From Trolls to Turks: Continuity and Change in Danish Legend Tradition

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Legend, be it in contemporary circulation or long since relegated to the realms of the archive, exhibits a marked resiliency and continuity in adapting itself to historical change. Carl Wilhelm von Sydow recognized the influence locality had on narrative tradition, labeling the geographic variants he observed as ecotypes (von Sydow 1931). A similar process occurs through time as well, in which features and actors relevant to one historical age are altered to fit the next. Like the process of synchronic ecotypification discussed by von Sydow, this process of diachronic ecotypification is subtle but distinct. Albert Eskeröd noticed the propensity of cultures to assign the functions of narrative characters to the “tradition dominants” of that particular geographic area (Eskeröd 1947: 81). This elucidation of the process of synchronic ecotypification also holds true for the diachronic process. Just as a geographic area exhibits “tradition dominants” so too does a historical period. Legends contemporary in Danish tradition help illustrate the concept of diachronic ecotypification, a process which best can be called “historicization” (Tangherlini 1990: 379; 1994: 15). While legend remains preoccupied with human interaction with the Other, perceptions of the Other exhibit distinct change. The major area of change in perceptions of the Other has been a move away from supernatural actants to human actants. Ethnic minorities comprise the major group of the human Other in contemporary tradition.

Danish legend tradition is rich and varied, often centering on instances of human interaction with the Other, be they ghosts, elves, trolls, and witches, or immigrants, refugees, drunks, and psychotics. The Other is constituted by all legend actants who belong to the “outside realm.” This realm is in direct opposition to the “inner realm,”
which is bounded by the cultural borders of the tradition group. Sometimes these borders are physically discernible, such as the boundaries of the nineteenth-century farm. Other times, the boundaries are more subtle and harder to recognize. The tradition boundaries are closely linked to the concept of ethnic boundaries—boundaries which are based on "a sense of common origin, common beliefs and values, a common sense of survival" (De Vos 1975: 5; Barth 1969). All the members of the inner realm are distinctly aware of the boundaries and their membership in that realm. Legend helps both to define and reinforce the borders of the inner realm.

Beverly Crane has noted that the primary reason a person tells a legend is psychological need—a need to express particular beliefs or values in a narrative form (Crane 1977; Dundes 1971). Donald Ward has also considered the psychological motivations for narrative performance, revealing how popular narrative traditions tend to reflect the dominating concerns of the subjects involved (Ward 1976: 350). The perceptions of the Other, the object of conflict, reveals the cultural views of where threat comes from. The actions of the Other in such conflict reveal the cultural views on what is threatened. While Danish legend tradition shows a marked continuity in what is threatened, the perpetrator of that threat, the Other, has changed appearance so as to fit better the cultural landscape. This change in identity of the Other suggests a change in the external concerns of the involved subjects, a change which has been precipitated by historical changes in society.

Unlike Sweden which has had the benefit of the publication of Klintberg's collection of contemporary legends, Danish contemporary legend remains largely uncollected (Klintberg 1986). Carsten Bregenhøj's two short articles on contemporary legends provide some insight into Danish tradition (Bregenhøj 1969 and 1978). Also, the newsletter of Foreningen Danmarks Folkeminder has carried occasional variants of contemporary legends (Pio and Kofod 1985; Kofod 1989). Recently, Else Marie Kofod of Dansk Folkemindesamling and Charlotte Jensen have been involved in contemporary legend collection. Many of the contemporary legends discussed below are from their collections. Luckily, the scholar interested in earlier Danish legend tradition has the benefit of Evald Tang Kristensen's voluminous printed collections as well as the countless unpublished variants archived at Dansk folkemindesamling. With these two groups of legends at hand,
the specifics of historicization in Danish legend tradition, particularly concerning attitudes towards the Other, begin to take shape.¹

One of the most notable aspects of the contemporary Danish legend is the high profile of immigrants and minorities. Klintberg mentions the ethnocentric nature of many contemporary legends (Klintberg 1976 and 1984). In these narratives, an “ordinary” Swede is put into conflict with a member of the outside realm, often an immigrant (Klintberg 1976). The group telling the legend centers itself within the narrative, putting any outside group into opposition with itself.² The distinction inside/outside becomes paramount. In early legends, in which the ethnic homogeneity of Danish society was not threatened by outside cultures, threat was assigned to supernatural forces—trolls, elves, and witches. Occasionally, foreign human threats appeared, in which case minority culture actants in the role of Other also appeared.³ With the advent of scientific scepticism, universal education and the move away from rural lifestyles, folk belief concerning trolls, elves, and witches declined. Concomitantly, the need for actants to assume the newly vacated legend functions appeared. With the marked change in Danish demographics, primarily the influx of large numbers of Asians and southern Europeans in the 1960s and 1970s (Danmarks statistik 1961–1984), the immigrant and minority populations were the logical culturally relevant replacement. Like the bjærgfolk, immigrants lead a life hidden from the native population. They have a separate culture and language. They work the least popular jobs, and there is minimal chance for assimilation into Danish culture. Often, physical characteristics set them apart from ethnic Danes. Finally, the separation of these people from Danish society is intensified by the isolation of large minority populations in communities such as Ishøj. The result is a group easily identified as Other, which lives and works outside the bounds of the ethnic Dane’s sphere, in much the same way that trolls and elves lived and worked outside of the human sphere—the farm.

¹ I am deeply indebted to the help both Else Marie Kofod and Charlotte Jensen have provided both with regard to their collections and their helpful comments on contemporary Danish tradition. Their collections comprise primarily materials sent them after national radio and newspaper appeals. Sylvia Grider (1981) addressed the question of how mass media events, particularly television shows, become the subject of folk narration.
² An interesting study would be to compare contemporary legends told by immigrant groups in Denmark with the contemporary legends told by the Danes.
³ I provide some examples of this in connection with plague legends, in which Finns act as the bringer of the disease in place of the supernatural traveling pair (Tangherlini 1988: 188).
Kristensen includes numerous accounts which suggest that *bjærgfolk* society is a mirror of human society, for example:

*I Krusrup findes en høj—eller rettere fandtes, ti den findes ikke nu, da den er bortkørt til fylde—hvor der i gamle dage boede ellefolk. En gammel kone, som døde for en halv mås år siden, fortalte, at hendes forældre ofte havde set ellefolkenes vande deres ko ved en bekv, der løber et stykkeanden om højen. (Kristensen 1980: vol. 1, 31)*

(There's a mound in Krusrup—or rather there was, since it isn't there any longer, as it was trucked away for filler—where elves lived in the old days. An old woman, who died about ten years ago, told that her parents had often seen the elves watering their cows at a stream which flows a bit south of the mound.)

The modern Dane does not need legend accounts to confirm the parallel, but hidden nature, of immigrant life—he need only take the *Stog* to the appropriate stop.

Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Denmark was a decidedly agrarian society. The majority of the population lived in small rural communities spread throughout the country. The distinction inside/outside was easily made, and community membership was easily determined. Outside consisted of areas outside the immediate farm house and buildings (Hastrup 1985; Lindow 1978a). The onslaught of the industrial revolution led to an increased urbanization and a break down of earlier communal boundaries. Nevertheless, contemporary Danish society has been able to maintain the inside/outside distinction. The distinction is based primarily on differences of physical appearance, language ability, ancestry, and conformity to traditional cultural norms. In short, the inside/outside distinction corresponds to the ethnic boundaries (Barth 1969). The legend material shows that despite the change in demographics, the distinctions of communal membership maintain their ethno- and sociocentric core. Legends are an expression of this ethno- and sociocentrism. Michael Banton notes that “individuals utilize physical and cultural differences in order to create groups and categories by the process of inclusion and exclusion” (Banton 1983: 104). This process is precisely the one expressed in the legend tradition. Legend, in large part, is a form of ethnic behavior, defined by Richard Thompson as “behaviors that are . . . based on cultural or

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*I have kept Kristensen's orthography in all citations from his collections. Thus, one often finds both “ø” and “ö” in a single record.*
physical criteria in a social context in which these criteria are relevant” (Thompson 1989: 11). In the Danish social context, the performance of ethnocentric contemporary legend both exhibits and defines the culturally relevant criteria and the limits of the ethnic boundaries—namely the ethnic differentiation of Danes in relation to non-Danes.

Interaction with the Other falls into three broad categories in the contemporary legend tradition. Each one of these categories, in turn, has a correlate in the earlier legend tradition. While the contemporary legends presented here are by no means a complete view of the tradition, they are at least partially representative of the contemporary tradition. The first main category is sexual contact with the Other: this group of narratives includes legends that deal with any attempts, successful or not at this contact. Included in this category are kidnapping legends (bjergtagning and bytning) as they often imply a sexual contact (Lindow 1978b). This group deals with threats to the fertility of the inner realm and the continued success of that fertility. The second group of narratives focuses on the Other’s attempts to disrupt the food of the inner realm. The threat to food constitutes a threat to the continued survival of the community. The final category is comprised of narratives in which the Other attempts to maim, hurt, or kill, an immediate threat to the individual and the social order. In each category, communal integrity and survival is threatened from the outside. The concept of outside threat is an underlying motivational factor for legend composition and transmission and constitutes one of the primary areas of continuity in legend tradition.

Legend tradition includes numerous examples of human sexual liaisons with the Other. These legends receive expression in the contemporary legend tradition in accounts such as the following:5


5 Sent to Jensen by Thorlief Sørensen, Århus.
steder, men uden held. Tilsidst, og mange timer (og øller) efter ender vores ven på et af de steder, omtalt før. Pludselig er pigene lidt mere nærgående og modtagelig for fyrens charme. Det giver ham selvfølgelig tilbage og han begynder at "bage" på en rigtig flot grønleder pige. Hun er modtagelig for hans charme til en vis grønse og han bruger al sin kraft og efterhånden desperation til at overbevise hende om at hun vil gå glip af en uforglemmelig oplevelse, hvis hun ikke tager med ham hjem. Hun indvilliger herefter i at tage med ham hjem inden fyrens "bageri" udvikler sig til en plade. De tager herefter hjem til ham og undervelses fortæller hun ham at hun glæder sig til at se om han er lige så god i sengen som han er i munden. Desværre har vores ven i løbet af aftenen og natten drukket så meget øl at han ikke er i stand til at indfri sine læfter overfor pigen, som nu først er varmet rigtig op. Fyren falder i søvn og vågner først næste aftense midnatt med en del "hoved" på. Pigen er væk og har ikke efterladt sig nogen sædet el. lignon. Fyren forstår hende egentlig godt indtil han åbner køleskabet for at tage skummetætken til sin myeles [sic], og ser at pigen, fra aften før, har forretset sin nødstræft på en talleren og stillet den ind på mellemste hylde.

(The background for this story is that, at that time, there were a lot of places on the Århus night scene where a lot of Greenlandic women went. These places soon got known as "last chance" . . . .) The girls there were considered to be easy, and you knew what that could include, in the worst case gonorrhea or the like. The Greenlandic girls were known as very warm blooded and good lovers. They had a very relaxed and, in some cases, quite uninhibited attitude towards sex. The guys knew all of this, and you had to decide for yourself if you dared to "go to them" . . . . A guy from Århus is in town to try and score a girl. The hunt goes on in several places but without luck. Finally, and many hours (and beers) later, our friend ends up at one of these places mentioned before. All of a sudden, the girls come a little closer and they’re more receptive to the guy’s charm. This gives him his self-confidence back, and he begins to hit on a really beautiful Greenlandic girl. She is receptive to his charm to a certain extent, and he uses all his power and, after a while, desperation to convince her that she’ll miss out on an unforgettable experience if she doesn’t go home with him. She agrees to go home with him before the guy’s hitting on her becomes a nuisance. They go to his house, and on the way she tells him that she’s looking forward to see if he’s as good in bed as he is with his mouth. Regrettably, our friend has drunk so many beers over the course of the evening and the night that he isn’t in any condition to keep his promises to the girl who has just now gotten really warmed up. The guy falls asleep and doesn’t wake up until the next morning with a bit of a hangover. The girl is gone and hasn’t left any note or the
like. The guy understands her well until he opens the refrigerator to get the skim milk for his cereal and sees that the girl from the night before has relieved herself on a plate and put it on the middle shelf.)

In this case, the Dane (insider) makes a conscious attempt at seduction of the Other with negative results. The young man suffers a double threat—both to his fertility and to his food. The Greenlandic woman executes two inversions in her dealings with the young Dane. His inability to consummate what is a dangerous liaison in the first place leads to the Other’s inversion of the “normal” fertility cycle. She substitutes an anal action for what should have been vaginal, negating the fertility function of sexual contact. Also, she inverts the normal food cycle by placing her feces in the refrigerator—the place where food is normally kept. As such, she contaminates the food, thereby expressing the strong desire of the Other to interfere with the human food cycle. By causing this double inversion, the Greenlandic woman identifies herself as Other and, therefore, nonhuman. The legend tradition invariably underscores the nonhuman nature of the Other through such inversions which threaten the success of the tradition community.

One finds numerous parallels to this legend in Kristensen’s collections:

Min oldemor på moders side hed Karen Rasmusdatter og var født i færgedården på Ristinge, Langeland; hun har fortalt min moder, at da hun tjente på Langeland som malkepige, var der en af datidens ellekarle, som kom til hende, hver gang hun var i marken for at melke, og samlede kærne på ét sted, som jo var til stor tjene for hende. Men nu blev han så læge ved med sin godhed og tjene, at hun blev bange for ham og kjet af hans venskab. Så var det en middag, da han stod og næsten gav mine til at vennes med hende, at hun tager sin ene trasko af, sætter sig ned og gjør sit behov deri ved siden af melkebotten, og ellekarlen blev da så led ved hende, at han ganske forlod hende, og hun så ham ikke mere før end mange år efter . . . (Kristensen 1980: vol. 2, 13–4)

(My great grandmother on my mother’s side was called Karen Rasmusdatter and was born in the ferry yard in Ristinge, Langeland; she told my mother that when she was in service on Langeland as a milk maid, there was an oldtime elf boy who came to her every time she was in the field to milk and [he] gathered the cows in one place, which was a real help to her. But now he had continued his kindness and help so long that she got scared of him and afraid of his friendship.
Then one day at noon, he stood and practically made a move to get friendly with her; so she takes off one clog, sits down, and does what she has to in it right next to the milk pail, and the elf boy got so disgusted with her that he abandoned her, and she didn’t see him again for many years.)

This legend reflects a partial reversal of the contemporary legend. Despite the change, the fundamental consideration—sexual liaison with the Other—remains the same. The juxtaposition of nourishment and waste (milk and feces) are enough to prevent the dangerous union of woman and elf. Similarily, the Greenlandic woman’s juxtaposition of feces and milk provides the Dane with a degree of relief after the undoubtable initial shock—he has not consummated a threatening union. If she is capable of inverting the food cycle, negating the concept of nourishment, her inversion of the fertility cycle would undoubtedly have similar dire consequences. The most striking similarities between the contemporary variant and earlier ones may be found in the following story:

_Et sted var en karl bleven forelsket i en ellekjelling og havde blandet sig med hende, men så blev han kjed af forholdet og nøgtede at komme ud til hende en aften. Ellefolkene fik dog fat i ham og rente så med ham over bukker og moser, så han var helt ude af sig selv. Nu henvendte han sig til en klog mand, og han gav ham det råd, at når nu ellekjellingen kom for at lokke ham med sig igjen, skulde han gå ud i gården til hende—for ind kunde hun ikke komme—og have en meldmad i hånden og gå og stige af. Så skulde han gå hen på møddingen med det samme og sette sig der i naturlig forretning. Når hun så det vilde hun blive kjed af ham. Han fulgte rådet, og da hun så ham bare sig sådan ad, rendte hun sin vej, og han så hende ikke mere._ (Kristensen 1980: vol. 2, 14–5)

(At one place, a boy had fallen in love with an elf hag and had gotten mixed up with her, but he was bored by the relationship and refused to come to her. The elves got a hold of him and ran him over hill and dale, so he was completely out of himself. Now he consults a folk healer, and he gave him that advice that when the elf hag came to lure him to her again, he should go out in the yard to her—since she couldn’t come in—and have a piece of bread and go and chew it. Then he should go to the dung hill and sit down to do his natural business. When she sees that, she’ll be upset with him. He follows the advice and when she saw him act like this, she ran her way and he didn’t see her again.)
In this case, the boy has become tired with his earlier sexual conquests and, as a means for ridding himself of this obvious threat to his well-being, he gives explicit expression to the human food cycle. In the contemporary legend, the Other gives reference to an inverted food cycle. In either case, the differences in both sexuality and nutrition, the fundamental blocks of community, are juxtaposed leading to the dissolution of a union that threatens communal integrity. While the Other is willing in both earlier and contemporary tradition to engage in sexual contact, and often seeks out such contact, the result of such a liaison is inevitably destructive rather than constructive. Thus, sexual relationships with the Other act as a negation rather than an affirmation of human fertility. Likewise, the Other’s attitudes towards human food and the food of the Other itself act as a negation of human nutrition.

Several discrepancies exist between the earlier and contemporary tradition. The primary difference is found in the identity of the Other. The earlier elf is replaced by the contemporary and human Greenlander. The connection between the Greenlandic woman and the ellefolk of earlier tradition is made explicit in the contemporary legend with the locution “go to them.” This shift results in two noticeable phenomena. First, the Greenlandic woman is robbed of her human traits, as she is equated with the earlier nonhuman Other. Second, the ethnic differentiation of Dane/non-Dane, in contrast to the earlier human/nonhuman distinction, is highlighted. This type of shift is frequent in contemporary tradition. A second difference is found in the intentions of the Dane with regard to the Other. In contemporary tradition, the Dane seeks out the Other, and it is only his inadvertent inability to perform which averts the union. In earlier tradition, the Dane takes explicit steps to avoid or terminate the relationship. The final difference lies in the execution of the juxtaposition of nourishment and waste. In earlier tradition, the insider carries out this juxtaposition, as opposed to contemporary tradition, in which it is the Other who performs this task. While the earlier tradition focuses on the human qualities of the insider, the contemporary tradition focuses on the nonhuman qualities of the Other. As such, earlier tradition takes an inclusive standpoint—those who behave in this manner belong—whereas contemporary tradition takes an exclusionary standpoint—those who behave in this manner do not belong. Banton mentions that while ethnic categories result from inclusive processes, racist and ethnocentric distinctions result from exclusive processes (Banton 1983). Taken in light of the
demographic changes mentioned above, it is not surprising that contemporary tradition relies on an ethnocentric and exclusive process to define the boundaries of the group, while earlier tradition inclusively defined those boundaries.

Also plentiful in Danish tradition are legends concerning the kidnapping of insiders by the Other. The kidnapping of a young child, particularly a girl, by the Other expresses a potential threat to the community’s future success. By removing both a community member and a future child bearer, the Other effectively removes the ability of the inner realm to procreate. Accounts similar to the one considered by Edgar Morin (1982) exist in contemporary Danish tradition:6


(My little sister told me that she heard about three girls who traveled on Interrail down to France. Now the girls were in Paris, and it was the day before they were supposed to travel back to Denmark, and so they were going to go into town one more time before they went home. So they were out walking around, and they came to a strange little neighborhood down by the river. They were going to look around in the stores. All of a sudden, one girl sees a dress in a store window, and she told her friends that they should wait outside since she wants to try on this dress. So the other two stood outside and waited and waited

6 Collected from Lotte Pedersen, age 19, Roskilde.
and the girl just stayed inside. So one of the girls goes into the store to find out what has happened, but the Arab who owns the store denies up and down that a blond girl had come into the store. So the girl hurries out of the store and together with the other girl they go to the police and explain the situation—they could both speak French. . . . The police go along to the store, but the Arab still denies that the girl had come in there. But when they search the changing room, they discover a trapdoor. The police believe that the girl went into the changing room to try on the dress, fell down through the trapdoor and was kidnapped in that way. They say she was sold into the white slave trade in north Africa. She never came back, but the store was closed and the Arab is in jail.)

The young girls have moved beyond the boundaries of the inner realm and thereby have placed themselves at threat. Their youth suggests that they have yet to contribute as child bearers to the community. Therefore, the Other’s ability to seize one of them is particularly devastating to the fertility of the inner realm.

Kristensen’s collections contain analogues to this account. Particularly worthy of note is:


(In Herrested parish on Måre field, there’s a big mound from where you used to be able to see over to Sjælland. The mound-dwellers who lived there took a girl from a man in Måre. He sent her out into the field one evening to get the geese, but she couldn’t find them and, to see better, she went up on the mound but sank down and disappeared. They never expected to see her again, but one night, while the mother was at home, a girl came to her and asked for lodging. The woman said
no and since it wasn’t completely dark yet she could probably find lodging somewhere else. . . Now she asked if they hadn’t lost a girl here on the farm a few years ago. The woman answered yes and asked if it was her. The girl didn’t answer but said, “If you give me a bag of grain, then I’ll say where I am and you can decide for yourselves who I am.” She sprinkled the grain behind her up to the north side of the mound and the parents followed along behind. As they stood there, the girl sank before their eyes. They tried to dig her up but the earth had become so hard they couldn’t sink a shovel in.)

Here one finds both the danger of the outside to young girls and the downward movement during the kidnapping. Unlike the contemporary version, this variant expresses a degree of optimism—the girl reappears. Nevertheless, she remains removed from the community. Another legend mirrors the contemporary legend in that the girl is tempted into the realm of the Other, this time by strawberries:

_Når man følger vejen fra Torsø mølle til Ajdt, kommer man om ved en bukke, der er overgroet med småtræer og buske, og efter en tidligere ejer kaldes Sören Ajdt’s skov. Der vilde børnene gjerne sige hen for at samle jordbær. En lille pige fra Tungelund, som gik meget derud, forsvandt en gang sporløst. Folk havde set hende gå ind i skoven, og i flere dage ledte man da om hende så vel der som i et kjer ved siden af bakken, men alt var forgjøves._ (Kristensen 1980: vol. 1, 252)

(When you follow the road from Torsø mill to Ajdt, you come to a hill which is overgrown with small trees and bushes and, after a previous owner, is called Søren Ajdt’s forest. The children often went there to pick strawberries. A little girl from Tungelund, who frequently went out there, disappeared once without a trace. People had seen her go into the forest, and they searched for her for many days there as well as a in a pond next to the hill, but it was all in vain.)

In all cases, a movement to the outside realm results in the Other disturbing the communal integrity. Implicit is the need for young girls to remain “inside” and the desire of the Other to acquire such girls, often for sexual purposes. Whereas the contemporary variant positions the Other as a member of a different and unknown human ethnic group, the nineteenth-century variants identify the Other as a supernatural being. In all of these accounts, the girl is not returned to the community.

While many of the Other appearing in Kristensen’s collections are supernatural beings, human Other also exist. In conjunction with the
These legends cited above, one should consider legends of the robber band which steals a girl to be their slave:


(Southwest of Assens on my property there’s a mound out on the heath which is called Sanni’s mound. It stems from when a girl, who was called Sine, was snatched by some robbers who lived in the mound. People looked hard for her but couldn’t find where she was staying. She ran errands now and then for the robbers and one time she was sent out after grain. Then she comes to a little guy, and he questions her about where she’s from. Then she answers that she’d let it be known. She let some grain fall now and then and then people found the mound, and she was released.)

These legends tend to end on an optimistic note, with the girl eventually released and the threat to communal integrity removed. In contrast, the contemporary version refuses to return the girl to her community. The suggestion is that ethnically differentiated Other are more dangerous than socially differentiated Other. After all, the socially unacceptable are still part of the ethnically acceptable group. In either case, the threat continues implicitly—it will always be dangerous for girls to travel outside the communal boundaries in the realm of the Other.

The success of fertility can also be measured in the success of the offspring. Physically or socially handicapped children are inherently a threat to the success of the community. Legend assigns the blame for such offspring to the Other. At the same time, these legends express the desire of the Other to become part of the inner realm. Earlier legend tradition contains numerous accounts of changelings, identifiable by their odd appearance and actions:

Der var hjærgfolk i et hjærg, der var der oven til Søndergård. De forbyttede et barn derfra. Han var i en gård nør i byen og en sille stymper alle hans dage. Han lignede også en døver og gik i skytter (skjørter) al hans tid. (Kristensen 1980: vol. 1, 302)
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(There were mound-dwellers over in a mountain which was over by Søndergård. They changed a child from there. He was in a farm in the northern part of town and a poor wretch his whole life. He looked like a dwarf and wore shirts all the time.)

(There was a changeling at the deacon’s house in Lovns. The deacon’s daughter was its mother. It stood and scratched itself and showed its long teeth. It was a boy, and he reached thirty years old.)

In each case, the child is that of the Other. The presence of this changeling within the inner realm constitutes a frightening threat. Contemporary legend tradition provides several examples:

Min mor...voksede op på Øregård på Sydsjælland, deres “købstad” var Vordingborg, og her boede der en lods, der jo af og til var ret lange hjemme fra. Hans Kone fudte et negerbarn og manden var rasende—men det viste sig, at hans bedste- eller oldefar havde været på Dansk Vestindien og var blevet givet derovre med en “indfødt!” Så negerbarnet var et af de meget sjældne tilfælde, hvor bestemte arveanlæg pludselig slår igennem.?

En dame i Oslo havde født et negerbarn, en mulat. Manden, en vidt rejende person, gav selvfølgelig konen skyl for ikke at have holdt sig på måten, når han rejste på forrentningsrejse i Europa. Hans kone bedyrrede sin uskyld, og manden måtte til sidst erkende, at han i København hos en letlevende dame havde dygget lidt vel rigeligt. Denne dame havde kort forinden været sammen med en neger, visstnok en soldat fra de americanske besættelsesstyrker i Tyskland. Beskyttelsen af nogen art havde ikke været på tale, så nordmanden sleber negeret med til Norge og putter den i sin egen kone. Summa summarum: Negeren vinder 1–0. 8

(My mother . . . grew up at Øregård in south Sjælland; their market town was Vordingborg and a pilot lived there who was, every now and then, away from home a long time. His wife gave birth to a negro child, and the man was enraged—but it turned out that his grandfather or great grandfather had been in the Danish West Indies and

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7 Sent to Kofod by Vibeke Calov, age 86, Sjælland.
8 Sent to Kofod by Aksel R. Kondrup, Grenå who collected the story from Hans Christensen, a painter, Oppegård, south of Oslo, at a building site in June 1960.
had been married over there with a native. So the negro child was one of the very seldom occurrences where certain genes come through.)

(A woman in Oslo gave birth to a negro child, a mulatto. The husband, a person who traveled widely, put the blame on his wife, of course, for not behaving herself when he went on business trips in Europe. His wife asserted her innocence, and the husband had to admit at last that in Copenhagen he had screwed around with a loose woman. This woman had shortly before been together with a negro, probably a soldier from the American occupation forces in Germany. There was no talk of any type of protection so the Norwegian carries the negro sperm back to Norway and puts it into his own wife. Summa summarum: the negro wins 1–0.)

The Other has been able to force its way into the inner realm through birth. In contemporary tradition the physical handicap of earlier tradition is replaced by an ethnic handicap. While the skin color of the child does not hamper its actual physical abilities, it does hamper its social abilities. Thompson notes that the racial classification of blacks and whites has meaning and social significance “only to the extent that blacks and whites are differentiated from each other on dimensions other than skin pigmentation” and that “people do believe that there are socially meaningful differences between blacks and whites” (Thompson 1989: 16–7). The black child is considered equally unable to be part of society as the nonhuman changeling. The horror of a white Dane giving birth to a black child is implicit in the accounts and correlates well with the horror both the parents and community feel towards the changeling in earlier tradition. The horror of the event seems to be the main motivational force behind the legend’s performance. In both cases, the man places initial blame on his wife, the protector of the domestic space, but eventually is forced to acknowledge his “fault” in the matter. Interestingly, the “outside” is able to force its way into the inner realm when an insider travels away from home to engage in economically coded activity; thus the legends also emphasize the dangers associated with engaging in economic exchange with the outside. In all of the variants, the tradition community gives vent to its ethnocentric desire to maintain its “purity,” devoid of any handicaps. The Other’s desire to enter the inner realm plays a major role in these accounts. From the point of view of the insider, this is a dangerous threat to communal integrity. However, in the contemporary variants, the subtext speaks of the wish of minority peoples to
integrate themselves into the dominant ethnic/cultural group. The horror of the Danes in the legend perhaps mirrors the desire to avoid such integration as it threatens the already established cultural boundaries. As such, the legend does not hold out much hope for the minority person who hopes to integrate himself into Danish society.

Sexual liaisons with the Other constitute a threat to the perseverance of the community as a homogeneous entity. In the first case examined, a potentially hazardous relationship is averted. The Other is rebuffed at the last second, either by sexual impotency or an expression of humanness. In contrast, the Other expresses the inverted nature of their realm. In the second case considered, the Other repeatedly attempts to steal the most fertile members of the community as a means of compromising the integrity of the inner realm. Whether the girl returns or not is almost immaterial—she has been indelibly stamped with the effects of the outer realm. One of the greatest threats to the community is the transplantation of a baby from the outer realm into the inner realm. The Other’s baby in this case threatens the homogeneity of the inside group.

As noted above, the Other often tries to poison human food. Food preparation is one task that should be carried out exclusively within the inner realm. Allowing outside elements to engage in food preparation or to even have access to food storage areas can have disastrous consequences. The “Kentucky Fried Rat” legend has been the center of great speculation and scholarly debate in contemporary legend studies (Fine 1980; Brunvand 1981, 1984, 1986, 1989, 1993). In many of the Scandinavian variants, the offending restaurant is owned by non-ethnic Danes, usually readily identifiable ones such as Chinese or Turks (Klintberg 1988). Bregenhøj includes a variant of one such account:

*Det var et ungt par, som gik på kinesisk restaurant. De bestilte forårs ruller og gik med god appetit igang med maden. Pludselig mærkede den unge mand, at han fik noget hårdt i sin mundfuld, men han forsøgte at synke det. Det blev imidlertid siddende i halsen, og hvad man end gjorde, kom det ikke løs igen. Manden måtte tage på skadressen, hvor legen konstaterede, at det var et rotteben, som han havde fået i halsen. Sundhedsmynvidighederne blev alarmeret og undersøgte den kinesiske restaurant med det resultat, at man afslørede, at der i fryseren var adskillige slagtede rotter side om side hengt op i balerne.* (Bregenhøj 1978: 70)
(There was a young couple who went to a Chinese restaurant. They ordered egg rolls and, with good appetites, began eating the food. All of a sudden, the young man noticed that he had something hard in his mouth, but he tried to swallow it. It got caught in his throat and regardless of what he did, he couldn't get it out. The guy had to go to the emergency room where the doctor determined that it was a rat bone which had gotten stuck in his throat. The health officials were notified, and they searched the Chinese restaurant with the result that they discovered that, in the freezer, numerous slaughtered rats had been hung up, side by side, from their tails.)

The Other is ready at any moment to pass poison or nonhuman food off as “normal.” In earlier legend, trolls, bjørnfolk, ellesfolk and the like would tempt the unwary farm hand with ordinary looking food. This food, however, was often poisonous or in other ways hexed to appear normal when in fact it was not:

På Torshøj pløjede en mand, Sören Kristensen, for en 20 år siden. Da kom et kvindemenneske ud af højen i sorte klæder og sort i ansigtet, om han ikke vilde fære en skåde, hun gik med, så skulle han få en kage. Så kom hun med en, og da blev en dreng, som kjørte pløven, syg. (Kristensen 1980: vol. 1, 104)

(A man, Søren Kristensen, plowed on Torshøj about twenty years ago. Then a woman in black clothes and with a black face came out of the mound, [and asked] if he wouldn’t repair a spade she had, then he’d get a cake. Then she came with one and then the boy, who drove the plow, got sick.)

In this instance, the food offered by the Other is accepted and results in illness.

Bregenhøj identified a contemporary legend that experienced hyperactive transmission in 1978. He summarizes the variants as follows:

Gennem de første par uger af februar i år opskrevne beskæftigelsen i en række europæiske lande af nyheden om at terrorister havde indeopføjetede kryksølv i israelske appelsiner. Det hele startede tilsyneladende da man i Holland fik meddelelse om en palæstinensisk organisation kaldet “Arab Revolutionary Army, Palestinian Command” havde forgiftet israelske Jaffa-appelsiner. (Bregenhøj 1978: 65)

9 As such, this legend circulated as rumor. Rumor is a hyperactive transmissionary state of legend. Patrick Mullen considers the relation of contemporary legend to rumor, suggesting that rumor acts as a reinforcement of legend (Mullen 1972).
(During the first few weeks of February this year, the citizens of a series of European countries were terrified by the news that terrorists had injected mercury into Israeli oranges. It all started, most likely, when notice was received in Holland that a Palestinian organization called “Arab Revolutionary Army, Palestinian Command” had poisoned Israeli Jaffa oranges.)

The account was also carried in newspapers throughout Europe, increasing both its dispersion and believability. The terrorist Palestinians appear as the Other intent on disrupting the food supply and poisoning the members of the inner realm. In the following examples from earlier tradition, the poisoned fruit is an apple, which is deliberately placed along the road or otherwise proffered to poison someone:


(When I was a boy, I walked home from Gårsvænved near Fredericia. It was a little past noon, and I was hungry. Just when I get a little out of town near a big pond, I find a wonderful red apple on the road. I grab it and make short process of it by taking a huge mouthful, but yeah! the foulest material sprayed out into my face, and I now saw for the first time that it was hollow but had been held together by three pins. I was fifteen years old that time, but I remember it clearly, how incredibly disgusting it was for me. A little later, I got seven boils on my left leg, and I’ve practically never gotten rid of them.)

This variant also includes the random nature of the attack found in the contemporary account, as no particular victim is singled out. In all cases, an innocuous but tempting (the apple has tempted mankind from the beginning!) fruit becomes the vessel of threat. This feature of the legend prompted Sylvia Grider to dub the narratives as part of “The Razor Blades in the Apple Syndrome” (Grider 1984; Ellis 1989). In contemporary tradition, the witch’s position is taken over by the foreign terrorists. In each case, the Other operates within the inner realm with easy access to the food supply. The legends suggest that the Other
can in fact be very close at hand. Although both the witch and Palestinian terrorist are disguised in human form, they are decidedly members of the Other, as evidenced through their destructive actions. Their clever human disguises make them all the more dangerous. Brehenhøj, in analyzing the legend, mentions that “historierne bygges på en ofte forekommende situation men sammetidig grunder de sig på noget vi er bange for . . . i flere tilfælde er der tale om et nyt element i samfundslivet” (Bregenhøj 1978: 71) [the stories build on a common situation but, at the same time, they ground themselves on something we are afraid of . . . in many cases there is a question of new elements in the societal life].

In the earlier legends, the fear of the ellefolk, bjærgfolk, and witches led to the transmission of legends concerning either the poison nature of the Other’s food or the Other’s desire to poison human food. The witches, like the terrorists, are particularly terrifying because they have greater access to the inner realm than the bjærgfolk or the ellefolk. In the contemporary variants, the fear of contaminated food persists. Instead of witches contaminating the food, their modern counterparts, the terrorists, as new elements in society and thus as new actors in the realm of the Other, play the leading role.

The Other have also been engaged in the theft of food and, more strikingly, the theft of household pets, which are later eaten for dinner. Accounts such as these have great global distribution, as is attested by Florence Baer’s study of anti-Vietnamese folk narrative (Baer 1982). A contemporary variant follows:10


(It all started a year ago. There was a woman who had to go to Brugsen, and she took her dog along. She goes into Brugsen and twenty minutes later, when she came out, she just sees the backside of her dog. She follows; it was being pulled by an immigrant. He goes

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10 Sent to Jensen and Kofod by Henrik Bech Jensen, Fårup.
into a stairwell and up to the second floor. She tried to knock on the door, but he didn’t open—so she went in to the neighbor’s apartment and called the police. When they came, he opened the door. They went out to the kitchen where the dog stood shaved—ready to be slaughtered. When they opened the freezer, dogs, birds, and rabbits were lying in there ready to be eaten.)

In this case, while the Dane is in the market shopping for her (i.e.: normal) food, the *invandrer*, the Other, goes “shopping” for his food! A second variant does not include the timely arrival of the police.\(^{12}\)

*Historien om hunden, der blev stjålet og spist af tyrker fik jeg fortalt for ca. 4 år siden. Det var i en kreds af ret så fornuftige mennesker og fortelleren kendte de menneske, det gik ud over. Disse mennesker gik tur med deres gravhund, da pludseligt et par tyrkere snppede linen ud af hånden på disse mennesker og forsøndte hunden. Da politiet fandt frem til gerningsmanden, var måltidet lige overstået. Hele tyrkerfamilien sad omkring bordet og kun de nævnte ben var tilbage.*

(I heard the story of the dog which was stolen and eaten by Turks about four years ago. It was in a circle of reasonable people, but the teller knew the people it happened to. These people took a walk with their dachshund when all of a sudden a couple of Turks snatched the leash out of their hands and disappeared with the dog. When the police found the culprits, dinner was just finished. The entire family of Turks sat around the table and only the gnawed bones were left.)

There is a grotesque delight on the part of the narrator in describing the entire Turkish family sitting around the well-gnawed pup. In earlier variants, the role of the Other is filled by *ellefolk*:

*En karl fortalte mig følgende: Hans fader tjente i Tøjstrup, og den gang gik skoven helt ned til Tøjstrup by, nu er der kanske en helt fjærdingvej op til den. Der i skoven var ellefolk, som var hule op ad ryggen. De kom tiet til ham, når han var hyrde, og de vil gjerne listte hans meladad fra ham, det var jo det, de gik efter. De gik også ind i byen og var stemme til at stjåle der og tage deres katte. Dem spiste de, sagde man. Folkene skulde se noje på, at deres katte ikke var ene i stuen, for ellers snappede de dem.*  

(Christensen 1980: vol. 2, 34)
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(A guy told me the following: his father worked in Tøstrup, and at that time the forest went all the way down to the town of Tøstrup; now there's practically a mile up to it. In the forest there were elves who had hollows in their backs. They often came to him when he was a shepherd, and they tried to steal his bread from him, that was what they wanted. They also went into town and were bad about stealing there and taking [the townspeople's] cats. It's said that they ate them. People had to watch out that their cats weren't alone in a room because then they would get snatched.)

In both cases, the Other steals and eats the family pet—an animal that is not only part of the inner realm but also an integral part of the family, only one step removed from the status of a child.

In a direct attack against the inner realm, the Other also tries to maim, hurt, or kill. While Klintberg's collection of Swedish contemporary legends contains numerous accounts of this sort, the only one present in the Danish collection to date is one commonly referred to as "the severed fingers." Klintberg views the legend as an expression of reactions to violent situations with the victim unconsciously or accidentally victimizing the attacker (Klintberg 1986: 48). His examination of the variants reveals that the attacker is always seen. This observation contrasts sharply with the majority of Danish variants in which the unseen nature of the attacker heightens the horror of the discovery of the amputated fingers:13


(One dark, late night, with fog, a lady who had helped with house work—or was that a nurse—is on her way home from a farm in the middle of nowhere. She drives slowly, because the visibility is bad. All of a sudden, she thinks that she hears a child crying (—screams). She stops the car and goes out into the dense fog to look in the direction of the sound. At once she feels insecure, and she hurries back to the car, jumps in, and starts and drives as quickly as possible home. When

13 Sent to Jensen by Dorte Jensen, Herning.
she gets home and opens the car door, she sees that the four outer extremities of a hand are caught in the door!

A second variant identifies the intended victim as a nurse from Århus:14


(The second story tells of a young nurse in Århus. It was a winter night, and she was on her way home in her car after a night shift at the hospital. She was tired and drove the direct route through Marselisborg forest. When she is half way through it, she sees a bundle lying in the middle of the road. She stops the car, opens the door, and gets out of the car. Before she manages to get around the door, she gets a strong feeling, all of a sudden, that she isn’t alone. As a reflex, she throws herself terrified back into the car, slams the door with a bang and speeds up and drives out of the forest in record time. During the rest of the way home, she begins to settle down, but she’s still feeling a little bit strange when she parks the car in her garage. When she turns on the light in the car, she discovers that she has blood on her clothes. She turns her head to the left toward the car door and screams when she sees a bloody finger caught in the door!!! A long time later, she meets a colleague at a seminar who tells her that at the same time this happened, she was working at an emergency room where they treated a man who had lost a finger.)

The third variant is in fact a collection of variants, and includes references to various types of psychologically or socially unstable men:15

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14 Sent to Jensen by Marin Kruse, Mariager.
15 Sent to Jensen and Kofod by K.N., Århus.

(It is midnight. Usually the wind is whistling through the windbreak’s naked trees. The moon and the stars stare coldly down from above. A nurse is on her way home to sleep after a night shift. She has been working at a hospital in Skagen, Sønderborg, Esbjerg, Odense, Sørø, Præstø, and Rønne. When she is safely home, she opens the car door, and down tumbles a collection of fingers. Apparently a person, almost definitely a man, had his fingers out after the woman when she got into her car at her work place. To encounter a little of everything, she slams the car door right on the nose (fingers?) of a drunk, a sex-crazed man, a pervert, or whatever he may be. The fingers come along home, but not the man. He is worn down to nothing out on the highway’s asphalt.)

A final variant identifies the attackers as “rockere” [motorcycle gang members] and is markedly similar to the variants mentioned by af Klintberg (1986: 45–8): 16

Min veninde kender en sygeplejerske, som efter en aftenvagt var på vej hjem. Det var sent, og for at nå hen til sin bil skulle hun krydse en temmelig ude parkeringsplads. Hun var lidt utryg ved situationen, og bedre blev det ikke, da en gruppe rockere kom fraende ind på parkeringspladsen på deres store motorcyler. De begyndte omgående at genere hende, og da de kom nærmere og nærmere, blev hun alvorlig bange og satte i løb for at komme i sikkerhed i bilen. Hun nåede lige akkurat ind, inden de fik fat i hende, smækkede døren hårdt i, speedede op og kørte afsted i rasende fart. Hun hørte godt nok høje rå og skrig fra rockerne, men antog, at det var utryk for skuffelse over, at offeret var undslipset. Da hun endelig nåede hjem og skulle til at stige ud af bilen, opdagede hun, at der sad en afreven finger fastklemt i bildøren...
In all cases, the woman (and it is a woman!) is a nurse on her way home from work at night. Immediately, a threatening situation is presented. A woman is out at night—she is neither at work nor at home, but rather in the limbo of her commute—thereby treading in the dangerous realm of the Other. As long as she remains in her car, provided she manages to get there, she is free from threat. However, in the first variant, the cry of a baby awakens her instincts both as a mother (or potential mother) and as a nurse causing her to stop the car and get out. That the woman is a nurse underscores the traditional role of woman as helper, healer, nourisher, and protector. Furthermore, the nurse is linked to the fertility of the community because of her implicit role in assisting childbirth. In short, the nurse acts as a protector of communal integrity. In this case, the Other deliberately attempts to harm an important and vital member of the inner realm.

In earlier tradition, one finds plentiful accounts of a similar nature. Simpson, in her evaluation of a Swedish variant, relates the legend to a boat journey threatened by a water spirit (Simpson 1981: 207). Kristensen includes several variants of similar accounts under the rubric of “Mislykkede overfald” (Failed attack). These are the obvious precursors to the contemporary variants:

En soldat havde fået permission en 2, 3 dage og fået lov til at tage sabløen med sig, det havde manellers ikke lov til i de dage. Han vilde til Jørslev og så kom han ind og fik sig en drøm i kroen. Da kommer der en gårdmand kjørende, han vilde også her nord på. Så spørger soldaten gårdmanden, om han kunde få lov til at kjøre med. Jo, det kunde være skjønt nok, for vejen var ikke altid så rar gennem Øbjerg bakker, og han havde netop været i Ålborg og fået nogle penge, som han havde
med sig. De kommer så ud at kjøre, og da de kommer i kravet, bliver de omringet af 3 røvere. De to springer hvert til sin side af øjene og griber i dem, og den tredie vil springe op i vognen. Men så trækker soldaten sæbelen og hugger en finger af ham, og den bliver liggende i vognen. Oven på det galopperede de af alle tre. (Kristensen 1980: vol. 4, 475)


(A soldier had received leave for two or three days and had received permission to take his saber with him, which wasn’t allowed otherwise in those days. He wanted to go to Jerslev, and so he went in and had a dram at the inn. Then a farmer comes driving along and he also wants to go north. So the soldier asks the farmer if he could ride along. Yeah, that would be good enough, because the road wasn’t always so nice through the Øsbjærg hills, and he had just been in Ålborg and gotten some money, which he had with him. So they start driving and when they get to the thicket they are surrounded by three robbers. Two of them jump to either side of the nags and grab hold, the third tries to jump up into the wagon. But the soldier pulls out his saber and slashes one of his fingers off, and it remains lying in the wagon. After that all three [of the robbers] gallop off.)

(There was a robber band in Gjellerup which had its hang-out near the highway between Varde and Øllevad, and when he rode home he brushed against the chain. The robbers jumped up, and one grabbed the horse’s mouth, and the second the tail, but he spurred his horse on and chopped the hand off the second. When he got to the Varde river, the water was up, and he had to go back to Gjellerup. There he came to a farm where only a woman and a little girl were at home. The hand still hung in the tail, and the girl recognized it as her father’s by a ring. Then she says: “That’s my dad’s hand which is stuck there in the horse’s tail,” and then he gets back on his horse and rides home towards Varde. Now he must get over no matter what and promises to
build on to the church, if he gets away alive. He got safely across and kept his promise. . . .)

In most of these cases, the identity of the robber, the Other, is brought into the immediate inner realm through the identification of the amputated hand or fingers by a child. Klintberg mentions that in earlier accounts such as these, the amputation of the hands is deliberate, caused by an act of self-defense (Klintberg 1986: 48). He sees this as an area of discrepancy between contemporary and earlier variants. However this is not necessarily the case. Instead, the act of slamming the car door is equally as defensive as lashing out with a bared saber. While the earlier tradition allowed for culturally credible characters to carry swords, this is not the case in contemporary society. Since people rarely ride horses as a daily means of transportation in contemporary society, the culturally credible car has taken its place. The more recent variants mention door-slamming as a protective measure much as the earlier variants mention the slash of the sword as a defensive measure. The amputation of hands and fingers in contemporary legend may be traced directly back to these earlier variants as a car door is explicitly designed not to amputate limbs caught between it and the car frame.\(^\text{17}\)

In all of the variants, the intended victim is always startled to find his attackers digits stuck to his/her conveyance.

Despite many of the areas of agreement, earlier variants and contemporary variants of this legend exhibit numerous areas of discrepancy. The most notable of these discrepancies is the sex of the attacked—earlier variants have a male victim, while contemporary variants have a female victim. This change in victim highlights the process of historicization. In earlier Danish society, it was uncommon for a woman to travel alone on the roads. The legend is distinctly related to travel and, therefore, a culturally credible character is needed to fill the role of traveler. The contemporary variants replace the male traveler with a female traveler for a number of possible reasons. While earlier tradition could not support a lone female traveler as a credible figure, the working woman is now a social reality. Possibly, the tradition chooses

\(^{17}\) Design engineers in the “Closures” department of Ford Motor Company’s Body and Chassis Engineering Division state that car closures are designed not to result in amputation when inadvertently closed on fingers, etc. The Office of Microsurgery at the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center confirmed that they have only rarely been involved in surgery on fingers crushed in car doors. They had never encountered a fully amputated finger as mentioned in the legend variants.
a woman to act as intended victim to underscore the perception that woman’s journey to the outside realm to fulfill a non-domestic role (i.e. work) as a dangerous undertaking. The domestic role assigned by society to women is partially preserved in the work the intended victim performs—nurse.

Another area of discrepancy lies in the identity of the attacker. The earlier highway robber has been replaced by his contemporaries—the psychopath, drunk, or gang member. Brunvand’s and Klintberg’s collections both include numerous variants of psychopathic killers attempting to attack women in their automobiles. The automobile represents an extension of the inner realm—a means to be conveyed safely through the realm of the Other. However, it is not entirely safe—the Other has easy access to the open car. A journey through the realm of the Other is inherently dangerous. While the car gives a sense of security, it is a false sense. Therefore, women who do travel through the realm of the Other, even if by car, are at risk.

A final discrepancy lies in the possible interpretations of the amputation. Earlier variants always position the attacker as a robber thereby providing a reason for the loss of a hand—the hand is used to steal. In the contemporary variants, the implicit intention of the attacker is rape. The amputation of the fingers has moved from an explicit symbol to an implicit one acting here as a metaphor for castration (Dundes 1971 and 1980). This interpretation may not be necessary if the intent of the attacker is to maim or kill the intended victim. Both of these actions would be carried out by hand—the removal of the hand would remove that threat (Dégh 1968 and 1971). Regretfully, tales such as “The Hook” tell us that even psychopaths who are missing a hand are prone to attack—using their prosthesis instead of their missing fingers. In contrast to the other legends considered above, these legends of failed attacks have remained essentially sociocentric.

The perceptions of the Other in Danish legend tradition reveal several aspects of the function of legend in society. John Lindow has noted the continuity in the socio- and ethnocentric nature of legend across time: “Modern legendry is ethnocentric and sociocentric, to be sure, but in that it simply exhibits continuity with older tradition” (Lindow 1989: 401). Many Danish legends have moved from implicit ethnocentrism to explicit ethnocentrism. By equating the minority refugee and immigrant cultures with trolls, elves, and other nonhuman groups, the Danish contemporary legend tradition places these people
outside of the Danish cultural boundaries. In early agrarian Denmark of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were few threats to the ethnic homogeneity of the Danes. Occasional outsiders appeared and, like the current minority populations, were pushed into the realm of the Other. Because the ethnic threat was highly abstract in this earlier context, the role of Other was assigned to supernatural beings. Threat to ethnic homogeneity was not omnipresent and actual but rather perceived and implicit. In the nineteenth century, the tradition dominant for ethnic threat resided in the supernatural beings. In contemporary tradition, this motifemic slot is filled by the minority populations. Witches and robbers, though human in appearance, also belong to the realm of the Other. Rather than being ethnic distinctions, these two categories are social distinctions. In contemporary tradition, the robber has been replaced by the psychopath, drunk, or gang member, another social distinction. Despite the various effects of historicization, these legend narratives have preserved their sociocentric nature. In contrast, the legends about witches and poisoned fruit have moved in part from the realm of sociocentrism to the realm of ethnocentrism. The witch has been replaced by the terrorist. The terrorist encompasses both a social and ethnic distinction. Not only does he distinguish himself through his acts of violence aimed at disrupting social integrity, but also his ethnic identity, in this case Palestinian, firmly entrenches him outside the ethnic boundaries of the Danish inner realm.

Contemporary legend uses, in large part, ethnicity in defining the identity of the Other. While the function of the Other remains constant, the identity changes from supernatural or asocial actants to ethnically unacceptable actants. Lanternari comments on the dehumanizing goal of ethnocentrism:

*Proprio in forza di questo passaggio un gruppo finisce per negare pari valore umano all’altro gruppo, che perciò viene discriminato, perseguitato, marginalizzato e al limite annientato.* (Lanternari 1983: 151)

(Precisely as a result of this process, one group ends up denying equal human worth to another group which is, therefore, discriminated against, persecuted, marginalized and, in the extreme, annihilated.)

This process corresponds with what one observes in contemporary Danish legend tradition. Because the actants change from supernatural
Other to a dehumanized but actual group “immigrants,” the legends shift from being overtly anthropocentric to explicitly ethnocentric. The result is at least marginalization of the immigrant groups and, at worst, acts of discrimination and persecution of these groups. The need to codify the threat of ethnic contamination forced the usurpation of earlier legend roles, assigning these roles to ethnically unacceptable groups and resulting in the formation of highly ethnocentric legends. Any ethnic group which is not Danish is unacceptable by the tradition standards. This attitude is implicit in the use of general terms such as invandrere [immigrants] in the legends. When the ethnicity of the Danes became threatened in a concrete and observable manner through the influx of large numbers of non-ethnic Danes, the reaction was to assign these groups the nonhuman role of Other in tradition. In this manner, the threat to Danish ethnic homogeneity is underscored. At the same time, the exclusive nature of legend helps preserve Danish ethnic identity through delimitation of the ethnic borders. The legend tradition acts as a means for codifying the ethnocentric values of the tradition participants.

This examination of contemporary legend tradition in light of earlier variants has brought forth some interesting aspects of the process of historicization. While contemporary tradition appears at first inspection to be in large part shockingly ethnocentric, closer scrutiny reveals the process of assigning the role of Other, previously occupied by supernatural beings, to the immigrant and minority populations. The characterization of these minority groups is not based on observation but rather on the reassignment of traits, which constitutes one of the main aspects of historicization in Danish legend tradition. The interchange, however, results in a negative perception of the minorities and a perpetuation of this perception. Ethnocentrism is based on the belief that “one’s own group (be it ethnic or national) is superior to other groups” (Thompson 1989: 17). Every ethnic group defines itself by positioning itself in opposition to an Other which, in turn, is always attributed nonhuman characteristics. In nineteenth-century Denmark, the most common victims were supernatural beings. Regrettfully, the current tradition victimizes human beings. Like the sociocentric legends of witches and kloge folk [folk healers], which resulted in the persecution of numerous innocent people, current ethnocentric legends of Greenlanders, Iranians, Pakistanis, Palestinians, and Turks dehumanize a very human part of Danish society.
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