sup>6</sup>

In 1959 Dorson spoke further about the value of early literary channels of folklore. Referring to the antebellum period of American history, Dorson stated, "At no other period in American history did a flourishing oral humor enjoy such intimate and fruitful connections with the popular culture of journalism, literature, and the stage." Old newspapers contain the only records of some tale cycles since collecting folklore for the sake of academic study had not yet begun on a wide

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<sup>5</sup>Richard M. Dorson, "Print and American Folk Tales," California Folklore Quarterly 4 (July 1945):207-09.

<sup>6</sup>Richard M. Dorson, Jonathan Draws the Long Bow (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), pp. 13-21.

scale in this country. Dorson noted that at the time of publication of American Folklore few of the antebellum newspapers had been researched for the mass of humorous anecdotes they contain.<sup>7</sup>

The folklorist must, however, exercise caution in handling traditional items from a literary source. Francis Lee Utley in a 1961 article saw the printed word as a contaminator, though not a destroyer, of the oral process. Literary versions are useful in placing a date on a particular item, but "when the folklorist uses literary versions, as he must, he should realize that he is not now studying folklore, but the relationship of oral and written literature." To Utley the best critic of literature which has evolved from oral sources is the folklorist because he is aware of what folklore is.<sup>8</sup> Dorson too shared this idea, noting that many literary scholars are quick to call an item folklore without proper documentation to prove their claim.<sup>9</sup>

Just as there are varied approaches to studying folklore in oral context, so too are there different ideas on how folklore in literature should be handled. In a 1957 symposium on folklore in literature, Dorson warned that much of what is considered folklore and is then found in literature actually originates in popular literature. Again, such errors can be avoided through proper documentation. He gave three methods for showing that a given piece of literature is related to the folk tradition. The first of these is biographical research on the author to show direct contact between the author and oral lore. The

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<sup>7</sup>Dorson, American Folklore, pp. 49-53.

<sup>8</sup>Francis Lee Utley, "Folk Literature: An Operational Definition," Journal of American Folklore 74 (September 1961):198-203.

<sup>9</sup>Richard M. Dorson, "Folklore in American Literature: A Postscript," Journal of American Folklore 71 (June 1958):157-59.



second method involves a study of the literature itself. Internal evidence will reveal that the author is familiar with the folkloric process; a writer cannot very well describe a tale-swapping session without having witnessed one. The third method is to research the items which appear to be folkloric for an independent existence.<sup>10</sup> In that same symposium Daniel Hoffman commented that a strict adherence to Dorson's methodology will limit the search for folklore in literature to the works of regional writers.<sup>11</sup>

The more recent emphasis on context in the study of oral traditions has also been applied to the research of folklore in literature. A 1965 article by Alan Dundes put forth the idea that a complete analysis of traditional material in print must include not only the identification of the item as folklore but also an interpretation of the item as it appears in its literary context.<sup>12</sup> Adding to this concept, Rosan Jordan DeCaro noted the importance of studying how a piece of folklore functions in its oral context as well as in the printed context.<sup>13</sup> Obviously the trained folklorist is better equipped to handle such research than the literary scholar.

The concepts of performance used in modern folklore research have also been carried into the study of folklore in literature. In a

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<sup>10</sup>Richard M. Dorson, "The Identification of Folklore in American Literature," Journal of American Folklore 70 (March 1957):3-7.

<sup>11</sup>Daniel G. Hoffman, "Folklore in Literature: Notes Toward a Theory of Interpretation," Journal of American Folklore 70 (March 1957):15.

<sup>12</sup>Alan Dundes, "The Study of Folklore in Literature and Culture: Identification and Interpretation," Journal of American Folklore 78 (June 1965):136.

<sup>13</sup>Rosan Jordan DeCaro, "A Note About Folklore and Literature," Journal of American Folklore 86 (March 1973):62-65.

1972 article Roger Abrahams defined performance as "a demonstration of culture" and a "working out expressive means of operating together." Art is that performance which draws continuities between the performer and the audience, the author and his readers. Serving as a shaping force in the creation of literature, the audience now plays an important role in the study of literary folklore. Abrahams noted that the enthusiasm with which literary folklorists study regional literature is in part due to the easily detected continuities existing between the regional author and his readers. They share a common culture pool.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, the argument was put forth in 1975 by a non-folklorist that the folklore scholar and the literary scholar both do an incomplete job in the study of the more popular forms of literature. Joseph J. Arpad contended that the folklorist dealing with a newspaper anecdote focuses only on its performance, transmission, and oral nature. The literary scholar sees only the written nature of the item. Yet the piece can be both oral and written, a communal creation and an individual creation. According to Arpad, neither the folklorist nor the literary scholar is equipped to handle this paradox, and the proper place for the study of such items is in the field of popular culture. Folkloric terms such as "fakelore" and literary terms such as "sub-literature" are indications that the two fields are attempting to deal with items which do not quite fit the folkloric or literary molds.<sup>15</sup>

Resting on this foundation of scholarship, the study of folklore in literature has been carried on with varying approaches to different

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<sup>14</sup>Roger D. Abrahams, "Folklore and Literature as Performance," Journal of the Folklore Institute 9 (December 1972):75-81.

<sup>15</sup>Joseph J. Arpad, "Between Folklore and Literature: Popular Culture as Anomaly," Journal of Popular Culture 9 (Fall 1975):403-405.

literary forms. The results have been numerous and diverse. The most simple and most common of these is the listing of traditional items in one or more works of an author. Naturally, some authors lend themselves more easily to such analysis than others, regional writers especially. Studies abound in which the researcher mentions a title and the type of folklore contained in that work.<sup>16</sup> A deeper and perhaps more useful method of listing is to index the folkloric items in the literature of a particular author. Such a work is David W. Higgs' recent "Index to Elmer Hinton's 'Down to Earth' Columns Appearing in the Nashville Tennessean, January, 1969--December, 1974." Higgs includes anything from a six year period of that column that involves folklore, including family names, place names, and material culture.<sup>17</sup> Similar approaches might prove more helpful to the folklorist working outside the realm of literature.

Few studies of folklore in literature have gone beyond item documentation. Donald M. Winkelman takes a somewhat Dorsonian approach in attempting to link the writer with a folk background. Should the author draw material "from a fund of knowledge integrated with his community life" then he is in some respects a folk artist.<sup>18</sup> Dianna Zacharias analyzes a rural Kentucky Newspaper to determine the world view of the people who write it and read it. She sees the Mountain

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<sup>16</sup>Lawrence S. Thompson, "Folklore in the Kentucky Novel," Midwest Folklore 3 (Fall 1953):137-145.

<sup>17</sup>David W. Higgs, "Index to Elmer Hinton's 'Down to Earth' Columns Appearing in the Nashville Tennessean, January, 1969--December, 1974," Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin 42 (September 1976): 129-36.

<sup>18</sup>Donald M. Winkelman, "Three American Authors As Semi-folk Artists," Journal of American Folklore 78 (June 1965):130-35.



Eagle as a "written link in the chain of otherwise oral tradition" revealing the mountaineer's attitudes toward land, family, and religion.<sup>19</sup> Gene Bluestein's The Voice of the Folk shows how formal American literature rests upon a base of folklore and folk ideology beginning with the formation of a national identity and continuing through modern times.<sup>20</sup>

Even regional authors themselves have published in folklore journals explaining their personal use of folklore. Guy Owen, a North Carolina writer, sees himself as a kind of historian, preserving the traditions of a dying way of life.<sup>21</sup> Harry Harrison Kroll feels that even the traditional-sounding items he creates are folkloric because they come out of his folk esthetic. Both writers share a view of folklore as rural and isolated and believe the artist must grow up with this folklore in order to use it correctly in his work.<sup>22</sup> Though "Greetings" might be considered regional since it clearly deals with an identifiable geographic area, the distribution range of the Courier-Journal, Trout himself differed from the two writers mentioned above. He was a columnist rather than a novelist, and his work shared little with creative fiction.

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<sup>19</sup>Dianna Zacharias, "The Newspaper: A Folklorist's Guide to Culture and Its Lore," Bowling Green, Ky. 1974. (Typewritten.)

<sup>20</sup>Gene Bluestein, The Voice of the Folk (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972).

<sup>21</sup>Guy Owen, "Using Folklore in Fiction," in Folklore Studies in Honor of Arthur Palmer Hudson, ed. Daniel W. Patterson (Chapel Hill: The North Carolina Folklore Society, 1965), pp. 147-57.

<sup>22</sup>Harry Harrison Kroll, "How I Collect Proverbial Materials For My Novels," Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin 23 (March 1957):1-5.

The Roots of "Greetings"

Writing from 1939 to 1967, Allan Trout could just as easily have performed the same duties from 1839 to 1867, for it was during that earlier era that Southern newspaper humor rose to prominence. Not only is Trout's material similar to that used a century before, but his method for acquiring that material was also practiced by the antebellum journalists. Nevertheless, Trout's popularity attests to the fact that the process is just as successful in the twentieth century as in the nineteenth.

The first newspaper published in the United States came out in 1690, but the newspaper's greatest growth in popularity took place between 1830 and 1850.<sup>23</sup> At that time nationalism was strong, and American writers were rejecting European ideas for literature, looking instead to their own new country for material. What they saw was a distinctively American, rural, folk culture.<sup>24</sup> The backwoodsman was already popular in legend, and the tall tale genre was just reaching its prime.<sup>25</sup> The frontier newspaper was essential to the new settlements, and the humorists found their first audience among these new inhabitants. "A certain folk custom was crucial to the actual creation of this literature. This was the favorite frontier pastime of telling stories. The conventions of oral repetition . . . became characteristic of the printed yarns of the Southwest." (The Southwest here constitutes the

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<sup>23</sup>Franklin J. Meine, "Tall Tales of the Southwest," in The Frontier Humorists, ed. Thomas Inge (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1975), p. 25.

<sup>24</sup>Leach, "Folklore in Regional Literature," p. 380.

<sup>25</sup>Constance Rourke, American Humor (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1931), pp. 59, 79.

southwestern region of the United States in 1830. This includes Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Kentucky.<sup>26)</sup>

The most popular humorous journal of the antebellum period was William T. Porter's Spirit of the Times, published from 1831 to 1861.<sup>27</sup> Porter employed two practices that Allan Trout used a century later. First, he encouraged readers to submit anecdotes for publication.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, he reprinted the best tales from other papers, even from Trout's future employer, the Louisville Courier.<sup>29</sup> As Dorson has noted, this sharing of anecdotes was common, and good anecdotes were passed from paper to paper.<sup>30</sup>

People competed to top each other's tales in Spirit, and "the magazine became a medium for swapping tales." Contributors often gave some background as to where the tale was heard, just as Trout's contributors were to do later.<sup>31</sup>

Following the Civil War, the humorist enjoyed continued popularity though he was still considered to be second rate in the field of literature. The humor grew less coarse and was presented in the forms of light verse, the tall tale, and the humorous paragraph (all of which were used in "Greetings"). The basic trends, which are also revealed in Trout's column, included reminiscent detail, moralism, philosophy,

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<sup>26</sup>Thomas Inge, ed., The Frontier Humorists (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1975) pp. 2-3.

<sup>27</sup>Meine, "Tall Tales," p. 25.

<sup>28</sup>Inge, Humorists, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup>Meine, "Tall Tales," p. 27.

<sup>30</sup>Dorson, Jonathan Draws Bow, p. 14.

<sup>31</sup>Walter Blair, "Humor of the Old Southwest," in The Frontier Humorists, ed. Thomas Inge (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1975), p. 61.



wisdom, and sentiment.<sup>32</sup> Not all of the humorists shared the same attitude however. Some expressed "amused contempt and tolerance" of the people they described, while others held a sympathetic attitude.<sup>33</sup> The condescending outlook prevailed at least in southern Appalachian writing until the 1930s, when the mountain people were judged to be in a period of transition from isolation to modernity.<sup>34</sup> As will be shown later, Trout's original concept of what his column should be is interestingly supportive of this latter opinion of the transitional, rural South.

"Greetings" was not the first column of its kind in the Louisville Courier-Journal, but rather a continuation of a tradition in that paper going back to the 1850s. Trout was preceeded in the role of "folk columnist" by Will S. Hays and then Anthony Woodson. Upon Trout's retirement Joe Creason continued writing the same type of column for the Courier-Journal until 1974.<sup>35</sup> The format under which these men wrote has since been dropped from that paper. Columnist Billy Reed writes the closest thing to what may be called a "folk column," but his feature deals more with unique Kentucky personages. It lacks the subject variety and reader input which Trout promoted.

One can only speculate as to why the type of humor which these

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<sup>32</sup>Wade Hall, The Smiling Phoenix: Southern Humor From 1865 to 1914 (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1965), pp. 13, 19, 328-51.

<sup>33</sup>James H. Penrod, "Hardin Taliaferro, Folk Humorist of North Carolina," Midwest Folklore 6 (Fall 1956):148.

<sup>34</sup>Thomas L. Connelly, "Some Perspectives on Appalachian Writings," Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin 32 (March 1966):8.

<sup>35</sup>The writings of all four of these men have been collected together and are housed in the Kentucky Library of Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

four journalists presented remained popular, and thus a regular newspaper feature, for so long. Perhaps the answer lies in John Donald Wade's statement in 1934, "The South at large represents in its basic economy the persistence of a tradition long superseded elsewhere, and its humor does too. Humor there is still at base rural."<sup>36</sup> Since that time, the transition from isolation to modernity, first noted in Appalachia in the 1930s, has taken great strides toward completion. A new generation, one which cannot reminisce of the pre-television, pre-automobile, pre-electricity era, has developed.

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<sup>36</sup>John Donald Wade, "Southern Humor," in The Frontier Humorists, ed. Thomas Inge (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1975), p. 42.

## CHAPTER I

### THE MAN AND THE COLUMNS

To call Allan M. Trout a folklorist is to stretch that role far beyond the scientific study of traditional material. Perhaps he is more appropriately described as a journalist who employed items of folklore to entertain his readers. His job as collector was a passive one, and his criteria for inclusion in his collection appear to have been entirely subjective. Nevertheless, he was correctly aware that his columns constituted a large body of Kentucky folklore and were valuable enough to preserve. For this he hoped to be remembered.

Trout was born in Churchton, Tennessee, on 8 August 1903.<sup>37</sup> Raised in a rural environment by his uncle after being orphaned at an early age, he attended a three room, country school before moving to Dyersburg, Tennessee, where he completed his high school education. Here he first practiced journalism by founding the school paper. Following his journalistic interests, Trout attended Georgetown College and became editor of the college newspaper and yearbook. He graduated in 1926, a Rhodes scholar nomination finalist, and moved to Breathitt County, Kentucky, to serve as owner, editor, and publisher of a local newspaper. When the Times folded in 1929, Trout was hired by the

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<sup>37</sup>The following information was abstracted from the vertical file on Allan Trout, housed in the Kentucky Library of Western Kentucky University. The file is primarily made up of articles clipped from Kentucky newspapers. In many cases partial or complete bibliographic data for these articles is missing. Individual articles important to this study will be footnoted as well as possible.



Louisville Courier-Journal, his employer for the next thirty-nine years. In 1940 he was sent to Frankfort, Kentucky, to cover the state senate, and he kept that post until his retirement in 1967. Trout died in December of 1972.

Joe Creason, the man whose column replaced "Greetings" when Trout retired, described Trout as a "reporter, folklorist, and legend."<sup>38</sup> As a reporter, Trout received several awards for his accomplishments. In 1931 he won a Pulitzer Prize honorable mention for his account of the Bank of Kentucky-Bank of Tennessee failure. Trout was the acknowledged dean of the Kentucky State Government press staff, and he is the only two-time recipient of the Kentucky Governor's Medallion. He was also awarded various honorary degrees throughout his career. An authority on both public school finance and the assassination of Kentucky Governor Goebel, Trout authored the Kentucky section for the 1968 Encyclopedia International. He published selections of his columns in two volumes of Greetings from Old Kentucky, and he had a third manuscript prepared for publication at the time of his death.

As a legend, Trout was a journalistic wonder. "Greetings" was a daily Courier-Journal feature from 2 January 1939 to 30 December 1967. The column appeared 8,998 times and was estimated to consist of five million words. In those twenty-nine years Trout missed only one column, that due to a World War II paper shortage. Through "Greetings" Trout distributed ginko and gourd seeds, 100,000 of the latter, to his readers. Known throughout Kentucky, he was in a sense marketed by the Courier-Journal. He was the subject of advertisements for the newspaper and a

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<sup>38</sup>Joe Creason, "'The Sheriff' Hangs up His Hat," The Courier-Journal and Times Magazine, 10 December 1967, p. 13.

feature of the Kentucky State Fair.

As a folklorist, Trout can only be viewed as an armchair collector, and in some respects a poor one at that. Having had journalistic rather than folkloristic training, Trout made no analysis of his material, for his interests in folklore were romantic and rural. He did, however, express his opinions on the subject. About folklore he wrote:

Folklore means different things to different people. To the ballader it means old foot-pattin' fiddle tunes. . . .

To the historian, folklore is the spice that enlivens the dull pudding of heavy events. To the artist, it is the weather lines in an old man's face, or the sun bonnet on a wrinkled old woman's head.

To the sociologist, folklore is the cold classification of warm human emotions into Roman headings I to IX inclusive, with alphabetical subheadings a, b, and c.<sup>39</sup>

The last statement hints at Trout's feelings concerning an analytical approach to folklore. The humanity of the item is lost in its "cold classification." As to his own interpretation of folklore, Trout wrote:

But to me, folklore is the irrepressible cussedness inherent in a robust people. My brand of folklore does not mean anything. It does not solve problems, but neither does it create problems. It does not add leaves to a man's laurel, but neither does it wither the leaves already there.<sup>40</sup>

Such an outlook is hardly realistic, and few items match Trout's definition of folklore. Yet clearly Trout had no personal desire to look beyond the enjoyment value of the lore he printed. That role was for the artist, historian, and sociologist.

Trout had, however, given attention to the creation of folklore, at least the rural folklore with which he was raised. He pictured the

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<sup>39</sup>Allan M. Trout, Greetings from Old Kentucky, 2 vols. (Louisville: The Courier-Journal, 1947), 1:104-05.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 105-06.

hard-working, illiterate man with a nagging wife, sick children, and a potential crop failure.

But a streak of inherent cussedness keeps most men from acknowledging defeat. The combination of adverse circumstances at last reaches the point where the only thing left to do is to grin and bear it. At the moment an overburdened man grins he invariably says something that contains a trace of wisdom and truth. That is how my brand of folklore is born.

That folklore survives, according to Trout, is because wisdom and truth are not usually spoken by the type of person described above. Drawing attention to itself, the statement is appreciated and thus is repeated from generation to generation.<sup>41</sup> Trout's context for folklore was obviously rural and oral.

Though the majority of items he included in "Greetings" dealt with a past era of Kentucky life, Trout realized that the folk process would continue regardless of the dramatic changes the world would experience. One of his readers wrote complaining that folklore might be dying out because her sons would not sit and listen to her sing the ballads she had learned as a child from her mother. Trout consoled her by writing, "Folklore will not die out with this or any other generation so far ahead as the mind can probe. Lore is simply the seasoning of fantasy that man sprinkles on humanity to make it liveable." He went on to say that her sons were experiencing different things from when she was a child and that in later life they would have their own folklore as they reminisced about the past.<sup>42</sup> The concepts of memory and age seem essential to Trout's interpretation of folklore.

Trout's medium for both preserving and presenting folklore was

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 105-06.

<sup>42</sup>Allan M. Trout, "Greetings from Old Kentucky," vol. 3, 1970, Allan M. Trout Collection, Kentucky Museum, Bowling Green, Kentucky, pp. 508-09.



the "Greetings" column. The era out of which the feature came was that same period when the Appalachian people were seen as being in transition from isolation to modernity.<sup>43</sup> Reflecting this new outlook, Trout's original conception of the column was that it be written like a letter to a mythical cousin from a country boy in the city, thus the isolated would be commenting on the modern. The title "Greetings" was created to go along with this format and was kept even though Trout dropped the country boy-letter idea before the column first appeared.<sup>44</sup>

Trout did, however, picture himself as an outside observer of city people and city life, and he intended to include some of his observations in the column. Of himself Trout wrote, "I express the plain man's bewilderment at the complicated mess society is in. I'm the articulate spokesman of a great many people who wonder where in hell we're headed for."<sup>45</sup> Though literate and worldly, Trout still classed himself with the "plain" people, and apparently his audience accepted his position. Interestingly enough, the early "Greetings" was not included in the city editions of the Courier-Journal though it was a regular feature in the non-Louisville editions.

A statement to the effect that Allan Trout wrote the "Greetings" column is misleading. More accurately, Trout served as the guiding force for the thousands of people who shared information through the column. Trout shaped the column and occasionally steered it toward a particular subject, but once "Greetings" was under way, his words most often came in response to a correspondent's comment or question. Four

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<sup>43</sup>Connelly, "Perspectives," p. 8.

<sup>44</sup>Creason, "'Sheriff,'" p. 9.

<sup>45</sup>Cited by Joe Creason, "'Sheriff,'" p. 9.

days after the column began to run, Trout printed the first contribution from his audience, a humorous title for the feature, and he asked for more reader input on that subject. He would continue to prod the audience by asking questions on a special area, and the column developed into a direct interaction between Trout and readers from all over Kentucky, as well as Tennessee and Indiana.

"Greetings" was structured into several, short paragraphs. Usually more than one contributor was featured in a column, and more than one topic was discussed. Trout included in the columns his own comments on subjects like local politicians, the economy, and various scientific issues. He reminisced about his experiences and injected his uncomplicated, optimistic philosophies. Features such as a daily review of the weather and a weekly review of the Louisville movies were later dropped from the format. From the outset "Greetings" leaned toward a rural audience and embodied such attitudes as experts are not to be trusted and politics are sheer folly. The outlook was conservative and consistently turned to the past.

Considering the medium, one may correctly assume the lack of the obscene, but even in a free press situation it is doubtful that obscene material would have appeared, given the mixed sexes of the audience. Indeed, as many men as women added their comments to the column. Though names seem to be a fairly accurate key to the sex of Trout's informants, there is no quick method for determining what racial or ethnic groups participated in the column. From the text one can assume Trout's audience to be white, middle-class adults. In the printed material blacks are referred to as Negroes, and when mentioned (usually as slaves or ex-slaves), their role appears to be on the same social

level as the white characters.

According to Trout, the column wrote itself from the mass of letters which came in from his readers. For instance, Trout posed the following question in "Greetings" on 16 January 1939: "In a yoke of oxen, is the lead ox on the right or left?" On 19 January he printed the first response. By 21 January Trout had gotten twenty-six responses to the question from all over Kentucky. He printed a short segment from five of these, and two of the answers mentioned Buck as the name of the lead ox. On 26 January Trout formed a "mythical" Buck and Berry Club of "old ox team drivers, or sons who helped." To become a member, one simply wrote a letter describing his or her experiences with oxen. Trout kept the interest alive by printing a reader's comment that the off ox was called Jerry, not Berry, and he eventually split the Buck and Berry Club into two factions. The oxen topic was still alive in the 31 March "Greetings," two and a half months after Trout first brought up the subject. On the strength of such reader response, Trout was able to keep fifty columns ahead of schedule. (The idea of a club surely inspired readers to participate, and Trout continued forming clubs on various subjects such as the Golden Courier Club for people who had read the Courier-Journal for fifty years and the Starling Society for people with ideas on how to rid Louisville of roosting starlings.)

Those members of the audience who contributed were not just writing to Allan Trout; they wrote in reaction to a subject or another reader's letter. Correspondents played off each other and often mentioned to whom they were responding. Trout himself encouraged a type of competition among members of his audience. For instance, on 2 February 1939 Trout formed the Tall Tales Club, the president of which was the person



who contributed the best tall tale.

In this respect "Greetings" served as a functioning, tale-swapping session. The spontaneity of a face-to-face relationship was lost to the conscious effort of writing and the time involved in getting the material to Trout. Also missing were the extra nuances normally transmitted through voice and kinesics. But in a sense each writer was a performer before a huge audience, and he or she was certainly aware that what they said might be printed in the column. Trout exercised a vast control over that performance; he sometimes quoted just a sentence, or he occasionally turned all of the column's space over to the contributions of one reader. In addition Trout's author-editor role allowed him to change the subject, thus inspiring donations of a completely different genre of material. From his typical rural outlook, Trout compared "Greetings" to a "mythical front porch." He wrote, "Here is where the neighbors gather in and . . . compare complaints, swap remedies, and tell tall tales of what we have seen and heard."<sup>46</sup> It is important to realize that "Greetings" differed from other forms of literature. It was not a static work of art composed in the mind of one author but rather existed closer to the realm of communal creation. Trout did not ingest beliefs and tales and then write them down as his own. Instead he provided a medium in which many speakers could take part.

A look at the last three months of "Greetings" (October, November, and December 1967) reveals little change in the format of the column over its twenty-nine year existence. Trout was still taking questions

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<sup>46</sup>Trout, "Greetings," vol. 3, p. 23.

and making observations of nature through a short paragraph medium. In these more recent columns the mythical club idea had been dropped, and Trout referred to his audience as if they were in school and the contributing reader was the teacher. As in the 1939 "Greetings" Trout printed original poems by his readers and traditional song lyrics. Contributors still bragged about products from their gardens and discussed state politics.

In these newer columns, however, Trout borrowed a clever saying from other publications on a nearly daily basis; he had reinstated a practice found in the Spirit of the Times over a century earlier. Also, the 1967 "Greetings" contained more anecdotes than the 1939 ones did.

Yet the major difference between the first and last set of columns is in Trout's role as the writer. All of the columns regardless of date deal for the most part with some aspect of Kentucky folklife. The topics covered include material culture, names, speech, jokes, beliefs, and traditional songs. In the 1939 set of "Greetings," Trout was just getting the column started; either he asked a question of his readers, or his readers contributed information directed toward the general audience of the column. But in 1940 Trout started a pattern which would continue in the feature until his retirement. In that second year of "Greetings" Trout set himself up as a professor of "barnyard science," a humorous field of double-talk which attempted to explain the unexplainable through the study of nature. Still made sport of for having a column written by other people, Trout began to answer rather than ask questions, and readers started sending in their observations for his interpretation. The questions Trout received and answered, like the rest of the column, covered a broad area of subjects. For

example, Trout dealt with the following; "What is meant by the old expression, clean as a hound's tooth? Just how pretty is a speckled pup? Can you tell me how big a neighborhood is? Why does an old hound dog trot with his hind quarters slewed out of line?"<sup>47</sup> When possible, Trout offered to put forth a valid response, particularly on questions concerned with linguistic expressions. But when the problem was unanswerable, Trout used his training as a writer to the fullest, claiming that he found his answers in the cryptic markings on the backs of terrapins. The following example illustrates Trout's creative writing style:

"Who manufactures those 10-foot poles people will not touch each other with?" asks Mrs. Eugene Hazelip, Park City.

Thank you, ma'am. Those 10-foot poles are manufactured by Doubt & Mistrust, Inc., in the town of Suspicion. The foreman of the factory is a fellow named Envy, and the president of the company is a Mr. Greed. The poles are distributed through the wholesale outlets of Gossip & Slander, Inc., and may be identified by the trademark of U-Don't-Say!<sup>48</sup>

Most of Trout's barnyard science pieces were several times longer than the one given here. The question, of course, was a play on a common figure of speech and had no answer. In prodding Trout to perform, the reader certainly did not expect a serious response. Trout completed the interaction by accepting the subject the reader had put forth. Trout was not a stand-up comedian rattling off one joke after another in a one-sided manner. Like everyone who contributed to "Greetings," he responded to stimuli from the other participants. He was not afraid to share the stage, but he was the professional writer. The popularity of the column rested on his performance, part of which was the choice of what contributions to print and respond to. Trout's personality held

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<sup>47</sup>Trout, Greetings, 2:8-9, 34, 37, 44.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 53.



the varied facets of the column together.

A portion of that successful performance was the result of Trout's reinforcement of audience values. Coming out of a rural background and assuming that the majority of his readers shared an exposure to the rural environment, Trout forwarded general concepts which few would dispute. Without stressing religion, he expressed man's inability to explain everything. Through anecdotes he proved that no walk of life is too high or low to be humorous. He appeared to listen to everyone and to find value in what they said. He devoted a great deal of the column's attention to a rural life and people who may have felt forgotten as the world pace quickened. In "Greetings" Trout avoided anything controversial in a serious way, sticking instead to the obvious good and the obvious bad (see his discussion of 10-foot poles, above). Trout sought to entertain and inspire in a mild sort of way, and accordingly, "Greetings" was eventually moved from the front page of the sports and financial section of the paper to the comics page.

Trout realized that his work was valuable beyond the field of journalism. Though "Greetings" dealt with popular as well as folk items, Trout saw his column as a part of a great tradition of folk literature. He failed to define the term "folk literature," but it would appear that he had in mind a printed collection of folkloric material. In a 1969 letter he wrote: "The Courier-Journal has the most distinguished record in this country for folk columns, which taken in the aggregate, amount to folk literature."<sup>49</sup> Yet the value goes beyond here. In describing the product of his career, Trout embraced the folklife concept and

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<sup>49</sup>Letter to Julia Neal, 20 February 1969, quoted in Julia Neal, "The Allan M. Trout Collection," Kentucky Folklore Record 19 (June 1973):33.

pictured himself recording an entire way of life ignored by the historian:

In that 29-volume file of Greetings are 5 million words related to the mores and minutiae of folk life in Kentucky for the century lying between post-Civil War days and man's exploration of outer space. The primary focus is upon how and why plain people laughed, joked, played, and prayed; what they ate and wore and worked at; the lore and legend they believed in; the signs of nature they set store by; how they endured adversity with patience, and crowed loud and clear over minor triumphs.<sup>50</sup>

Realizing the potential uses for such a collection, Trout donated his memorabilia to Western Kentucky University in 1969. There "Greetings" would be housed with the works of the two preceding Courier-Journal folk columnists (as they are described by Trout and the Courier-Journal), Will Hays and Anthony Woodson, and later with the writings of Trout's co-worker and successor, Joe Creason. Trout chose Western Kentucky University to receive his collections because of the work that school had done with folklore. He was impressed that the university considered folklore to be a viable academic field and at that time offered an undergraduate folklore minor program.<sup>51</sup>

Housed in the university's Kentucky Library, the Allan M. Trout Collection contains far more than just the twenty-nine volumes of "Greetings." Over the years Trout had collected numerous unusual items from Kentucky folklife; many of these had been given to him by column fans. Included in the collection are such things as a madstone ( a folk cure for snakebites), toothache bones, an adz, a butter mold, and an assortment of Barlow knives. As a political historian, Trout amassed

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<sup>50</sup>Trout, "Greetings," vol. 3, p. i.

<sup>51</sup>Ed Ryan, "Allan Trout Gives His Memorabilia to College," Louisville Courier-Journal, 16 March 1969, p. B10.

several items associated with the assassination of Kentucky Governor Goebel and a large stock of old campaign buttons, all of which are found in the collection. Trout's library is a combination of the old and new, the scientific and the fictional. Of greatest interest to this study are the twenty-some books which have to do with folklore and speech. Indicative of Trout's relationship to folklore, they are almost entirely non-theoretical collections of tales like Harris' The Favorite Uncle Remus, Roberts' South From Hell-fer-Sartin, and Botkin's A Treasury of American Folklore. About half of these deal with geographical regions within the distribution area of the Courier-Journal. Clearly the diversity of the Allan M. Trout Collection reflects the urban-rural dichotomy of the man himself.

Interestingly enough, little is known about Trout's methods of composing "Greetings" despite his popularity and reputation. The Courier-Journal staff could provide no information on Trout's working habits, and the staff of the Kentucky Library had no background data on the few items in his collection which may have been related to "Greetings." Amazingly, Trout threw out all of the letters he had received from his audience. Perhaps he did so out of consideration for his readers' privacy, yet such a collection would likely have been a valuable contribution to the study of Kentucky folklife.



## CHAPTER II

### THE USE OF FOLKLORE IN SELECTED COLUMNS

The presence of traditional material in "Greetings" becomes apparent with even the most superficial skimming of the columns. Further research reveals an abundance of folklore-related items covering several different genres. To show the extent to which Allan Trout used folklore in his column, this chapter will identify and classify the traditional material found in the first and last three months of "Greetings" (January through March 1939 and October through December 1967).

A study such as this necessitates the use of many collections and resource materials in determining which items from "Greetings" are indeed traditional. The main stumbling block to such research is the wide variation within the resource materials themselves. The subjective nature of collections accounts for differing organizational techniques. Some genres have been studied and collected more than others (tales as opposed to title-author jokes, for instance), and some areas of the country have received more attention than others. These variations in materials, area, and also in time often require the researcher to look long and far before reasonable documentation can be found. Even then, items which are certainly folkloric in nature, as shown by internal evidence within the columns, sometimes remain undocumentable. Fortunately, several of the column correspondents called for Trout himself to research an item, particularly in the area of folk speech.

Additionally, certain problems are inherent in any folklore classification system. The placement of an item under the heading of a particular genre is by necessity a somewhat subjective process. Genre overlap, and at times an item might just as well fit in one category as in another. For instance, in the 5 December 1967 "Greetings" a reader attempts to explain the expression "What the Sam Hill!" Such an item would fall under the heading of folk speech. However, the explanation itself might well be placed in the genre of lyric-poetry:

If you will change an S to a D,  
Also change an i to an e,  
You will very likely see  
What the Sam Hill used to be.

In such cases the material is best classified under its dominant purpose, here, an explanation of folk speech.

Perhaps the greatest flaw in collecting numerous items and classifying them by genre is the static nature of collections themselves. The dynamics of the folkloric process are often lost in pages of stale print. Even though "Greetings" relies totally on the printed word, hopefully the previous chapter has illustrated the unique, kinetic nature of the column. To this writer an understanding of the "Greetings" process is more valuable to the student of folklore than the following classification, but the classification is necessary in setting the column apart from a regular, letter-to-the-editor feature. Still, certain items popular in origin appear in the column as a result of the folkloric process under which "Greetings" operates. These items might be viewed as becoming traditionalized within the culture pool shared by Trout's readership.

Items of folklore appear in "Greetings" in two capacities. The first of these is an analytical role in which Trout or a contributing

reader attempts to explain an element of folklore. In doing so they look for origins and historical data to back up these explanations. One purpose of the analytical approach is to educate though Trout still seeks to entertain at the same time. Most often an analytical discussion begins with a reader question followed by Trout's response. For example in "Greetings" of 11 December 1967, Trout addresses himself to the following reader question, "Do you happen to know why boats and ships are referred to as 'she?'" As an element of folk speech, the use of "she" is dealt with in The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore (Volume I, page 589), but Trout turns to an amusing reader interpretation and then to his own more serious explanation:

"A boat is called she because there is always a great deal of bustle around her. There's usually a gang of men around. She has a waist and stays. It takes a lot of paint to keep her looking good. It's not the initial expense that breaks you, but the upkeep. . . ."

Frivolity now aside, sir, I suspect that a deeper reason underlies. From time of ancient Greece to modern demise of the sailing ship, most, if not all, prows carried an heroic figure carved out of wood, called the figurehead. Now these figureheads invariably were of the feminine gender, as, for example, a mermaid, Athena, Venue, or some goddess dear to sailors. It would come natural, then, for the tars to call their ship a she.

Trout rarely gives his source of information, and he notes his own theories when sufficient explanation cannot be found elsewhere. Later readers may write in to refute Trout's ideas. In the analytical approach direct attention is drawn to the item, and the discussion that follows is meant to pass on accurate information about it in an entertaining manner.

The other role in which folklore appears in "Greetings" is a functional one. Here the item serves to enhance the discussion of some other subject or is included for its own sake. The functional folklore



of "Greetings" may be as subtle as the many traditional words and phrases used or the passing references to tales, beliefs, and games. However, the material is often presented in a blatant, straightforward manner but not with the purpose of educating the reader to its meaning or background. In most cases the goal here is strictly entertainment. For example, Trout includes the following item in the column of 9 March 1939:

Possum Pie is made of rye,  
 And possum is the meat.  
 The crust is rough, the crust is tough,  
 And the damn pie ain't fit to eat.

The stanza is meant simply to amuse, and neither Trout nor his correspondent provide any analytical information about it even though it has a background in tradition.<sup>52</sup> The majority of the folklore found in the column appears in this functional capacity.

The following categories have proven most convenient in the analysis of traditional material within the "Greetings" columns: folk speech, beliefs and customs, legends and anecdotes, author-title jokes, riddles, song lyrics and poetry, and games.

#### Folk Speech

##### Single Words, Expressions, and Non-Proper Names

As might be expected, elements of folk speech appear frequently in "Greetings," more so than any other genre of folklore. These words and phrases comprise the basis of everyday speech and thus turn up within the larger oral genres such as tales and lyrics. At least as far as "Greetings" is concerned, Trout apparently feels that a strict adherence to the Standard English practiced by journalists is not always

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<sup>52</sup>B. A. Botkin, The American Play-Party Song (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1963), pp. 284-93.

necessary. Obvious from his other journalistic pieces, Trout has mastered the "correct" style of newspaper writing, but he clearly realizes the value of the folk idiom in achieving the "down home" flavor associated with his column. Following Trout's example, the contributing readers make no attempt to conceal their speech mannerisms and in some instances exaggerate the stereotype of rural Kentucky speech just as the humorists did a century earlier.

The two major sources used here for documenting the items of folk speech found in the Trout columns are the File on Folk Speech Items of the Gordon Wilson Collection (Folklore Archives, Western Kentucky University) and the proverb and folk speech sections of the Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore. Both of these have their advantages and disadvantages. In working with "Greetings," the Gordon Wilson Collection is most important since both the column and the collection deal with much the same geo-political area, that is, Kentucky. The Wilson Collection contains a far greater number of entries than the Brown Collection though the former has not yet been subjected to the demands of editing and publication; for example, 900 proverbs and 1,000 other folk speech items were not printed in the Brown Collection.<sup>53</sup> However, unlike the Brown Collection the Wilson Collection offers no guides for further research of a particular item and in many cases simply lists a word or phrase.

Not surprisingly, the larger and more geographically similar Wilson Collection holds more of the folk speech items found in "Greetings" than does the Brown Collection. Still, a few items turn up in the Brown

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<sup>53</sup>Charles Bond, "Unpublished Folklore in the Brown Collection," North Carolina Folklore 20 (February 1972):13.

Collection which are not included in the Wilson Collection; all of these are of a proverbial nature. Yet even together, the two collections cannot account for many of the speech elements of apparent traditional origins used in "Greetings." This fact makes an important comment on the nature of any folk speech collection. Since words and phrases quickly fall in and out of use, it is unlikely that a complete collection of speech items can be done for even a small region, and probably no type of folklore collection becomes dated quicker than one attempting to record speech. Convenient for this study, both Brown and Wilson operated at least partially during the same period in which Trout wrote.

Another unresolved concept associated with folk speech is that of the proverbs. One of Archer Taylor's first statements in The Proverb is that a definition of the proverb is practically unwriteable. In The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction, Jan Brunvand sees the proverb and saying as "one notch up from folk speech,"<sup>54</sup> but this notch is of little importance to a study of "Greetings" since both the single and multi-word folk expressions serve the same function in Trout's work, that is, to provide color. The Brown Collection draws a distinction between the proverb and folk speech, creating a different section for both, while the Wilson Collection includes proverbs within the File on Folk Speech Items. As in the Wilson Collection, the folk speech section here will include proverbs and sayings.

A great drawback in studying folk speech through the Trout columns results from the loss of pronunciation in the written word. An important facet of the oral nature of speech cannot be conveyed in

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<sup>54</sup>Jan Brunvand, The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1968), p. 38.



letters and newsprint by the non-linguist. The columns' few attempts to write items as they might sound prove to be literary exaggerations with humorous intent. The loss can only be regained through oral collection of Trout's written material.

An analysis of the folk speech in "Greetings" serves to polish the glaring question of what constitutes folk speech. Identifying them as possible folk speech material, this writer drew 127 words and phrases out of 155 columns. Of these, seventy-one were found either in the Wilson Collection or in the Brown Collection. This does not mean however that the remainder are nontraditional. Items such as "between a rock and a hard place" ("Greetings," 24 November 1967) and "hot off the griddle" ("Greetings," 13 March 1939), which are found in neither the Wilson Collection nor the Brown Collection, certainly are not the literary creations of Trout and his correspondents.<sup>55</sup> Many are indeed traditional, as noted by internal evidence. Contributing readers refer to items as old expressions or old sayings and ask Trout for the original meaning to these speech items. The successful use of folk speech in "Greetings," and in any situation for that matter, depends upon the common cultural background of speaker and listener, writer and reader. Because of this background, Trout can safely write, "Men, we'll get this matter straightened out if it takes until the cows come home" (23 February 1939), and though one is hard pressed to give an exact interpretation of the expression "until the cows come home," the implied meaning is sufficiently clear for the purpose of "Greetings," that is, entertainment.

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<sup>55</sup>Since all items discussed in this study are taken from "Greetings," the name of the column will no longer be included with textual references to the column dates.

In looking at the "Greetings" process, one must keep in mind that Trout and his readers are literate, and as shown in their writings, they hold some idea that such a thing as folk speech exists. The best indication of this knowledge appears in the old humorist trick of exaggerating dialect to the point of absurdity. Trout himself avoids the use of dialect, he says, because of the difficulty in writing it, but by the second month of the column, he starts adding reader contributions of what he calls "pure dialect" along with a translation for those who cannot follow it. The column of 10 February 1939 includes:

What th ells trout doin outen wotter giten dry lan critturs  
ter yoak up n sech leettle turnin groun as hit didn no whar wen n  
whut way to git em tu shanny sech as hits likes duz nye wotter.  
En jedges spectin a lawhyur tu derect a dercisun bout uzin falutin  
rope n crook tu derrekt nstid o byark n jourger. Nary nomanshun  
fo sech ignurunce.

The piece serves as a literary spoof of the Kentucky hillbilly stereotype. In another instance (3 March 1939) the stereotype of the antebellum black is promoted through his statement, "'Lawdy, Massa, what am dat?'" In this case, however, dialect is employed to add color to a tale rather than to be humorous for its own sake. Both examples reveal an awareness of regional and social speech patterns and an ability to use them in creating a particular image. Again, the success of such material depends upon common, cultural beliefs held toward those speech habits by Trout's readership.

One cannot overlook the possibility that either Trout or his readers might combine a literary talent and a knowledge of folk speech to create speech elements which are only traditional in appearance. The genre can dictate certain rules by which one might produce an original expression virtually undistinguishable from popular material.

In some cases these might seem a bit too literary or too long to be used in everyday speech. Two such suspicious statements are "there always is a sprout of heresy on any worthwhile tree," and "as big as the biggest bull frog that ever sang bass in the North Fork" (24 February 1939 and 14 March 1939), but with Trout's death there is no way of establishing how, if any, such expressions he created. Indeed, further collecting may show them to be traditional or possibly traditionalized as a result of their appearance in the newspaper. They each appear only once in the six months of columns studied, but that cannot be taken as a sure sign of originality since many other items documented as traditional are used a single time. This creates a singular problem in referring to "Greetings" as a collection of folklore in that Trout likely received duplicate material and numerous variants previously uncollected in Kentucky, but in keeping the column fresh, he was not apt to print the same material twice. However, this is probably more true for the other genres of folklore than for folk speech, and some expressions are fairly common to the column.

The folk speech in "Greetings" covers a wide range of topics and occurs in almost every context arising in the column. In discussing farm life names such as "harrow," "off ox," and "tongue" (referring to a wagon piece) are used. Traditional descriptions of one's associates include "clod hopper," "mule-headed," "young blade," and "high hat." Animals ranging from a "nit" to a "whang doodle," from a "wooly worm" to a "hoop snake" might all be mentioned as "critters." For those inclined to curse but aware of journalistic standards, there are terms such as "dogged," "doggone," "doggasted," "dad burn," "dad blamed," and "bedeviled." Among one's relatives are the "little wife," the "grandpaw," and the "grandmaw." A good cook might make a fine meal from a "turn" of



corn, some "innards," and a mess of "biled" "sallet" greens. One might be "took" trading for a "plug horse" or lose his "taw" in a quick game of marbles. Such uses of folk speech openly reflect the rural bent taken by Trout in the column.

Many of the proverbial expressions and sayings from the column also indicate a contact with nature. In reference to the weather, Trout uses common expressions like the "dead of winter" and "March came to Louisville like a lamb." Animal references abound in sayings such as "as the crow flies," "watched like a hawk," "running hog wild," "cart before the horse," and "You have driven your ducks to the right pond." The traditional expressions of "Greetings" range from the common "play second fiddle" and "as bright as the noonday sun" to the less used "as interesting as last year's bird nest" and "with the bark on it." There is the culinary "take . . . with a grain of salt" and "flat as a pancake" plus the monetary "sound as a dollar" and "two cents worth." Some of the sayings have some logical, metaphorical sense to them like "clear as a crystal" while others are seemingly nonsense expressions such as "Katy-bar-the-door."

As in the other genres, most of the speech items here appear in a functional rather than an analytical context. Not surprisingly, the proverbial expressions receive more of the analytical treatment than do the one word items, especially where the metaphorical sense of the former has been weakened through time and distance. A fine example of this is found in the 6 December 1967 "Greetings" discussion of "What the Sam Hill?" Thanks to a reader contribution and a magazine article Trout reveals that Col. Samuel Hill actually did exist in Connecticut before the American revolution. Col. Hill continually sought public

office, thus the expression "running like Sam Hill." Trout then adds his own comment, "Your valiant columnist now hazards the guess that later generations, not knowing the identity of Sam Hill of Guilford, Conn., continued to invoke his name in situations fraught with wonderment, puzzlement, consternation, etc." Instances of folk speech analysis occur almost exclusively in the later columns, indicating another role which Trout develops as the column progresses.

Folk speech acts as a multi-purpose element in "Greetings." It provides entertainment as a mild escape from the drier, journalistic style of the news media. In doing so it adds color and often humor to the column. Perhaps the presence of traditional speech items also provides a form of security for some of Trout's readers by giving needed attention to a less-uniform but more human way of speaking. The analytical discussions of speech items may be of less importance, but surely Trout's ability to come up with those explanations helps to establish with his readers his reputation as an authority on folklore.<sup>56</sup>

#### Proper Names

More so than any other particular item, proper names abound in the "Greetings" feature. Rarely does a column go by in which Trout does not mention the name of a contributing reader, and a long list of Kentucky place names could be drawn from this daily acknowledgement of people and their homes. In the selected group of columns one also finds proper names for cards, quilt patterns, and animals. Yet "Greetings" becomes a collection of proper names for the most part only as a by-product of the other activities taking place within the column.

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<sup>56</sup>At the end of this study, an appendix of folk speech items from "Greetings" is given to illustrate both the type and extent of material used.

Only twice in the six months of columns studied here does Trout intentionally solicit proper names.

In an article on folklore and onomastics, Robert M. Rennick states that much of the enjoyment in name collecting is derived from the "delight in discovering some new and relatively obscure name" and from the "humor inherent in some of the oddest of names."<sup>57</sup> In his first reference to proper names, Trout reflects this idea by asking his readers for names that begin with the letter "x" and then giving two examples from his own experience, Xenophon Hunt and Xenophon Hicks. The first reader response comes three days later on 12 January 1939 with Xantius Wilson, Xenophone Wickersham, Xavier Carrico, Xavier Vowels, Xavier Schuler, and as a bonus, Zolon Zeh. Apparently the readers share the enthusiasm for gathering uncommon names, and Trout eventually prints eighteen proper names beginning with "x," two of which are Kentucky place names.

Writing in a special folklore issue of the journal Names, Jan Brunvand comments that the folklorist has given too much attention to the unusual, as Trout does above, and has thus ignored common naming practices.<sup>58</sup> At least in the selected group of "Greetings," Trout is perhaps more thorough than the folklorist Brunvand describes, and he gives a good deal of column space over to a lengthy debate among readers as to what names should be given oxen. In 1977 the naming of oxen might be considered an uncommon topic but probably not as much so to Trout's rural readership of 1939. As noted in the first chapter of this study, the spirited debate over Buck and Berry

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<sup>57</sup>Robert M. Rennick, "The Folklore of Curious and Unusual Names," New York Folklore Quarterly 22 (March 1966):5.

<sup>58</sup>Jan Brunvand, "Introduction," Names 16 (September 1968):198.



runs for several weeks, and the respondents represent many geographic locales. The numerous reader contributions on the subject produce pairs of oxen named Buck and Berry, Buck and Jerry, Tom and Jerry, Buck and Bald, Buck and Brite, Dick and Bawley, Turk and Tony, Buck and Ball, Brandy and Jerry, and Rock and Rolly. Of course Trout makes no deep analysis on the subject, but the information he has gathered seems to indicate that the practice of naming oxen pairs is most often guided by tradition. Indeed, the entire debate is started by one reader advocating Buck and Jerry instead of Buck and Berry as the names of the lead and off ox, respectively. One reader traces the Buck and Berry tradition back to a literary documentation of 1839, and the idea of using unusual or highly individual names for oxen receives no support from Trout's Buck and Berry Club. The reader statement (24 February 1939) best sums up the situation, "Buck and Berry is undoubtedly the orthodox position."

A vein of regionalism in oxen naming is also hinted at amid the Buck and Berry controversy. The first reader to promote Buck and Jerry as the traditional pair of oxen soon receives support from another resident of that geographic area. The Buck and Berry faction answers (17 February 1939), "Down there at Kuttawa where he was raised it might have been Buck and Jerry, but down here in the Blue Lick Hills where Daniel Boone fought the Indians and I was raised, it was Buck and Berry nine times out of ten." Relying on Trout's column alone, one cannot determine positively if this regional naming practice actually has a strong existence or merely looks likely as a result of a non-representative sampling of Trout's readers. Further fieldwork is necessary to provide the answers.

Still another naming custom is hinted at in "Greetings." On three instances in the selected group of columns, readers mention that they were named for characters in literary works. One reader writes that she, her brother, and her three sisters were all named for characters in a short story serial which ran in the Courier-Journal. Two other contributors state that their names were taken from a book. Again, more collecting is needed to determine how widespread this naming practice was and to what extent it is still popular today.

Although Trout himself spends little time analyzing proper names in the column, the raw material seems to be there for further extended study. This writer feels safe in estimating that at least ten thousand place names alone can be drawn from the column, counting duplicates, and almost every place name is preceded by the name of a person. As with the other folkloric items in "Greetings," Trout most often takes a functional approach to the proper name material, yet some of the background to the naming process which Brunvand seeks does leak through, as in the two examples above.

#### Belief and Custom

Naturally, the nature of "Greetings" is conducive to discussions on beliefs and customs. Covering a wide range of topics, they are both hinted at and clearly spelled out by readers who are proud rather than ashamed of placing stock in "superstitious" patterns of behavior. With a rural bent typical of Trout's column, the beliefs and customs appearing here stretch from current items with widespread popularity to dying material of apparently singular origin.

Though beliefs differ from customs, their inclusion under the same heading is warranted not only by academic precedent (The Frank C.

Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore, for instance) but also by the close relationship existing between the two types of material. For example, in the 15 November 1967 column a distraught housewife complains that her family consistently refuses to eat the last spoonful of jelly in the jar. Trout explains the custom as the result of Western man's "hereditary instinct . . . to save the last of something good for seed." The practice is upheld both in Kentucky and in the Ozarks by the belief, "To take the last portion from a dish brings bad luck."<sup>59</sup> Neither Trout nor his contributor shows an awareness of the belief, and one cannot say whether the belief came in to being to help perpetuate what Trout identifies as a well-taught table manner or the custom originated as a result of the belief. These relationships between belief and custom will be noted where possible.

The majority of the belief and custom material in the selected columns comes from the contributing readers rather than from Trout himself, but some of his popularity likely results from his crafty play upon the strength with which his readers embrace their traditional ideas. Early in the column (4 February 1939), Trout creates interest in his feature by starting a campaign to change Ground Hog Day from the second to the twenty-sixth of February. The customary observance of the day rests upon the belief that six more weeks of bad weather will follow should the ground hog see his shadow, but Trout notes that six weeks of winter weather is not at all unusual after the second of February. By 25 February 1939 Trout with the aid of his readers, has amassed historical evidence supporting his campaign for changing the

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<sup>59</sup>Daniel L. Thomas and Lucy Blayney Thomas, Kentucky Superstitions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1920), p. 149; and Vance Randolph, Ozark Superstitions (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), p. 182.



date. He relates the background of a Trimble County, Kentucky family whose name, interestingly enough, happens to be Trout. Sometime in the early nineteenth century the Trouts took in a visitor who taught them that a bear sighting his shadow on the twenty-sixth of February meant six weeks of bad weather. As bears became less and less common in Trimble County, the ground hog was chosen as a replacement. According to Trout, the twenty-sixth of February is still the traditional Ground Hog Day in that region of Kentucky. The observance of the second of February as the national Ground Hog Day is witness to Trout's failure to have the date moved, but more important to "Greetings" is the amount of publicity Trout gained by manipulating custom.<sup>60</sup>

In a similar move in 1960, Trout set out to prove the belief that the first frost can be predicted from when the katydids first sing. Trout used a period of ninety days, but other variants dictate six weeks and nine weeks.<sup>61</sup> Hearing the first katydid on the twentieth of July, Trout  
twentieth of October. With perfect accuracy, the first frost for that Louisville winter came on the twentieth of October. Again, Trout's reputation as an expert on folklore is reinforced.<sup>62</sup>

As might be expected, many of the beliefs found in the selected columns are based on an agricultural context. Contributing readers advise Trout that beans and peas should be planted when the

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<sup>60</sup>Interestingly, Jan Brunvand in Study of Folklore, p. 204, notes that Ground Hog Day is now observed almost totally by the news media rather than by the folk.

<sup>61</sup>Randolph, Ozark Superstitions, p. 22.

<sup>62</sup>Brunvand, Study of Folklore, p. 193.

sign is in the knees, and oats should be planted in the light moon of April after the last full moon of March (30 January 1939). Tall corn should be planted in the light of the moon whereas potatoes should be planted in the dark of the moon (30 January 1939). Rail fences should be constructed in the new moon to prevent the bottom rail from sinking, and a slain snake hung on a rail fence will cause rain before sundown (4 February 1939).

Within the domestic realm, soap should be made in the dark of the moon and stirred with a sassafras paddle (4 February 1939). Visiting females must spit into the vat lest the soap turn out unsatisfactory (4 February 1939). To avoid plain bad luck, readers are advised to start nothing on a Friday that cannot be completed on the same day (10 November 1967). The common stigma from path-crossing, black cats can be erased by simply walking three steps backwards (10 November 1967).

Belief and medicine go hand in hand, and "Greetings" is no exception to that relationship. All of the medicinal beliefs in the selected columns make use of foreign substances to cure or prevent bodily disorders ranging from colds to warts. Trout recalls wearing an assafoetida sack around the neck to ward off childhood diseases (27 January 1939), and another reader proclaims the value of water in hollow stumps as a remedy for warts (12 October 1967). The madstone, a traditional charm for snake bites, is humorously misused in one reader's tall tale, one of the few instances when beliefs are not dealt with in a serious tone in the column (23 March 1939). Teas made from pennyroyal, a plant found wild in the distribution range of "Greetings," are recommended aids in relieving

spasms, hysteria, and the common cold (31 October 1967, 26 December 1967).

Pennyroyal is also acclaimed in the realm of preventive medicine. Whipped against clothing, the plant, according to Trout's sources, provides protection against chiggers, ants, fleas, and mosquitoes (29 December 1967). In addition readers recommend coal oil or sulphur pills to ward off chiggers (23 October 1967, 21 December 1967). Perhaps some or all of these remedies contain a degree of scientific credibility, but personal experiences are sufficient credentials for Trout's barnyard scientists.

Not all of the beliefs in the column are intended to predict, prevent, or control anything. Some are just simple concepts traditionally held to be true. For instance, Trout is unable to verify for a reader that a drowning person goes under water three times though both Trout and his contributor have heard this all their lives (17 November 1967). Other I've-always-heard items include, "A ripe watermelon is not red until it is cut open" and "If a tree falls in the forest with nobody close enough to hear it, the crash doesn't make a sound" (25 March 1939). Such material serves as food for thought rather than guidelines for practical activities.

As they do with the other genres of folkloric material, the writers of "Greetings" can merely hint at a particular belief, thus allowing the readers to draw connections from their common cultural backgrounds. As an example, in the 30 March 1939 column Trout is gently satirized as a monkey in the supposed dream of a reader. In his response Trout directs his contributor to seek more information from the monkey "the next time you eat too much spring



onions and mustard greens for supper." In order to make proper sense of such a statement, the "Greetings audience must fall back on the beliefs regarding food and its relationship to dreams. They may not find in their ken an exact reference to spring onions and mustard greens, but the correct connections can be drawn from variants such as, "If you eat too much meat for supper, you will have bad dreams."<sup>63</sup>

Indeed, variants to most of the beliefs abound. Some share only minor differences while others call for completely different actions. For example, one contributor, saying that her beliefs are "not superstition, but sound sense," states that she plants potatoes in the dark of the moon so they will not be green and bitter (30 January 1939). Other Kentucky beliefs concerning potato farming indicate that the crop should be planted on St. Patrick's Day or the sixth of April regardless of the moon's phase.<sup>64</sup> At least in the selected group of columns, nowhere does a reader expressly contradict the stated belief of an earlier contributor though surely some readers place great stock in opposing traditions. Either Trout's readers respect the beliefs of others or Trout himself may have chosen to avoid printing contradictory beliefs for the sake of argument. Much of the column's vitality is derived from Trout's ability to include letters which further his discussions, and like the Buck and Berry controversy, a debate over two unprovable but opposite beliefs could only come to a stalemate.

On a few occasions the light tone of "Greetings" gives way to

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<sup>63</sup>Thomas, Kentucky Superstitions, p. 149.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

the solemn treatment of belief in a supreme being. Though no particular religious faith is named, the references in the selected columns reflect the predominantly Christian background of Trout's distribution range. God holds a traditional position of creator (10 November 1967) and all-powerful guardian of the meek and the small (20 November 1967). One writer refers to the Christian symbol of the cross as he encourages the "Greetings" audience to be thankful for their troubles (4 October 1967), and Trout himself describes women as the "daughters of Eve" (15 December 1967). In two instances Trout actually prints prayers, one of thanks for getting safely through the winter season (21 March 1939) and another in honor of one of our national holidays Thanksgiving (23 November 1967).

Of course, the passing of Christmas is given attention, but the religious significance of the holiday is replaced by the belief in Santa Claus and the customs associated with the gift-giving, particularly the hanging of stockings on mantels and the placing of shoes on opposite sides of the fireplace according to the sex of the owner (23 December 1967). Other holiday customs appearing in the selected "Greetings" are the playing of tricks on Halloween and the above mentioned practice of giving thanks on Thanksgiving (25 December 1967, 23 November 1967).

Most of the customs in the column deal with nothing more than simple, day-to-day living, and most must be abstracted from their functional roles in the discussions. Trout's passing reference to mailing money to a cemetery caretaker reflects the custom of family graveyard maintenance (3 January 1939). In another case (6 January 1939) Trout credits his abiding by the rural custom of yelling

at the gate before knocking at the door for preventing his being shot.

Trout also identifies the breaking of custom or stereotype as a source of humor. He is amused when the "hillbilly steps out of character . . . to bid his audience "au revoir" at the close of a barn dance (10 January 1939), and his friends kid him about "wearing coats and pants that match, city like" (17 March 1939). One of Trout's humorous stories involves his friend's personal custom of asking for flounder in a particular restaurant which lists the fish on the menu but never has it. The comic element is created when the waitress finally brings out a plate of flounder and the custom is broken (12 January 1939).

Only one custom from the selected group of columns is so foreign to the cultural background of the "Greetings" audience that Trout must provide an explanation. In his final column of 30 December 1967, Trout uses the symbol "30" at the bottom of the piece. He explains that the symbol is traditionally used by American journalists as the signal for the end of a story, and he includes a short, legendary background for the custom. From the reader statements included by Trout in the column, "Greetings" might be considered somewhat of a custom itself with thousands of people habitually turning to it each day for entertainment and information. The object of that practice was abruptly cut off with Trout's retirement.



Legends and Anecdotes

As might be expected, legends and anecdotes are common to "Greetings." Other tale forms, however, are absent from the column, and a look at the selected "Greetings" reveals a very limited range of fictional prose used by Trout and his contributors. With little room for diversions, the numerous tales share many similarities, most of which are likely due to the nature of Trout's medium.

Considering the nature of the column, one is not surprised to find "Greetings" as a source of anecdotes. Stith Thompson writes of anecdotes in The Folktale,

But one gets the very definite impression, in surveying a large number of such anecdotes, that for most countries they belong to a semi-literary tradition, that they are likely to be preserved in cheap jestbooks even today, and that one is more likely to have learned his story by reading it than by hearing it.<sup>65</sup>

Trout goes so far as to preserve many of the "Greetings" anecdotes twice, once in the column and then again in his two inexpensive and popular volumes of Greetings From Old Kentucky. These latter works consist almost entirely of the humorous anecdotes which Trout considers to be the best from the daily feature. Surely, many readers receive their first exposure to a particular story either in the column or in Trout's two larger publications.

The appearance of a narrative follows the same basic format both in the early and late columns. No other genre in "Greetings" is given a similar introduction or key to indicate that a particular item is about to be used. Here, too, Trout or his informant will sometimes begin his anecdote without warning, but usually the writer will give

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<sup>65</sup>Stith Thompson, The Folktale (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1946), p. 216.

some indication of what is to follow. His lead might be as simple as one contributor's statement (21 October 1967), "Here is an old joke you might straighten up and use." In another style, the "teller" makes a general statement and follows it with an anecdote to prove his point. For example, one correspondent (19 January 1939) writes, "To an old-timer, you city folks do some curious things." He then goes on to describe an incident in which he is stopped for going the wrong way down a one-way street. His excuse to the police officer is that he is only going one way.

Still another introductory device calls for the writer to explain why he has sent a particular item to Trout. Often the contributor has been reminded of an anecdote by earlier discussions in the column. For example, an informant (14 October 1967) precedes his tale with the statement, "I was intrigued by your story of the hunter who sent his companion ahead to find out where the bear tracks led to, whilst he retraced the tracks to see from whence they had come. I was reminded. . . ." He then presents his story of a hunter who is able to escape from an angry bear because he, the hunter, has the advantage of dry ground. The word "reminded" appears frequently in the narrative introductions.

On one occasion (22 December 1967), Trout precedes a reader's tale with explanatory material "lest younger readers miss the point to the splendid story at hand." Realizing that a trip to the grist mill is no longer a common occurrence for most people, Trout notes that the miller was traditionally paid with a percentage of the grain rather than with money. With this in mind, the young "Greetings" reader can understand the tale of the miller who tolled the wealthy farmer heavily

because he could afford it and the poor farmer heavily so that he would stay poor. The vast majority of narrative items in the column are self-explanatory, however, and need no elaborate introduction.

Once the prefatory remarks have been made, the format of the anecdotes in "Greetings" quickly serves to establish the location of the incident and the identity of the characters. This is usually accomplished in the first sentence, and the action is carried on for an average of two paragraphs before reaching a climax. The tale commonly concludes with a humorous statement by one of the characters in response to earlier action.

The following example, taken from the 21 October 1967 "Greetings," is typical of the tale format of the column:

"Judge Charles B. Bratcher's story about his Uncle Dick Harper and the cussin', chawin', marble-playing boys," writes Ilden Edwards, Cromwell, "reminded me of the old Ohio County story about the boys at Rosine. It seems a preacher on his way to the depot at Rosin came upon these boys as they were using ugly language and playing marbles.

"When the good brother rebuked them for their ugly talk, one of them asked him what business it was of his. 'I am a minister of the gospel,' he replied, 'and I have been on the road to heaven for 40 years.' The boy replied: 'Well, if you have been on the road to heaven 40 years and haven't got any further than Rosine, you'd better turn around and go back!'"

A squelching retort if I ever saw one, Mr. Edwards, and thank you.

As often as not, Trout makes no concluding comment and abruptly moves on to another subject.

Many of the recurring features of the "Greetings" anecdotes are brought about by the nature of the column itself. Trout usually limits the space for a tale to no more than one-third of the column, thus long tales with many motifs are excluded. Trout and his correspondents use several terms to describe their material. These include: tale, tall tale, yarn, joke, anecdote, and story. The latter of these



is by far the most frequently used, but what actually appear in the column are humorous anecdotes. These occasionally take on a legendary feature and deal with a character known throughout some small locale. For example, Trout includes anecdotes about newspapermen, preachers, and minor politicians known to a small portion of the "Greetings" audience. Legendary figures of wide renown receive no mention in the selected columns, however, though they may be used in the years between 1939 and 1967.

In keeping with the other elements of the column, the printed anecdotes convey a light, humorous tone palatable to the entire audience. One cannot determine whether or not Trout received any forms of the folktale other than the humorous anecdote, but the more complex tales could not have delivered the quick entertainment Trout seeks to provide. Therefore, serious, dramatic, and multi-motif tales seldom appear in "Greetings."

While being humorous, the column anecdotes are also almost all conceivable, that is, the events described could actually have happened. Ghosts, fairies, and the like never make it into the column, and the supernatural is ignored. Indeed, other variants of the Tolling Miller tale given above have the Devil dictate to the miller how much each customer will be charged (X215). This supernatural element has been deleted from the "Greetings" version.

A degree of temporary credibility is added to a few of the "taller" tales by telling them in the first person. One contributor (8 March 1939) does an interesting turnabout by first scoffing at exaggerations and then proceeding to reel in the audience with one of his own:

There is a cliff hereabouts where 'tis said if a man fall over he would starve to death before he hit the ground. This is a slight exaggeration, of course; but the following incident actually happened:

As several of us were peering over the edge of this cliff, an old gentleman was so awed his false teeth dropped out of his gaping jaws into the abyss. Doc Goebel Newsome set out at once for a store a quarter of a mile away. Here he telephoned a lady living at the foot of the cliff, whereupon the good woman rushed out to the foot of the cliff and caught the teeth in her apron.

The only damage done was to Doc Newsome, who stumped his toe rushing to the telephone.

Despite the establishment of a Tall Tales Club early in the column, the majority of anecdotes derive their humor from human nature, unpredictable but believable, rather than from exaggerations.

Another aid to the narrative credibility results from the contemporary settings used in most of the "Greetings" tales. Rarely does the reader need venture to an obscure place or time. One exception, both in terms of setting and credibility, is the tale of an Irish countess whose estate is plagued by crows (27 February 1939). One gentleman endeavors to solve her problem by painting the trees with paste and inviting hunters to fire at the roosting crows. At the first shots, however, the startled birds attempt to fly away and finally pull the trees out of the ground. More typical is the Clinton, Kentucky, tale of the two boys waiting to see the passage of the railroad's fastest train through that town (11 December 1967). The railroad had put up ropes to prevent bystanders from being sucked under the train, but the two youngsters had moved past the ropes for a better view. As Trout tells it, "Looking up the track, one of them yelled: 'Here she comes!' And, in about the same breath, the other little boy jerked his head down the track and yelled: 'Yonder she goes!'" Of course, an aid to the transmission of such anecdotes is their adaptability to many

locations. At least in the selected columns, Trout did not print the same story twice, but it is possible that he received the same tale from more than one place. One is not surprised to find, however, that most of the "Greetings" anecdotes have supposedly traceable characters and a local, if not specific, location.

Violence plays practically no role in the selected column tales, and naturally, gruesome stories are excluded from the feature. The lone anecdote with an element of strong violence is told by Trout himself (25 March 1939):

A Kentucky father, so the story goes, was walking down the road with his son. He heard a movement in the bushes back of him, whirled and saw an enemy about to draw a bead on his back. The father fired, but his foe didn't fall. The puzzled sire turned to his boy and said:

"Son, go back thar and push him over; he must be cotched on something."

This story is also unique in that it contains one of the few mentions of death in the selected columns.

Typical in all respects of the column, blacks play only a minor part in the "Greetings" narratives. Their brief portrayals place them in a lower station than most of the white characters. The following example from the 16 February 1939 column illustrates this point:

Uncle Rollie, an old Negro preacher, worked for us down there. But he fell from grace once and got jailed for bootlegging. Along about Christmas one year, Uncle Rollie came to work a little earlier and stayed a little later. His pile of kindling got higher and higher.

One day Uncle Rollie said, "Missus, ain't it gettin' around Christmas?"

"Not long now," I replied. "What would you like for a present, a Bible or a bottle of whisky?"

Uncle Rollie looked at the ground and scratched his head. "Well, it's this way, Missus," he replied, "I'se gettin' old and can't see to read, but my taste ain't changed none."

Interestingly enough, no tales with black characters are used in the 1967 group of columns, possibly due to the civil rights awareness



promoted during that decade.

Though women are active contributors to the column, their role in the "Greetings" anecdotes is exceedingly small. Two tales use wives in their humor, but the women never actually appear. The first of these stories (24 October 1967) involves a horse trader who would like to trade his wife because he knows that he would be getting the better end of the deal. The second (18 November 1967) concerns a farmer who seeks to be excused from jury duty due to his wife's illness. When asked about her malady, the farmer replies that he is not sure what she has, but the doctor told him she suffers from something like worms. In only one tale from the selected columns (7 January 1939) does a woman deliver the punch line, but her position in life is still clearly defined:

Back in the days of prohibition, Mr. Ransdell says, the famed hospitality of Eastern Kentuckians wasn't extended to U. S. Revenuers. So, when Eb and his good wife spied a stranger walking up the path one morning, the head of the house grabbed his rifle and made for the bushes.

The obedient wife met the stranger at the door.

"Are you a Government man?" she asked.

"Yes, madam," he replied

"What's your business?"

"I'm the census taker," he replied.

The good woman then turned toward the mountainside, cupped a hand to her mouth, and shouted:

"Come on down, Eb; it ain't nobody."

The male is described as "the head of the house," and the "good wife" is also the "obedient wife." In most of the tales, however, women are not even mentioned.

The anecdote is the only genre for which members of the "Greetings" audience refrain from using the group memory process to reconstruct a particular item. Trout's correspondents frequently ask for a recipe or a song stanza, but nowhere in the selected columns do they make a request for a tale. Whereas other material might be treated analytically, the

fictional narratives all share a functional existence in Trout's work, and though notable, the phenomenon is inexplicable to this researcher.

In seeking out the traditional heritage of the "Greetings" anecdotes, one quickly realizes that the column may be one of the few written records for many of these tales. Works of Kentucky collectors such as Marie Campbell and Leonard Roberts provide little help in determining the traditional backgrounds of Trout's stories because these collections center more on the multi-motif, fantastical folktales. In addition, the majority of tale types and motifs in "Greetings" fail to appear specifically in the motif and type indexes of Baughman or Aarne and Thompson. One must finally look to internal evidence within the columns as a key to the traditional nature of the anecdotes.

One of the wildest tales from the column, and most traceable through previous scholarship, is told as a true occurrence said to have taken place between the Kentucky towns of Glasgow and Burkesville (23 March 1939). Trout's correspondent reports that his wagon was attacked by a hoopsnake (B765.1) which struck the wagon tongue. As a result of the bite, the tongue swelled amazingly and was eventually cut into a great amount of lumber (X1205.1). The "Greetings" version goes on to have the lumber shrink to splinters when the madstone (D1515.4.2), a traditional cure for snake poison, is applied to it.

Another, more believable anecdote with a previously collected motif involves tricksters who make up a lie in order to catch a liar. Their scheme results in the liar outdoing them (X909.2). In the "Greetings" tale (29 March 1939) the tricksters tell their supposed victim that the mill dam burnt down the previous night, and the victim

replies that he figured something had happened when he saw all the fish swimming by with burnt fins.

Most of the characters in the "Greetings" anecdotes have proper names and some believable relationship to the teller, but traditional, unnamed figures also appear in the column. Three tales key in on the blundering activities of the traditional numskull, identified in "Greetings" as the moron. In the first of these (19 October 1967), two morons find great luck in a particular fishing spot. So that they will know where to come next time, one moron puts a mark on the side of the boat, but the other moron complains that they might not get the same boat when they return (Type 1278A). The second numskull tale (19 October 1967) involves one moron attempting to light matches on a damp day. He discards the ones which fail to light, and when one finally ignites, he considers it a good one and puts it back in the box. The third moron tale (27 November 1967) concerns two morons painting a house. The moron on the ground yells to the one on the ladder, "George, take a good hold on the brush for I'm going to move the ladder." Neither of these last two stories have been listed as tale types in the important indices, but both make use of traditional characters around whom numerous anecdotes have been created.

Yet even without type and motif analysis, evidence exists in the columns which would identify the traditional nature of many of the tales. For instance, in the preceeding remarks to the second moron tale (19 October 1967) Trout writes, "I am willing to join you in a revival of some of the old moron jokes that swept the country about the time every wall fit for scrawling proclaimed: 'Kilroy was here.'" Trout not only indicates the existence of a series of such anecdotes but also gives



clues for ascribing a date to their popularity in the United States. More commonly, the evidence is less informative and only displays a consideration by Trout or his correspondent that a particular item is an old story or just simply a story. Some informants include their source for a tale, and on one occasion (13 March 1939) Trout even identifies a piece as a new tale (at least to his or his source's experience): "Friends, here's a good one. It came out of the Federal Building in Louisville and is supposed to be hot off the griddle." Neither Trout nor his correspondents would stand to gain anything from giving false information concerning the material, and their remarks can accurately serve as the first step toward analyzing the tales.

#### Author-Title Jokes

The minor genre of author-title jokes appears in the opening days of "Greetings" and after limited use disappears from the selected columns. This form of non-narrative joking draws upon the relationship between the author's name and the title of the work which he has produced. In its usual form outside of the column, the author-title joke involves fictitious names or initials for both the author and the literary piece. As in the humorous riddle, neither of the joke's binary elements is amusing in itself; the humor results from the combination of the author's name taken literally and the title of his work. The humor is often obscene.<sup>66</sup>

Of course, none of the author-title jokes in "Greetings" are obscene, and all use Trout's name and a possible title for his column rather than fictitious names. The five readers who contribute author-title jokes use just the genre form instead of traditional jokes. Their

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<sup>66</sup>Charles Clay Doyle, "Title-Author Jokes, New and Long Ago," Journal of American Folklore 86 (March 1973):52.

examples are presented below with the form and punctuation Trout gives them in the column:

"Splashes by A. Trout"<sup>67</sup>

All 'an M. 'ore  
by  
Trout<sup>68</sup>

Tales and Tackle  
from  
A. M.(ountain) Trout<sup>69</sup>

"Nibbles From A. M-innow Trout"<sup>70</sup>

"Out of Season by A. Trout"<sup>71</sup>

By the column of 23 January 1939, the novelty of Trout's name apparently wears off, and nowhere else in the selected "Greetings" does this form appear.

#### Riddles

Though riddles would seem to fit easily into the "Greetings" process, they appear rarely in the selected columns. In a few instances readers make use of a structurally informal riddle form, the wisdom question, to express their knowledge of the rural life style discussed by Trout and his contributors. Unlike the more common riddle forms, the wisdom question offers no clue to the answer in the question itself, and the correct response comes either from esoteric knowledge or a previously learned response.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Trout, "Greetings," 5 January 1939.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 9 January 1939.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 10 January 1939.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 23 January 1939.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Roger D. Abrahams and Alan Dundes, "Riddles," in Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction, ed. Richard Dorson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 137.

The first example is printed in the 27 January 1939 column when a reader tests Trout's rural knowledge with the question, "How many wheels does a buggy have?" Trout responds, "Ah, my friend, you can't catch me on that one. A buggy has five wheels." Trout attributes his awareness of such exoteric information to his boyhood on a farm. Three more wisdom questions on similar topics are printed in the early columns, but Trout gives no answers since these are directed to two earlier contributors. No riddles in any form are found in the 1967 group of "Greetings."

Also of note to the folklorist are the three, traditional logic problems appearing in the column. The first two incorporate an unanswerable question form and are used by Trout to comment on a particular situation. When a reader prods Trout to settle the oxen name controversy (15 March 1939), Trout gives his correspondent this problem to solve: "How many angels can stand on the point of a needle?" Like the oxen name controversy, there is no solution to the question. In a similar manner Trout uses the question "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" to comment on government responsibility for a growing number of weapons (1 March 1939).

In the 18 March 1939 "Greetings" Trout paraphrases the final logic problem from a reader's poem: "If eyes do not see a desk in the corner, nor ears hear a phone ringing on the desk, the desk and phone don't exist." The problem is no longer in question form, but the statement still calls for some factual resolution. Though all three of these items were brought to this writer's attention through American teenagers, this material is akin to the problems, or koans, traditionally



used in the Zen religion to reach a higher state of mind.<sup>73</sup>

### Song Lyrics and Poetry

No other genre reflects the interchange and stimulus-response reaction between the readers of "Greetings" as well as song lyrics and poetry. One verse leads to another as the correspondents recall lines from church services, dances, singing schools, and old song books. When existing stanzas fail to provide the desired comment, readers create their own verses, many of which embrace the traditional patterns of rhyme and meter and use subject matter common to the "Greetings" experience. In varying degrees of folkloric quality, the contributing audience produces sixty examples of verse in the selected columns as memories are rehashed and strides are made toward a more artistic form of expression.

The description of this material as both lyric and poetry at one time results from Trout's own treatment of it in the column. He opens the door for poetic contributions in the 9 January 1939 "Greetings" by including his own example of what he refers to as "West Tennessee poetry":

The raccoon's got a bush tail,  
The possum's tail am bare;  
The rabbit's got no tail at all,  
But just a bunch of hair.

Trout makes no claim to authorship for the piece, and his placement of the verse in quotation marks would indicate that he takes no such credit. Further research reveals that variants of the stanza have been collected throughout the South as part of the song "Boil Dem Cabbage Down," yet

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<sup>73</sup>Isshu Miura and Ruth Fuller Sasaki, The Zen Koan (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965), p. xi.

nothing from Trout's use of the stanza would indicate that music accompanies the text.<sup>74</sup>

Due to the nature of his medium, Trout can freely use the terms "poetry," "lyric," and "verse" to tag the non-prose items in "Greetings." He often simply refers to a piece as a "four-liner." The space and print requirements of the column prevent the inclusion of a musical notation for every item which has one, thus songs are indeed reduced to poetry for the unfamiliar reader. Much of the material shown through research to have a musical background is lumped under one of the vague terms mentioned above, and for some of it one can only speculate as to its true background.

Most often dealt with by the folklorist are those stanzas with identifiable musical backgrounds and traditional roots. Scattered representatively throughout the selected group of columns, these pieces generally appear as single verses of four lines each with a simple rhyme scheme and two or four beats to the line:

Way down yonder, not far off,  
Bull dog died with whoopin cough;  
Another's sick, I spec he'll die.  
Gray cat kicked out black cat's eye.<sup>75</sup>

Typically, little or no background information accompanies the song lyrics and poetry in "Greetings" though some of the collections used in tracing these pieces give no more details than does Trout. In his usual style Trout includes the name of his contributor, his general address, and occasionally a brief statement by the contributor about the material. In

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<sup>74</sup>Dorothy Scarborough, On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs (Hatboro, Pa.: Folklore Associates, 1963), pp. 168-70.

<sup>75</sup>Trout, "Greetings," 6 March 1939.

the case of the above stanza, no comment is included with the piece, but a later reader notes on 11 March 1939 hearing the following variant in an 1880s talent show:

Way down yonder, not far off,  
Bull dog died with whoopin cough;  
Another's sick, I spec he'll die.  
The black cat scratched out the yellow cat's eyes.

Rarely does Trout include a title with the verses he uses in the column, and few songs are printed in their entirety in just one column. Exceptions to this are "Johnson's Old Gray Mule" (11 October 1967) and "Thompson's Mule" (8 December 1967).

As in the other folklore genres found in "Greetings," various examples of song lyrics and poetry are contributed out of an audience reaction to an earlier piece. For instance, Trout's first example about the raccoon's bushy tail eventually leads to a whole series of stanzas describing the exploits of the raccoon and the opossum:

"Possum he's a-sawin wood,  
Raccoon he's a-haulin;  
Houn dog a-settin on a log,  
Killin hisself a-bawlin."<sup>76</sup>

"Possum up a 'simon tree,  
Raccoon on de ground;  
Raccoon say you possum you  
Shake dem 'simmons down."<sup>77</sup>

"Raccoon he's a-pullin corn,  
Possum he's a-haulin  
My ole dog's a-mindin the gap,  
Killin hisself a-bawlin."<sup>78</sup>

"Raccoon up a gum stump,  
Possum in the holler;  
Purty little gal at our house,  
Fat as she can waller."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 20 February 1939.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 27 February 1939.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 2 March 1939.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 14 March 1939.



"Raccoon's in the cypress swamp,  
 Possum's in the hills;  
 Rabbit's in my cabbage patch,  
 A-manufacturin pills."<sup>80</sup>

Trout describes each stanza as either poetry or verse, and there is no indication in the column that music might be involved. Further research shows that the first, second, and fourth stanzas have been collected as song elements under three different titles, and the similarities between these and the other two verses would indicate that they also share the same musical heritage.<sup>81</sup>

Each of the above stanzas is contributed by a different reader on a separate date. Though one theme runs through the entire set, no one song appears in the common folksong collections with all five of the stanzas. The "Greetings" audience may have been familiar with just such a song, but it is more likely that verses of this nature were thrown into numerous dance tunes. Indeed, other, shorter series show up with the same basic meter and rhyme scheme and a similar tone:

"The old hen cackled,  
 She cackled in the branch.  
 The old sow squealed,  
 And the little pig danced."<sup>82</sup>

"The old hen cackled,  
 She cackled in the lot;  
 The next time she cackled,  
 She cackled in the pot."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 23 March 1939.

<sup>81</sup>Newman Ivey White, gen. ed., The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore, 7 vols. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1952), vol 3: Folk Songs From North Carolina, edited by Henry M. Belden and Arthur Palmer Hudson, pp. 206-209; Vance Randolph, Ozark Folksongs, 4 vols. (Columbia, Mo.: State Historical Society of Missouri, 1948) 2:361.

<sup>82</sup>Trout, "Greetings," 11 March 1939.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 16 March 1939.

Though many of these have probably enjoyed a wider popularity in previous years some are still in use today. The following is still sung among string band revivalists such as the Highwoods String Band under the title "Who Broke the Lock?":

"'You haven't laid an egg  
In God knows when,'  
Said the old red rooster  
To the little brown hen."<sup>84</sup>

"Said the little brown hen  
To the old red rooster,  
You don't come around  
As often as you yooster."<sup>85</sup>

Further use of "Greetings" as a collection of folklore may reveal that the column is the only written record for some of these pieces.

Not surprisingly, some of the contributors of song lyrics follow Trout's description of musically related material as poetry. One correspondent (10 March 1939) speaks of Trout's "great revival of poetry verses" before adding his stanza:

My old master promised me,  
When he died he'd set me free;  
He lived so long his head got bold  
And got out the notion of dying at all.

Of course, he might be unaware of the musical heritage of the piece,<sup>86</sup> but it is equally possible that he is influenced by Trout's earlier terms. Another reader (11 March 1939) precedes his stanza with the statement, "Here goes my verse of poetry before somebody beats me to it," implying a communal awareness of the piece but giving no indication as to where this familiarity might have come from. Such brief information, combined with the diverse nature of existing, lyric folksong

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 25 March 1939.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 29 March 1939.

<sup>86</sup>White, Brown Collection, 3:502-03.

collections, makes it difficult for later researchers.

Luckily, a few of the "Greetings" contributors do give a small amount of background information with their donations. One reader writes (29 March 1939), "The folks sang these words to the tune of 'Turkey In the Straw':

There was an old hen,  
An' she had a wooden foot;  
She layed all her eggs  
On a mulberry root.  
She layed more eggs  
Than any hen on the farm  
An' another little drink  
Won't do us any harm.

Another contributor (1 November 1967), inspired by an earlier variant of the familiar "Old Dan Tucker" (7 October 1967), recounts his father singing a "Civil War dance-song":

I'm Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines,  
I'm a Captain in the Army;  
I serenade the ladies to the left,  
And circle to the girl behind me.

When I left home my mammy she cried,  
My mammy she cried, my mammy she cried;  
When I left home my mammy she cried,  
And that's the style of the Army.

The last verse to "Captain Jinks" is sent in by a final reader (22 November 1967) who gives her source as an old songbook rather than her own memory.

One of the more complete handlings of a song lyric piece occurs in the 11 October 1967 "Greetings" when Clayton "Pappy" McMichen, an early, country radio star, sends in the entire lyrics to "Johnson's Old Gray Mule." Moved to write after reading earlier column debates about the song, McMichen claims that he wrote the piece in 1920 and recorded it with Riley Puckett, another early star. Like many other commercial country songs, McMichen's lyrics contain more than a few similarities



with those of songs collected elsewhere, notably, "Johnson's Mule" in The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore, yet Trout recognizes McMichen as the final source for this particular song.

As in the other folklore genres from "Greetings," the song lyrics and poetry sometime receive nothing more than a passing reference rather than a complete, stanza printing. An example is the single, religious line "How firm a foundation, the house of the Lord . . ." mentioned in a reader's description of Alaskan life (19 December 1967). Another correspondent (13 December 1967) narrates the plot of "The Preacher and the Bear" and gives only the last line "O Lord, help me; but if you can't help me, please don't help that bear!" In most cases, however, Trout prints at least one complete stanza.

Several generalizations can be made concerning the musically-related items in the selected group of columns. The tone is most often light-hearted and humorous, and much of the material deals with animals. The subject matter is given in a straightforward presentation which does not require the audience to grasp for obscure, poetic illusions. Only one reference is made to a serious, religious piece. There are no Child ballads in the column, and musical genres such as jazz or bluegrass receive no mention. Titles are rarely given for the items, and background information is sparse. A description of the original context and function of a particular song is unusual, possibly because few songs are reproduced completely in one place. The majority of stanzas share a similar, simple meter and rhyme scheme and mirror the rural viewpoint shown in the other folkloric material from the column.

Also of interest to the literary folklorist are the numerous examples of original poetry sent in by the "Greetings" audience. Though

these are not actually traditional, they sometimes borrow the subjects and styles found in the truly traditional pieces. The following item (24 March 1939), obviously written in response to Trout's discussions of oxen names, incorporates a structure, rhyme scheme, and tone similar to those of the song lyrics given above:

There lived a Buck and Berry writer,  
By the name of Allan Trout;  
He gave his ox some apple cider,  
And the ox kicked him out.

Trout's vague descriptions usually provide no help in distinguishing the original material from the traditional material, and the researcher must follow Dorson's advice to look for internal evidence.

As far as "Greetings" is concerned, original items differ from traditional ones in that the former are usually longer and are titled. The original stanzas also seem to be a bit more sentimental. Take, for example, the following piece entitled "Spring's Begun" (21 March 1939):

Johnson grass a-growin high,  
Cutworms a-chewin the wheat;  
Hawbills eatin up the rye,  
Skippers in the meat.

Beetles a-cuttin down the beans,  
Kids all sick with croup,  
Side meat's all stewed with greens,  
Chickens dead with roup.

Hogs got cholera, cows all bloated,  
Ole houn dog the mange has got;  
Press meat's all batter coated,  
Tough mutton roast now in the pot.

Ole Jed Hawkins dead with the colic,  
Ground hog's come out to sun;  
Pappy sheds his shoes to frolic,  
Pigs a-squealin, spring's begun.

Despite the suspected originality of the poem, several elements found in the traditional stanzas presented earlier are incorporated into this work. Most obvious are the similar rhyme schemes and four line stanzas.

The rhyme pattern of "colic" and "frolic" appears in a definitely traditional piece in the column only ten days earlier. The poem above keeps the traditional rural outlook and seeks to capture the nonsensical tone of the dance tune lyrics in the last verse. Even the spelling is apparently altered to coincide with some of the traditional lyrics.

Of course, most of the column's original poetry, which appears in the 1967 group of "Greetings," is more contemporary in terms of style and content than the example given above. Trout even allows readers to include the works of published poets. On one such occasion it is the contributor's remarks rather than her sample of poetry which is of interest to the folklorist (30 October 1967). She writes, "This little poem by Ella Wheeler Wilcox is my favorite as it was the favorite of my late mother, and my grandmother before her." Though the poem may not be traditional, the act of choosing it as a favorite seems to be a family custom.

Two other individual items can also be placed under the genre of song lyrics and poetry as well as in minor genres of their own. The first of these is the well-known limerick:

There was an old man of Nantucket  
 Who kept all his cash in a bucket;  
     But his daughter named Nan  
     Ran away with a man,  
 And as for the bucket, Nan tuck it.

Trout refers to the piece as "the granddaddy of all limericks" (7 December 1967), and its appearance in the column would likely have sparked an entire series of limericks had it not come so close to Trout's retirement. Second is a nursery rhyme parody printed in the 22 March 1939 column:



Old Mother Hubbard  
 Went to the cubbard  
 To get a hamburger on rye;  
 Provisions were skimpy  
 Because Popeye and Winpy  
 Had been there on the sly.

The success of this latter piece depends upon a group awareness of both traditional and popular material.

#### Games

Understandably, traditional games receive little attention in the selected "Greetings," and this trend probably continues throughout the entire feature. Trout's readership was for the most part past the age of taking part in the same recreation they enjoyed as children. Yet the memories persist, and on one occasion in the first and last months of the column Trout unites the past with the present on the subject of games.

Typical of the "Greetings" process, the discussion (6 October 1967) begins with a reader's question followed by information from Trout and other readers. Trout's short statement indicates his understanding of the traditional boundaries within which games function, "Folk games do disappear, I suppose. . . . But games whose rules pass by word of mouth, as well as example, from generation to generation are very slow to die out." As proof of this, Trout recalls that a reader could remember only the line, "Bum, bum, bum, here I come!," from an old game and needed help in remembering the rules and the remainder of the rhyme. Trout fills these holes by printing the entire rhyme and instructions on playing the game as sent in by a non-typical, fifteen year old reader who has played the game in recent times.

The name of this particular game is never given in the column,

but research reveals a citation of the game in Brian Sutton-Smith's The Folkgames of Children under the name "Trades."<sup>87</sup> As described by both Sutton-Smith and Trout's informant, the game is played by two teams, one of which acts out a particular occupation in response to a challenge within the rhyme. After guessing the occupation portrayed, the non-acting team attempts to tag fleeing members of the acting team. According to Brunvand's classification of games, Trades is both a physical action game, because of the chasing involved, and a dramatic game, because of the acting out of the occupation.<sup>88</sup>

Trout makes reference to two other games in that same column which also qualify as physical action games. These are "Leapfrog" and "Crack the Whip."<sup>89</sup> The first involves one person jumping over another, and the second is played by a line of people running while holding hands. Whereas Trout incorporates an analytical approach to Trades, he makes only a passing reference to "Leapfrog" and "Crack the Whip," giving no details on rules for playing these games. Once again he uses folk items functionally to spark memories before undertaking the explanation of Trades.

The three examples given above are the only games appearing in the selected "Greetings," but another form of what Brunvand calls "traditional active recreation" is given brief attention by a contributor (7 February 1939). This is the "Snipe Hunt." This form of play differs

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<sup>87</sup>Brian Sutton-Smith, The Folkgames of Children (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), p. 73.

<sup>88</sup>Brunvand, Study of Folklore, p. 220.

<sup>89</sup>"Leapfrog" is described in Sutton-Smith's Folkgames of Children, p. 281; and "Crack the Whip" is listed under the name "Chain Swing" in Iona Opie and Peter Opie, Children's Games in Street and Playground (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 235.

from true games because there are no set rules. Cited by Brunvand as "one of the most venerable American pranks," the "Snipe Hunt" involves an unsuspecting player being left alone to catch the snipe supposedly driven to him by the other hunters. These other hunters, however, simply return home, leaving the victim to sit alone until he figures out that he has been tricked.<sup>90</sup> The success of the "Snipe Hunt" depends upon the victim's having never heard of or been on one, yet the success of the simple reference to this activity in "Greetings" relies upon the reader's knowledge of the prank. Neither Trout nor his contributor lets on that the "Snipe Hunt" is anything more than serious sport, but the knowledgeable reader cannot miss the hidden meaning. As previously noted, the folklore in the column feeds on the common cultural background of Trout's readership.

#### "Greetings" and Folklife

Despite the large amount of folklore incorporated into Allan Trout's column, a serious drawback arises when one attempts to view "Greetings" as a folklife collection. By the nature of his medium, Trout has totally restricted himself to verbal material, and even this is reduced from its full potential since reading does not convey the rhythms and accents of speaking. The problem has already presented itself in the previous discussion of lyric-poetry, where the musical tones which make the words work can in no way be experienced. Yet perhaps the greatest loses in terms of folklife in "Greetings" are those traditions which revolve around skills other than speaking.

Throughout the selected columns readers attempt to describe

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<sup>90</sup>Brunvand, Study of Folklore, pp. 233-34.



practices which are or once were a part of their lives, but their words can only hint at the actual experience of doing. Naturally, many of these practices have to do with a rural life style which undergoes dramatic changes during the "Greetings" years. In the early months of the column, the men reminisce about the art of handling a team of oxen. From these discussions one can begin to identify certain agricultural traditions such as the position of the lead ox and the methods for training a team, but the "Greetings" record is inadequate. The modern folklorist would go beyond the brief information in "Greetings" by taking detailed interviews, seeking the material objects used, and recording the processes on film. Even an acceptable oral description could be produced, but Trout's column lacks the depth for serving as a folklife study on its own. Again, one must keep in mind that Trout's purpose is primarily entertainment, and lengthy discussions on one topic would likely defeat that goal.

Even though certain areas, such as material culture, lack even a minimum of coverage in "Greetings," the feature still has value for the folklife researcher. With proper indexing the column can function as an initial source of ideas to be tracked down in later research. For instance, later informants for a study of ox handling techniques could be confronted with the various views expressed by the members of Trout's Buck and Berry Club. The numerous memorates in the column are too short to be sufficient in themselves, but they each provide some clue to an occupation, social activity, etc., that is a part of the folklife tradition.

"Greetings" can also help fill in the folklife picture as a record of public attitudes for the years during which the column ran and,

to some extent, for the years prior to the column during which the contributors were raised. Admittedly, the outlook is dominated by Trout's guidance of the column, but the popularity of "Greetings" indicates that the audience embraces similar ideals. In the midst of pages of urban news, Trout and his contributors display a distinct pride in having once depended on skills like that of making soap. The readers find value in the old ways and are eager to talk about them. In such talk they not only present their traditions but also the values themselves.

Unfortunately, a discussion of "Greetings" and folklife does little to dispel the concept that folklore deals only with the old and the rural. Yet to Trout and his audience that is exactly what folklore means, and this itself is an important attitude to be mentioned in any folklife study of the people with whom Trout dealt. Indeed, that concept changed little from 1939 to 1967, the years during which "Greetings" ran.

In its present state "Greetings" is hardly a worthwhile research tool for the folklorist. As shown by this study, the traditional material does exist in the column, but the researcher finds himself confronted with a folklife collage of numerous genres without index or order. The sheer bulk of the almost nine thousand columns is more than enough to deter one from conducting a blind search for materials, and until proper indexing is added to Trout's work, "Greetings" will likely lie unused as it has for the past eight years.

### CHAPTER III

#### TROUT AS COLLECTOR, TRANSMITTER, AND POPULARIZER

Difficulty arises when one tries to define Allan Trout's unique role in the field of Kentucky folklore. Due to a lack of use and attention, the true value of the almost nine thousand columns still remains undetermined eight years after Trout's move to assure the collection's safekeeping and availability to the student of tradition. Trout obviously saw an importance to "Greetings" reaching beyond the journalistic acclaims achieved by it and somewhere within the many unanswerable questions concerning his work there lies a hazy picture of Allan Trout as a collector, transmitter, and popularizer of folklore. Trout's position as a collector can be accurately judged by looking at the collection itself, but a statement concerning the passage of items from the collection back into the stream of tradition requires a certain amount of speculation.

Concerning Allan Trout, the collector, an important concept is lodged in Trout's own image of himself and his position. As quoted earlier in this study, Trout pictured himself as a preserver of a passing heritage, a gatherer of information ignored by the historian. He referred to his donation to the Kentucky Museum as a collection and stressed the complete volumes of "Greetings" from a folkloric viewpoint as well as a journalistic one. Rightfully so, Trout felt himself to be first a journalist and second a collector of folklore. Certainly he was aware



that he was not a folklorist in the academic sense of the word, but he still did not bother to dispel at least one reader's opinion of him as the "foremost authority" on the subject.

Trout's collecting techniques served the column's purposes well, but they left several holes for scholarly applications of the material. Trout was not a field collector, yet from his own life he was thoroughly familiar with the cultural environment from which the material grew. As shown in Chapter Two, the items printed in "Greetings" were for the most part passed to Trout through the mail. It appears in most cases that he did not even need to ask for contributions, such was the eagerness of his readers to take part in the discussions. When he did solicit material, he did so in search of information he could not provide, usually in response to another reader's inquiry.

Once receiving the reader contributions, Trout apparently made few changes in the letters before printing them. Most printed pieces were direct quotations placed within quotation marks while a few seemed to be paraphrased. Of the four "Greetings" contributors contacted by this researcher,<sup>91</sup> all responded that Trout made no alterations to the material he printed from them, but from the brevity of the printed statements, Trout likely deleted some of the pleasantries which go along with letter writing. Indeed, one writer stated that Trout printed only "the most important part" of her letter while another said that Trout included most of hers. In all four cases however, Trout did not alter the grammar or wording of the portions he used in the column. According

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<sup>91</sup>An attempt was made to contact through the mail eight readers whose complete addresses were given in the selected columns of 1967. Trout included the complete addresses of those readers who wished to have something sent to them but only gave the name and town of other contributors. Four readers responded, but the remaining letters were returned undeliverable.

to his former contributors, Trout held the letters from three days to three weeks before working them into the column though this seems to conflict with a 28 September 1958 advertisement for Trout in which he claims to stay fifty columns ahead of schedule. Trout may have kept a surplus of general columns on file to be used in cases in which he was unable to write a response to the current "Greetings" discussion, but this can only be assumed.

As opposed to a collector in the field, Trout worked with too many contributors to develop any type of individual relationship with all of his informants. Two former contributors contacted here heard from Trout after writing to him. In one case the reader was making a request for a particular item (license plates), a common practice in "Greetings," and Trout sought a written verification that this individual had indeed written the letter, possibly to avoid the column's being used as a medium for practical jokes. Trout notified the other contributor of the date her letter would appear in the column, but apparently this was not his common practice. It is conceivable that Trout maintained contact with informants whose material particularly interested him, but for the most part Trout spoke to his contributors through the column. (Indeed, the mailing costs for acknowledging the receipt of each reader's letter would have been prohibitive.)

Allan Trout's approach to collecting was eclectic not only as to genre, as witnessed in Chapter Two, but also as to geography and age. Trout included information from all over the country, though it usually filtered through a Kentucky reader before reaching the column. He incorporated material from young informants as well as the elderly. Most readers probably did not give their age unless they recognized it to be

outside of the adult norm of the audience. Likewise, Trout printed modern material as well as items which only a few of his readers would recall. Not surprisingly, the column was often used by readers who could not remember something from their past and who sought the aid of the group memory of the "Greetings" audience.

The limitations imposed on Trout's collecting came from the nature of the medium he used, and thus from the collection itself. As dictated by column space, Trout could print approximately the same amount every day, but surely this was not enough room to include all of the material sent to him. The newspaper medium also excluded the obscene. Recognizing this limitation, one reader (24 March 1939) pretended to forget a stanza, the final line of which was obscene, and asked Trout for help. Of course, Trout, knowing the stanza, could not print the final line and said so. Yet by giving as much as he did, Trout created a very esoteric performance situation for those already familiar with the stanza without actually using the taboo item. In the selected columns this was as close as Trout came to employing material with a wide-scale offensive potential to the audience. We cannot determine how much more of this type item Trout "collected" but did not use.

The nature of the newspaper medium also created another limitation in that all of the "Greetings" material was by necessity verbal. In dealing with music, Trout could print only the words to the songs, thus requiring the reader to recall, if possible, the melody on his own. In the selected columns no mention by title was made of any traditional tunes which have no words to go with them. Neither did Trout make use of other visual aids such as diagrams and pictures though some might have been sent in by readers. Only one picture appeared in the selected



columns, this of a ground hog to draw attention to Trout's Ground Hog Day campaign. As shown by many of the items in the Trout collection, Trout shared an interest in traditional material culture, but any mention of it in "Greetings" was again restricted to verbal discussions. Such collecting practices are in some instances sufficient, but no doubt the combination of space limitations and verbal requirements of the column leaves many gaps for any thorough analysis by either Trout, his readers, or those of us who look to the column now.

Yet as stated previously, entertainment rather than analysis was the column's main purpose, and Trout did not have to be a scholarly collector to achieve this end. His techniques reflected the non-scholarly approach. No records or notes were preserved by Trout concerning the information he collected other than those printed in the bound volumes of "Greetings." Curiously, Trout destroyed all of the reader correspondence he received including the letters which appeared in the feature, and this action likely destroyed numerous leads to material and informants for later researchers. Likewise, Trout kept no index to the column; thus its usefulness is seriously hindered until a complete inventory system for "Greetings" can be developed. The collection is too large to be easily dealt with in its present state, and Trout left no handle with which to grasp it.

Trout was not a collector in the sense that one takes material out of its functional context and freezes it for analysis. Rather, he worked within the process of transmission, and his medium happened to lend itself to self-preservation, at least as far as Trout wished it to. He did not actively pursue one particular genre for an extended period of time but rather on many occasions sought out one particular item from

one genre ( a specific game, for instance). Unlike the academic collector, Trout spent little energy on variants, again working through a medium which not only lacked space for numerous repetitions but also called for a constant flow of fresh material. The result was Allan Trout serving as a relatively passive but successful collector while at the same time actively transmitting this collected material back to his audience.

The extent to which Allan Trout successfully transmitted traditional material is questionable. Obviously, the feature itself enjoyed a mass popularity beyond that accorded to any academic folklore collection. Three of the four contributors contacted here had followed the column regularly for ten or more years, and one actually cancelled his subscription to the Courier-Journal upon Trout's retirement. However, no small portion of that popularity must be attributed to the column's appearance in the newspaper medium. "Greetings" was certainly one of several features which attracted the newspaper reader, and now that the medium for the column has changed from an easily available, common product to one which can only be obtained through some degree of effort, the column receives practically no attention whatsoever. This formula of incorporating a non-scholarly, folklore feature into a popular medium still works, as witnessed by the success of the paperback Foxfire series.

The "Greetings" process was one of acquaintance and reacquaintance. In the first case the reader gained his first exposure to a particular item from that item's appearance in the column. Even if the material Trout printed was new to the reader, in most cases it still related to the cultural experience of the audience. In the case of

reacquaintance, the items in the column were at one time familiar to the reader though he may have either forgotten or simply not thought of them until he read them through "Greetings." Naturally, the acquaintance of one reader with an item might be the reacquaintance of that item to another reader. The transmission of one item through "Greetings" often caused a reader to recall, that is, become acquainted with, another item which he would later contribute to the column. Indeed, this was the process upon which "Greetings" thrived.

In responding to one item with another, the reader unknowingly acknowledged that the transmission of the first item had been successfully accomplished. How long, if at all, the item was retained and later performed certainly varied with each reader. In random discussions with three "Greetings" readers, none could recall for this researcher a particular item he had picked up from the column though the nature of the feature was still familiar to all. Those persons who sought a particular item through Trout surely retained his response--the four contributors contacted here had little trouble recalling their own mention in the column--though the information may well have been discarded by others.

Part of Trout's role of folklore transmitter is his position as popularizer. Riding on a popular medium, Trout acquired the ability to reach a large number of people scattered over a wide geographical area, and in this respect he was indeed a popularizer. Through the subject of folklore he marketed himself and his column. Yet apparently Trout's presentation of the material itself was straightforward and true to the forms placed in his hands by his audience. In comparing "Greetings" to other collections of traditional items, one sees that Trout could have



done much worse.

Perhaps Trout's weakest point came from the domination of rural traditions in the column, yet other folklorists of his era also concentrated on rural material. Serving as a medium himself for communication between readers, Trout was something of a circumstantial transmitter and a mirror for the concepts, both correct and false, held by those around him. Any misconceptions popularized in "Greetings" were likely already prevalent in the mind of Trout's audience.

As a popularizer Trout promoted the value of folklore as entertainment, the key to the "Greetings" phenomenon. His service to his audience was identical to that of much of the lore itself. And if nothing else, Allan Trout provided a place for his readers to express pride in a frequently ignored heritage.

## APPENDIX

### FOLK SPEECH ITEMS

#### Single Words, Expressions, and Non-Proper Names

Items are listed according to the source of documentation and the order of appearance in "Greetings" from 2 January 1939 to 31 March 1939 and from 2 October 1967 to 30 December 1967. The dates behind each item correspond to the first and subsequent uses of that item in the column.

#### Items Listed Only in the Gordon Wilson Collection

little wife-3 January 1939, 5 January 1939, 31 January 1939  
aim-16 January 1939  
innards-17 January 1939  
biled-17 January 1939  
ribbing-19 January 1939  
nigh-19 January 1939, 21 March 1939  
off-19 January 1939  
harrow-21 January 1939  
as interesting as last year's bird nest-21 January 1939  
doggoned (and variants)-27 January 1939, 23 February 1939, 6 March 1939,  
10 October 1967, 27 October 1967, 6 December 1967  
set hens-30 January 1939  
clod hopper-7 February 1939  
hollered (as in shout)-7 February 1939  
falutin-7 February 1939  
watched like a hawk-21 February 1939  
until the cows come home-23 February 1939  
hollers (as in valleys)-24 February 1939  
grouch-24 February 1939  
mule-headed-7 March 1939  
play second fiddle-9 March 1939  
dad blamed (and variants)-13 March 1939, 22 March 1939, 27 March 1939  
critters-14 March 1939  
Adam's off ox-15 March 1939  
high hat-17 March 1939  
feist-20 March 1939  
tongue (a wagon part)-23 March 1939

hoop snake-23 March 1939  
 madstone-23 March 1939  
 bedeviled-27 March 1939  
 to go up Salt River-27 March 1939  
 grandpaw-30 March 1939  
 grandmaw-30 March 1939  
 young blade-31 March 1939  
 running hog wild-2 October 1967  
 taw-3 October 1967  
 with the bark on it-11 October 1967  
 nit-13 October 1967  
 whang doodles-13 October 1967  
 wooly worms-13 October 1967  
 driven your ducks to the right pond-23 October 1967, 26 December 1967  
 plug horse-24 October 1967  
 plum (as in completely)-27 October 1967  
 sallet-28 October 1967  
 Katy-bar-the-door-13 November 1967  
 hurtin'-18 November 1967  
 took (as in swindled)-14 December 1967  
 three sheets in the wind-22 December 1967

Items Listed Only in the Frank C. Brown Collection

as cold as the dickens-24 February 1939  
 the same old six and seven-4 October 1967  
 why in the Sam Hill (and variants)-10 October 1967, 5 December 1967,  
 6 December 1967  
 she (feminine for vessels)-11 December 1967  
 Children should be seen and not heard.-13 December 1967  
 sound as a dollar-14 December 1967

Items Listed in Both the Wilson Collection and  
the Brown Collection

dead of winter-2 January 1939  
 bright as the noonday sun-2 January 1939  
 as the crow flied-20 January 1939  
 upped-17 February 1939  
 blue streak-21 February 1939  
 reckon-21 February 1939  
 with a grain of salt-24 February 1939  
 clear as a crystal-24 February 1939  
 middling-27 February 1939, 1 March 1939  
 like a lamb-2 March 1939  
 as flat as a pancake-14 March 1939  
 cart before the horse-16 October 1967  
 all wool and a yard wide-17 October 1967  
 my two cents worth-20 October 1967, 28 October 1967, 30 October 1967,  
 20 December 1967  
 chawin-21 October 1967  
 rob Peter to pay Paul-31 October 1967



turn (an amount of corn)-3 November 1967, 8 November 1967, 25 November 1967, 1 December 1967

Traditional Items as Indicated from Internal Evidence

the second front (an occupational term)-18 January 1939  
slow by jerks, like a frog walking-2 March 1939  
type lice (an occupational term)-10 March 1939  
walk the grapevine-15 March 1939  
draw a load of wood-16 March 1939  
"X" (for acle)-16 March 1939  
cribbers-5 October 1967  
as strong as aquafortis-10 October 1967  
bobbed wire (barbed wire)-12 October 1967  
a horse fly knows a horse-12 October 1967  
raised the roof-20 October 1967  
loaded for bear-29 November 1967  
horse (for heroin)-6 December 1967  
bennie (for benzedrine)- 6 December 1967  
going up, going over, going down-7 December 1967

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