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"Folklore in Greeting Cards"
Folklore in the Media
Dr. Collins
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Folklore "floods" the mass media constantly. It can be found in virtually any magazine, any newspaper, or on any television broadcast. The different kinds of folklore found in greeting cards, however, often escapes the casual observer. When picking out cards for our friends and relatives, we tend to grant more attention to what we think the card's recipient will enjoy and think is humorous. From a folklorist's standpoint, it's almost overwhelming to see how prominent jokes, riddles, rites of passage, and other kinds of folklore truly are in greeting cards. I've collected ten examples of folklore found in greeting cards and included them in this packet.

The first example I found was a "knock-knock" joke. "Knock-knock" jokes are a timeless feature in our society. No matter where we are or what we are doing, when someone exclaims to us, "Knock knock," we can't help but reply, "Who's there?" These are some of the very first jokes we learn to tell successfully as children, and somehow, it seems that we never outgrow them. I found it interesting that each of my examples were very similar in format. Each was made out to suggest that the lines in the joke were being said

verbally through the use of word bubbles or lines, which are two popular devices used by cartoonists. Perhaps a "knock-knock" joke loses some of its humor if it's simply read on a card, as opposed to being told out loud. In addition to this, each of the card's covers are made out to resemble a door. The door knobs, panels, and key holes are all clearly noticeable.

Example number three incorporates the age-old custom of "mooning." To transescents, college students, and grown men, the bearing of one's buttocks has forever been a symbol of disgust and lighthearted fun. It is not at all uncommon to see one press his buttocks onto a window, mocking a passing motorist. I can remember when my father first "mooned" me while I was watching television. I thought it was the funniest thing I had ever seen. Like the "knock-knock" joke, the "mooning" custom is also timeless. This card is obviously for an adult on his/her fortieth birthday. It is important to note that the "40" is painted on the character's buttocks on the cover of the card. A humorous display of disgust at the recipient's "old age." This is expressed on the inside of the card by

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the phrase, "for many a moon." This example of folk speech refers to the idea that the recipient has been around for a long time.

Folk speech, or how people really talk without worrying about being grammatically correct, is found in two other examples I found. Even though a lot of folk speech is not considered "professional" grammar, it is still rampant in things such as greeting cards. For instance, in example number four, we find the phrase, "you're doggone right I do!" This is used to complete the card's interesting rhythm and rhyme scheme. It is also interesting to note that the card is shaped like a puppy. The term "doggone" is used as an adverb to emphasize and reinforce the validity of any given statement.

We are all familiar with the term "B.S." It ranks among one of the top statements when one is absolutely fed up with a situation. Before opening the card (example number five), one is led to believe that "B.S." stands for "bullshit," its usual hidden meaning. After opening the card, however, we learn that "B.S." in this particular instance, actually stands for "Being Sick." With no indication on the front cover, we later

learn that this is a "get well soon" card. It is also interesting to note the unique attire of the character on the front of the card. Portraying a "hillbilly," he is dressed in overalls, a flannel shirt, cap, with a wheat stalk hanging from his mouth. Perhaps this card is implying that only "hicks" and "hillbillies" use this crude colloquialism.

Dating as far back as the time of William Shakespeare, riddles have been a very influential motif in our folk culture. Since there is not a true definition of a riddle, they are often inconspicuous in nature. Examples six and seven go so far as to say, "A riddle for you" and "Here's a little riddle for you" as if to imply that the reader does not know what a riddle is. To solve a riddle is to solve the puzzle, to enslave the sphinx, or enter safely into the tomb of the forgotten pharaoh.

Though example number eight contains no folklore in the card itself, it celebrates a common custom of anxiously awaiting the birth of a baby. Baby showers are usually held by the mother-to-be's grandparents. At this event, the pregnant mother is "showered" with gifts to help her in the rearing of her new child.

The last two examples commemorate two important rites of passage, which are steps in one's maturation. Graduation and marriage are two very special occasions for practically everyone. The graduation card is interesting because of its depiction of the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's Messiah. This may be included to emphasize the long, hard journey the graduate may have experienced in his/her education experience.

The wedding card depicts several ritual aspects through the pictures included in the card. For instance, the cover shows a female hand caressing a male hand in front of a bouquet of flowers. On the inside cover, a picture of a female wedding band laying on top of a male wedding band is eloquently displayed.

Folklore is strewn about in virtually every aspect of the mass media. Even though many times it may be overlooked, folklore is an obvious element in many greeting cards.

APPENDIX

1. This is an example of a "knock-knock" joke. The name "Alda" provides the punchline.
2. This too, is an example of a "knock-knock" joke. "Jamaica" is the name used in this punchline.
3. This example portrays the "moonning" custom on the front and also incorporates an example of folk speech on the inside: "To someone who's been around for many a moon!"
4. This is another example of folk speech. On the inside, the phrase, "Well, you're doggone right" is noted.
5. This example of folk speech uses the age-old term, "B.S." to abbreviate "Being Sick," instead of it's usual representation.
6. This is an example of a riddle, and it goes so far as to set the reader up by saying, "A Riddle For You."
7. This riddle too, is set up for the cards recipient by saying, "Here's A Little For You While You're Not Feeling Well."
8. This card celebrates a baby shower, which is a popular custom in today's society.
9. This card celebrates a rite of passage. The occasion being celebrated is his/her graduation.
10. This card also celebrates an important rite of passage. It would be given to a couple to celebrate their wedding day.

NOTE: These cards were all purchased at College Heights Bookstore on the campus of Western Kentucky University during the Fall Semester of 1994. They are also the exclusive property of American Greetings Corporation.