

FOLKLORE IN "B.C."

by Paige A. Beshens  
5 April 1982

Submitted to:  
Dr. Camilla A. Collins  
"Folklore in the Mass Media"

INTRODUCTION

The following paper has been compiled from a collection of the "B.C." comic strips, written by Johnny Hart, which appeared in The Courier-Journal. The ten week period which the collection comes from begins on Monday, January 18, 1982 and goes through Sunday, March 28, 1982.

There are, however, two comic strips which come from The Washington Post rather than the Louisville paper mentioned above. They appeared on Sunday, March 7<sup>30</sup> and Tuesday, March 9.<sup>58</sup> These were obtained while the author did not have access to the original source for these dates.

The numerical references used in the above paragraph will be used throughout the paper to list the appropriate number for the comic strip being used in reference. All of the comics are located in the appendix at the end of this paper.

The assemblage and paper are divided into three main sections. The first of these is what I call traditional examples of folklore. In the second part are what I will call illustrations of contemporary folklore and the final portion of this project consists of the sixty-nine comics in which there does not appear any apparent folkloristic examples.

TRADITIONAL FOLKLORE

The examples found in the traditional section of this project are divided into three sub-categories. These are traditional phrases, beliefs and the observance of traditional holiday's.

④  
1-3

Hart uses "The Book of Phrases" as a reference for the origin of particular traditional phrases.<sup>1,2,6</sup> He adds comic relief to the use of these cliches with his definitions. A "Trivia" question-answer table is also used to show references for origin.<sup>8,9</sup> The traditional responses to seemingly idiotic questions is shown when one character is asked if the day of the week is Monday and answers with, "All day!"<sup>3</sup> Also, the use of the joke "We were so \_\_\_\_" and the response of "How \_\_\_\_ were you?" is shown here.<sup>4,5</sup> There appears another example of this in the contemporary portion of this project,<sup>17</sup> but was added to that section for reasons to be outlined there.

Traditional beliefs are demonstrated in the use of the stork delivering a baby.<sup>10</sup> This is something most young children are told when they begin to wonder about how they are physically brought into the world. The belief in the supernatural is shown through the use of a wishing well<sup>11</sup> and a Biblical quotation.<sup>12</sup>

The observance of customary holiday's is demonstrated in the strips which appeared on those days. These are Groundhog day<sup>13</sup> and Valentines day.<sup>14</sup>

#### CONTEMPORARY FOLKLORE

Those comic strips assembled in this section are also divided into sub-categories. These being the modern attitudes toward certain occupations, the effects of new items in our culture and the observance of days which have started to become traditional.

The occupational portion of this section deals with the

contemporary attitude towards various popular professions. These include police officers,<sup>15</sup> athletes,<sup>19,22</sup> doctors<sup>17</sup> and, in particular, those in public offices.<sup>16,18,20,21</sup> There are also references to accountants<sup>23</sup> and songwriters.<sup>24</sup> These are used to represent the popular exoteric view most people have of the occupations presented. The strip which also uses the "How \_\_\_ were you" joke was placed in this section, because of its' contemporary representation of the attitude towards the medical profession.

When something new is added to the daily life of people it easily becomes a part of their culture. The famous fast-food chain of "MacDonalds", because of its' wide commercial influence, has had a definite effect upon our language and this is seen in the use of the word "McSpuds" for potatoes in one of the strips.<sup>25</sup> Popular fads are represented in a reference to the "Rubiks Cube".<sup>26</sup> Because the use of international symbols has become so widespread it is noted that Hart uses these symbols rather than the words they represent when a character is inquiring about tickets to an exhibit of the symbols.<sup>28</sup> The influence of the mass media upon our daily lives is shown in reference to the size of a major newspaper publication<sup>29,30</sup> \* and the portrayal of the popular newspaper advice columnist.<sup>31</sup> Although the advice column has been in existence for several hundred years

---

\*There is a repeat of the same comic strip in this part of the project. The one dated March 2 (#29) appeared in The Courier-Journal and the strip dated March 9 (#30) was taken from The Washington Post. The March 9 issue of the Louisville paper could not be obtained by the author, the library did not have it, and therefore both were put into the project.

it is, in its present form, a contemporary part of our culture.

The final comic in this contemporary section is a reflection of the addition to our society of new days of observance. Hart takes an entire Sunday comic strip and dedicates it to "The Super Bowl".<sup>32</sup> This ballgame has become a regular and accepted holiday for most Americans. The tradition of athletes praying before playing in a game is also shown and should be noted as another representation of a belief in the supernatural.

#### "A LITTLE COMIC RELIEF"

The last major category in this project contains the remaining thirty-six comic strips which appeared to contain no obvious folklore.

These are all comics that are purely humoristic in their origin. I am sure that if one were to look hard enough, folklore in some form can be found in all of them, but for the sake of not appearing to go overboard this author chose to be extremely cautious in the selection and division of these comics.

#### CONCLUSIONS

It is interesting to note that of the sixty-nine comic strips displayed, it was found that thirty-three contained some form of folklore. This project has been very beneficial for this author in proving that folklore is alive and thriving in our society and not something of the past only to be used in understanding how our ancestors once lived.

6  
KS

1-6  
②

APPENDIX

- I. TRADITIONAL FOLKLORE numbers one through fourteen.
- II. CONTEMPORARY FOLKLORE numbers fifteen through thirty-two.
- III. "A LITTLE COMIC RELIEF" numbers thirty-three through sixty-nine.