

Preface

This book and accompanying digital content are the end result of a rethinking of standard, published folklore collections. Early in my studies of folklore, I found myself wondering about the people behind the stories I had read. A growing drumbeat in folklore circles seemed to be suggesting that earlier collections were based on suspect premises, in part because of the collecting that lay behind them and in part because of the overt editorial intrusion that intervened between the voice of the teller and the printed page. The implication was clear that early folklore archives were of little use for the study of folk expressive culture. Because I was predominantly interested in the role folklore played in people's understandings of economic, social, and political changes in late nineteenth-century Denmark—and therefore could not undertake my own fieldwork—I began hoping that I could somehow recover the connection between storytellers and stories and get back to the important connections that exist in storytelling as a teller moves from one story or song to the next.

While I wrestled with doubts about the legitimacy of existing folklore collections, I struggled with several other frustrations related to the collections. The first frustration was based on the way stories in the early collections were classified. Because most classificatory schemes were more or less idiosyncratic and developed for particular collections or publications, it was difficult to find comparative material either from the same tradition or from other traditions. At the same time, I often found myself wondering why a story appeared in one part of a collection when it could easily have appeared in a different part. The second frustration was

closely related to the first: because most collections were arranged topically, one had little choice but to base one's study of stories on the existing topic maps and story classifications.

Bengt Holbek's seminal work, *Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (1987), was an inspiration to me, not so much because of his groundbreaking work on analytical methodologies for the study of fairy tales but because of his thorough work on the archive of Danish folktales compiled by the nineteenth-century collector Evald Tang Kristensen. I based my dissertation and subsequent book, *Interpreting Legend* (1994), on the archival methods Holbek proposed. My goal was to explore the connections between storytellers and their stories, recognizing that a holistic view of a storyteller's repertoire could lead to a deeper understanding of how individuals use tradition—particularly storytelling tradition—as a deep cultural resource as they navigate the challenges of daily life. Unlike my Nordic colleagues, who, starting in the 1960s, had already begun to emphasize the study of individual repertoires as a key to understanding an individual's worldview, I wanted to focus on more than a single individual and a single community. I believe tradition is based on the interactions of many people in large, overlapping groups that span large social and geographical distances, so I needed to focus on the repertoires of many individuals from diverse backgrounds and different parts of the tradition area—in this case, Denmark. Ultimately, I decided that the best approach to interpreting folklore was to focus on a large group of individuals and the even larger number of stories that made up their repertoires.

As I began teaching folklore at UCLA, it became apparent to me that along with my students, I was missing a key piece for solving the Nordic folklore puzzle. What we needed was a Nordic folklore collection that included good

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English translations and thorough archival materials and was predicated on the idea of individuals and their repertoires. Until 1999, when Reimund Kvideland and Henning Sehmsdorf's collection of fairy tales from Nordic storytellers' repertoires, *All the World's Reward*, appeared, all the available collections of Nordic folklore in English were based on a topic model of folk narrative tradition—and even their collection was limited to a single genre, a form of topic modeling in itself. John Lindow's excellent collection of Swedish legends and folktales (1978) is broken into sections on "This World," "The Other World," and "The World of Religion," and Reidar Christiansen's collection of Norwegian folktales includes the categories "Historical Legends," "Legends about Magic and Witchcraft," "Legends about Ghosts, the Human Soul and Shapeshifting," and so on. Kvideland and Sehmsdorf's (1988) earlier compendium of Scandinavian folk beliefs and legends is arranged according to a similar topic model. It is difficult to discern in these collections the connections between individual storytellers and their stories. Another glaring problem for a course in Nordic folklore was that not a single substantive collection of Danish folklore existed in English translation.

In this work I attempt to address all these issues. The publication consists of two main components—a printed book and digital content stored on the accompanying DVD. The print version is a bit of a teaser, even as it offers an easy point of entry into the world of Danish folk narrative tradition. Unlike the more comprehensive digital content, the print version is intended to offer a good basis for understanding the Danish stories as the tellers themselves would have understood them and to present a series of the most compelling stories from the repertoires of five Danish storytellers. After an introductory chapter that provides some of the context for this collection, I provide excerpts from the

five main storytellers' repertoires, in English translation. The only commentary accompanying these stories is a brief biographical essay on each of the storytellers.

Each story is presented in the order in which it appeared during performance, although in the print version I have skipped over many stories; these are accessible in the digital content. Instead of including titles for the stories or developing an elaborate frame narrative, as Peter Asbjørnsen did for his early collection of Norwegian legends (1845–1848), I have simply included a reference number for each story. A story with the number 1.04, for instance, is the fourth story told during the first meeting between Tang Kristensen and the storyteller. After the reference number, in square brackets, appears the field diary pages on which Tang Kristensen recorded the story, followed by an abbreviated standard reference to the collection in which the story was published or indexed, if any. At the end of the book, a list of abbreviations used in both the book and the digital content identifies the published or indexed collections to which the abbreviations refer.

The five storytellers whose stories form the heart of this collection were all interesting people. “Bitte Jens” Kristensen was a clog maker who had served in the Danish army during the conflicts with Bismarck in southern Denmark in 1864. He owned a smallholding and was a remarkably versatile storyteller, his repertoire spanning ballads, proverbs, legends, jocular tales, and fairy tales. Kirsten Marie Pedersdatter was a relatively well-off farm wife whose stories explore, among other things, witchcraft, folk healing, and haunting. Jens Peter Pedersen lived in the northern reaches of Jutland and made his living as a lathe turner. In his stories, he largely comments on aspects of local history. He used his meetings with Tang Kristensen as a means to bolster what little social status he enjoyed in the surrounding area. Margrete Jensdatter was one

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of the many extremely poor rural women whom Tang Kristensen met on his travels. She had a remarkable fairy tale repertoire. Finally, Peder Johansen was a young journeyman miller and fiddler when Tang Kristensen first contacted him. In his stories, he often explore[STET][why past tense? The stories are still doing this for him even though he is long dead] the boundaries of acceptable behavior.

The digital content included on the accompanying DVD is more comprehensive than in the print book. The book's introductory chapter is replaced by a series of wide-ranging essays on the changing political, social, and economic landscapes of nineteenth-century Denmark, the history of folklore scholarship in Denmark, Evald Tang Kristensen's life and works, folklore genre theory and analysis, theoretical approaches to the individual and folklore repertoire, and a critical overview of the use of mapping in the study of folk tradition. Each of the print version's brief descriptions of the five main informants is similarly expanded into a comprehensive essay exploring the storyteller's life in the context of late nineteenth-century rural Danish society. A sophisticated mapping interface allows one to explore Danish geography in the context of the storytellers' lives and stories. Each story is presented in multiple versions and is accompanied by a thorough scholarly annotation as well as links to other, related stories. In all, the digital content includes 568 storytellers and 907 stories. Among those, the repertoires of the five main storytellers, which are presented in full, comprise 434 stories.¹ A description of how to use and install the digital content appears in the back matter of the book and on the accompanying DVD.

All the stories in the repertoires of the five main storytellers exist in two versions—the original manuscript version and a published version.² Most of them also exist in an intermediate “fair copy” version. For the digital content, I

transcribed the stories from the original manuscript versions, retaining the original line breaks and abbreviations. In cases where the original manuscript version was missing, I transcribed from the fair copy. All the published versions of the stories were scanned and subjected to optical character recognition (OCR) and subsequent proofreading. The English translations of the manuscript versions are as close to literal as possible, although I have expanded and translated abbreviations. The English translations of the published stories are less literal and attempt to capture the style of the original. I relied heavily on Feilberg's *Bidrag til en ordbog over jyske almuesmål* (*Contribution to a Dictionary of Jutlandic Peasant Speech*) for transcribing unclear passages and translating unusual words. Although I have tried to present as clear and accurate translations as possible, I have undoubtedly introduced errors in both transcription and translation, and I will be the first to claim these as mine.

Acknowledgements

I began sketching out this book in my first year of teaching at UCLA, frustrated that there was no equivalent collection of Danish folktales to John Lindow's *Swedish Legends and Folktales* (1978), Reidar Christiansen's *Folktales of Norway* (1964) or Jaqueline Simpson's *Icelandic Folktales and Legends* (1972). I was particularly impressed by Lindow's annotations in his volume, presenting, as they did, sophisticated critical commentary to Swedish stories in a remarkably brief yet informative manner. I decided I would like to do the same for Danish folktales. Since I began working on this volume, I have been in close contact with John Lindow, and he has provided a great deal of patient advice, intellectual guidance, and support. In addition, my students' comments on translations, and their insightful questions about vague, unclear or difficult aspects of Danish folk belief helped shape many of the story annotations. Students and colleagues at Harvard where I spent a semester as a visiting professor of folklore on the invitation of Stephen Mitchell also offered useful critiques.

A burgeoning interest in "visualizing" the landscape of folk belief led me to revisit the cartographic methods that many folklorists had abandoned. I had the good fortune of having received excellent cartographic training during summer work in the early 1980s at Clark University's cartography laboratory under the expert tutelage of Herb Heidt and a crew of generous graduate students and postdocs who showed me what one should and shouldn't try to do with maps.

During my time as the leader of the Center for Folkloristics at the University of Copenhagen, I began

exploring what a digital representation of a folklore collection might look like. I would like to thank Helle Preuss Justesen, Marianne Tyllesen and Hanne Pico Larsen for working with me as these initial ideas developed into more formal structures. Kirsten Brøste, the administrative assistant at the Center, cataloged the various digital materials and corrected the very first scan of Tang Kristensen's memoirs, *Minder og Oplevelser* (1923-1928). Michael Chesnutt acted as an intellectual sparring partner as I developed the ideas for the navigation of the digital materials and outlined the history of Danish folklore study. Torkil Damsgaard Olsen deserves thanks for providing funds to start the digitization efforts.

Assembling the archival material was a fascinating journey, taking me to national and local historical archives throughout Denmark. I would particularly like to thank Maja Andersen, Sophie and Søren Rasmussen, Jan Baltzersen, and Christian Bredholdt at the Todbjerg-Mejlby Egnsarkiv, Aksel Hjort at the Rosenholm Egnsarkiv, Poul Jørgen Christensen at Støvring Kommunes Lokalhistoriske Arkiv, Enrico Tychsen at Sindalegnens Lokalhistoriske Forening, and Leif Juul Pedersen at the Skanderborg Egnsarkiv for their help in discovering details about the lives of the five main storytellers. Their local knowledge and their archival prowess were instrumental in developing the nuanced picture of the storytellers that appear in the digital materials. Finally, I would like to thank Ingelise Rahn at Lansarkivet for Nørrejylland and Henrik Stissing Jessen at Rigsarkivet for their assistance.

Nearly all of Tang Kristensen's materials are housed at *Dansk folkemindesamling*, and I owe a great debt of gratitude to the archivists and librarians working there. They were always helpful in allowing me access to the manuscript, loose-leaf and photographic collections. Palle Christiansen, Henrik Stavnsborg and Else Marie Kofod deserve special mention in

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At UCLA, I have been fortunate to work with a group of truly supportive colleagues. In particular, I would like to thank James Massengale, Mary Kay Norseng, Ross Shideler, Kendra Willson and Arne Lunde for their engaging conversations about Nordic folklore and Joseph Nagy, who helped me with the chapter on the history of folklore studies. Thanks go to graduate students Chip Robinson, for his close and attentive reading of various chapters, and Anna Blomster and Kimberly LaPalm for their comments on earlier versions of chapters on the history of folklore scholarship, and repertoire studies. While I was working on this project, I spent a semester as a Visiting Professor of Folklore at UC Berkeley at the invitation of Alan Dundes, who has been an inspiration for this work.

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Ministers, UCLA's Council on Research and UCLA's Instructional Development Program, was instrumental in accomplishing the project's goals.

Developing a navigational interface to a complex digital folklore collection has been a great learning process. I was helped in this task by the talented staff at UCLA's Center for Digital Humanities, including Vergil Castello who developed the early design concepts for the interface. I explored aspects of the digitization, storage and retrieval of materials during a semester at the National Science Foundation's Institute for Pure and Applied Mathematics where colleagues including Fernando Diaz, Yannet Interian, Kendall Giles, Tina Eliassi-Rad, Peter Jones, Mark Green and Russ Caflisch all provided helpful comments and expert guidance. Colleagues at two UCLA summer institutes on "Network Analysis for the Humanities" funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities—particularly James Abello, Katy Börner, Peter Leonard and Nischal Devanur—helped me develop methods for search and retrieval that have been used in the organization of the digital materials. My initial, amateurish database design for the project was completely overhauled and brought up to a professional standard by Barbara Hui.

The lion's share of the thanks for the presentation of the digital materials is reserved for Peter Broadwell, whose patience, perseverance, dedication and intelligence is matched only by his friendliness—without his efforts, this project, which at its outset appeared more like an impossible task set by an ill-tempered fairytale villain, would have failed. Working with Peter has been like having the magical genie from one of Kirsten Marie Pedersdatter's fairy tales at hand: seemingly impossible suggestions would magically be realized the next day. Peter steered the project away from bad ideas and gently proposed changes that always improved the project considerably. I cannot imagine a better collaborator.

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Notes

¹ I use the word *story* throughout this work to refer broadly to any of the folk expressions collected by Tang Kristensen.

² Although the stories of the ancillary storytellers also exist in these forms, for these tellers only the published version and the English translation of that version are included on the DVD.