"How do you know she’s a witch?": Witches, Cunning Folk, and Competition in Denmark

TIMOTHY R. TANGHERLINI

In Danish legend tradition, the witch is perhaps the best known example of a supernatural threat in human form residing within the boundaries of the community.¹ The witch, as she is presented in tradition, appears as a terrifying and at times vindictive menace, intent on wreaking economic and physical havoc on otherwise seemingly safe rural communities.² In hundreds of accusations from seventeenth century court proceedings, in thousands of stories from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries collected by the Danish folklorist Evald Tang Kristensen (1934 and 1980 [1892-1901]), and in everything from broadsides to newspaper articles during the preceding, intervening and, to a lesser extent, subsequent years, horrific crimes ranging from assault to sabotage, poisoning to larceny, kidnapping to murder are attributed to witches (Johansen 1991 and 1992; Henningsen 1975 and 1978; Hansen 1960; Rørbye 1976; Kristensen 1980 [1892-1901]; Kristensen 1934). The profound threat to a community ascribed to witches in legend tradition—and folk belief in general—derives in large part from their status as community insiders. One can never be entirely sure that a next-door neighbor, a friend or even one’s own spouse is not a witch. Because of the clear proclivity of witches to undermine the economic integrity of a community and their wanton disregard for the physical well-being of community members, knowing who was a witch and who was not—a knowledge directly related to the contemporaneous storytelling tradition—was, at least up through the nineteenth century, a matter of great importance (Henningsen 1975).

The general conceptions both of the witch and of witchcraft were not

Western Folklore 59 (Summer/Fall 2000):279-303

279
constant from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. Furthermore, narrators’ motivations to affix the term “witch” to certain individuals or classes of individuals seem to have changed considerably. While one might expect that kloge folk (cunning folk) who, because of their abilities to cure illness and remove curses, would have been frequently accused of witchcraft, this does not appear to be the case, at least not until the nineteenth century. By that time, calling someone a “witch” had vastly different consequences than in the seventeenth century. It seems likely that this later use of the term “witch” in connection with cunning folk was connected to the market for healers—while using the label no longer had the potential to result in execution, it did have the power to hurt the practice of a local cunning man or woman.

The late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were arguably the heyday of the witch in Denmark. Scandinavian witch trials from this period, as well as stories about witches and their persecution, have become in recent years topics of considerable interest both for Scandinavian historians—such as Jens Christian Johansen (1991), Kim Tørnsø (1986), and Bengt Ankarloo (1971)—and folklorists—such as Bente Gulveig Alveir (1971) and Gustav Henningsen (1975). Their studies have considered in great detail the contours of witchcraft, the minutia of the witchcraft trials, the brutal execution of witches (generally by burning), and the narrative tradition concerning witches and witch belief both during and after the well-known witch-hunt frenzy that gripped most of Scandinavia and other parts of Europe during this period.

As Johansen has shown, the persecution of witches in Denmark was based primarily on the individual’s reputation as a witch (or more accurately as a troldkvinde or troldmænd), a reputation which developed out of the contemporaneous storytelling tradition (Johansen 1991: 48). Although the secular authorities demanded proof of malicious intent (maleficium) to continue to trial, this proof almost always took the form of witness accounts—hearsay evidence as it were. There were, of course, strict rules of evidence that excluded certain types of witness accounts. Thus, it was not possible to witness “i egen sag” [for one’s own case] and testimony based on “rumors” was not accepted (Johansen 1991: 32). This second category of testimony was one that clearly was difficult to enforce, as almost all testimony took the form of narratives that were based on folk belief. Therefore, this witness testimony was closely related to the contemporaneous legend tradition and, as such, rumor. Despite the fact that nearly all of the cases that were brought to trial referred to a specific event, such as the death of a cow or the illness of a child, the similarity of the stories that were presented concerning these specific events—stories that subsequently
formed the core of witchcraft accusations throughout Denmark—suggest that these accusations were part of a well-developed narrative tradition. Consequently, stories that constituted an accusation of witchcraft were readily available to any person willing to attach through narration an allegation of maleficium to a local community figure. Occasionally, these accusations would be directed at local cunning folk, although not nearly as often as the Lutheran Church would perhaps have liked (Jensen 1982; Tørnsø 1986: 104; Johansen 1991: 35).

In post Reformation Denmark, church authorities placed considerable emphasis on bringing to the general population a clear sense of pure Lutheran belief. As part of this process, they attempted to eliminate aspects of folk belief that contradicted church doctrine (Tangherlini 1998: 157; Grell 1995). Among the beliefs that they attempted to combat was the wide-spread belief in the ability of cunning folk to cure disease, find lost things, identify thieves and witches, and remove curses, all through the use of magic (Johansen 1991: 35; Johansen 1995; Jensen 1982: 8-13). The cunning folk were rightfully seen by the church as a threat to their power base, partly because they cured people using methods that were in direct competition with the church’s established rituals, partly because the church worried that the cunning folk’s rituals could include remnants of Catholic rituals—and thus undermine the efforts of the church to erase the last vestiges of Catholic practice from the religious landscape—and partly because the cunning folk represented a popular spiritual power that was not subject to the control of church authorities (Jensen 1982: 9; Johansen 1991: 35; Tangherlini 1998: 162). Furthermore, in the eyes of the church, the cunning folk undermined the important awareness of sin among the general population since they essentially told their customers that their illness or misfortune was a result of trolddom and not a punishment from God for sin (Johansen 1991: 35). To combat the perceived threat to the church posed by the cunning folk, ecclesiastic authorities promoted the view that the cunning folk were heretics, arguing that their cunning arts were derived from a relationship with the Devil (Jensen 1982: 8-13).9 The well-known bishop, Peder Palladius, for example, warned against cunning folk in his important Visitatsbog (Jacobsen 1925: 109-11) and in his “En vnderuisningh huorledies der kand handlis met dem som er besette” (Palladius 1547) in which he describes trolddom as, first and foremost, a question of cunning which, in turn, is the work of the Devil (Jacobsen 1925: 110). Not surprisingly, ecclesiastics focused their primary critique of witchcraft which, in their conception, included the cunning arts and its practitioners, on this alleged alliance between troldfolk and Satan.

During the seventeenth century, stories of witchcraft—and the people
that they were about—eventually came to the attention not only of religious authorities but also of governmental authorities (Johansen 1991: 48-51). Usually this occurred through an official accusation of witchcraft brought by a community member against someone who had developed a reputation as a witch (Johansen 1991: 48-51). In post Reformation Denmark, it was the local secular authorities (and not the church authorities) who carried out the actual juridical proceedings although convictions in these lower courts were automatically appealed to the landsting (district court). Interestingly, the secular authorities did not prioritize accusations of the use of cunning arts, but rather focused most of their energies on prosecuting accusations of maleficium. The juridical basis for the prosecutions was the Danish law of 1617, which made a distinction between malicious acts carried out by “rette troldfolk” (true witches)—those who had sworn allegiance to the Devil—and acts carried out by people who used “indbilde konster” (imaginary arts). A subsequent law from 1683 made a further distinction in this latter category, acknowledging the potential for acts carried out with malicious intent as opposed to those carried out with good intent (Johansen 1991: 23-4). It seems likely that both of these laws with their nuanced distinctions between true witchcraft and cunning were more examples of “found law” than “made law” and their emphasis on malicious intent was largely attributable to the general notion among the citizenry of what type of activity they found to be worth pursuing. While the church placed emphasis on Devil pacts and Satanic alliance—an emphasis that found expression in the law of 1617—the average person was far more likely to be concerned with the negative effects that deliberately malicious magical acts could have on their personal economy and well-being. In fact, accusations based on the lesser offense of using cunning arts without malicious intent that the church so fervently opposed were rarely brought to court. When a person was brought to court on charges consisting solely of having used cunning arts the case was more often than not dismissed (Johansen 1991: 35; Grell 1995). Only in the most extreme cases would a case based on accusations of cunning be tried and even in these cases, the convicted was at worst banished (Johansen 1991: 37 and 90). Only maleficium carried with it the death penalty.

The repeated telling of stories that labeled someone a witch, with the concomitant accusations of maleficium would, however, frequently result in punitive action. As such, the telling of stories was a politically charged endeavor that could bring with it clear results: if stories of a known community figure’s dealings as a witch gained enough currency in local tradition, the person would be arrested, brought to trial and quite possibly executed. Building primarily on questions of personal injury, these disputes
arose exclusively among people who knew each other beforehand (Tørrnsø 1986: 38). Community members must have been well aware of the power of storytelling, and while accounts of witchcraft often were an expression of fear, they were also likely deployed in a tactical manner out of vindictiveness (Henningsen 1975: 99-100). If a personal dispute escalated, the final play could be stories of witchcraft. Vindictiveness certainly seems to have played a role in seventeenth century witchcraft accusations, as attested both by records of various defendants’ challenges to the selection of jurors for the initial trial as well as records of defendants’ expressions of concern over the potential bias of selected jurors (Tørrnsø 1986: 38-9; Johansen 1991: 27-30). While the law against giving witness “i egen sag” was clearly designed to minimize the risk that vindictiveness lay at the root of an accusation, a clever antagonist could have an acquaintance do his or her bidding by acting as an “impartial” witness, and thereby sidestep this legal technicality. If the accused were sufficiently disenfranchised or otherwise unable to counter the negative narrative assault—which seems to have obtained for those whose cases actually ended up in court—chances were that the accusations would result in legal action. Depending on one’s perspective, the best or worst outcome of this prosecution would have been the execution of the accused.

Interestingly, the crimes of which most witches were accused had, at their core, an economic element—the theft of milk, the destruction of property, threats of physical harm that came true (or at least came true in the witness accounts), and curses that were coincidentally efficacious (Tørrnsø 1986: 104-12). In a fascinating tabulation of witness statements from Danish witchcraft trials, Johansen notes 271 accusations of murder, 510 of causing human illness, 339 of causing cattle’s death, thirty-nine of causing cattle’s illness, 104 of stealing or spoiling milk, 157 of killing horses or causing illness, thirty-seven of killing sheep, twenty-seven of killing pigs, twenty-one of ruining beer, and eleven of inflicting poverty (Johansen 1991, 202-205). All of these crimes constitute some form economic transgression as both murder and illness could have significant economic repercussions in the tight knit rural communities; furthermore, nearly half the cases (735 out of 1,519) speak of crimes whose primary effect was economic. While the church saw witches as a spiritual threat to the community, in practical and juridical term witches were largely prosecuted because of their imputed economic threat to the community. Quite simply, in the eyes of the courts and the local populace who brought the initial charges, witches were seen as an economic threat that needed to be eliminated.

In contrast to witches, cunning folk were not considered to constitute
an economic threat to the community. Quite to the contrary, in an age where rural medicine was virtually nonexistent, cunning folk offered at least the semblance of access to medical care. Consequently, as Johansen notes, the courts were reluctant to prosecute them: “Gennem sin praksis indtog den verdslige myndighed en ganske anden holdning end kirken; den var ikke det mindste interesseret i ‘kloge folk’” [Through its practice, the secular authorities held a significantly different position than the church: it was not at all interested in cunning folk] (Johansen 1991: 35). Although the possibility exists that cunning folk could find themselves on the wrong end of a witchcraft accusation if one of their cures failed in a spectacular manner, this seems not to have been a terribly widespread phenomenon (Johansen 1991: 88-9; Tørnsø 1986: 101-4). In some trials, well-intentioned parishioners would even testify to the folk healing abilities of the accused, not as evidence of the accused’s malfeasance, but rather as evidence of their positive character—a tactic that more often than not back-fired since, at the very least, the accused now stood liable for punishment on these lesser charges. Of course, a tactic among those accused of witchcraft was to plead guilty to the lesser crimes of “signen og manen” [blessing and conjuring] which, according to the law from 1617, could only be punished with confiscation and exile (Johansen 1991: 30).

In the few cases where cunning folk were actually brought to trial, it was generally on the charge of having cursed someone, and not because of their work as a cunning person. There was of course a certain ambiguity in the folk conceptions of who was and who was not a witch. While people could generally discern between malicious and beneficent intent, there was also a general sense that people who could do good could also do bad. Addressing the ambivalence among the general rural populace in France concerning the categories of the malicious witch and the helpful cunning man or woman, Robert Muchembled notes:

La différence traditionelle entre magie noire et magie blanche est à n’en pas douter une distinction savante, une invention due aux élites culturelles. Au village, tous les paysans sont confrontés quotidiennement à des phénomènes magiques ambivalents, qui peuvent aussi bien détruire que protéger l’individu, selon l’aptitude de ce dernier à les détourner ou encore à se les concilier. Mais si chacun recherche ainsi perpétuellement un équilibre magique par des tabous et par des rites protecteurs, il est un personnage qui est censé posséder plus de force, plus de capacités en de domaine que commun peuple: le devin-guérisseur, qui porte divers noms selon les régions, et qui est en réalité un sorcier villageois. Ses fonctions sont multiples, car il cumule celles du médecin, du prêtre, du savant: il dis-
This ambivalence obtained for the Danish rural populace as well as evidenced by witness accounts used not only to prosecute but also to defend individuals accused of witchcraft (Tønnsø 1986: 104). Accordingly, one can easily imagine a situation in which accusations of witchcraft would be challenged by other stories proposing that the accused was acting more as a cunning person than as a troldkvinde, thereby lessening the impact of the damning accusations of malicious intent.

Interestingly, this ambivalence concerning the identification of a person as either a witch or a cunning person did not disappear with the witch trials but rather persisted as a functional aspect of folk belief well into the twentieth century and is evident in the stories about witches and cunning folk collected by Evald Tang Kristensen. For example, a certain Lærer J. Jacobsen from Mejlyb, speaking about the “Cunning Smith in Lønborg” says: “The cunning folk were both feared and admired. They could measure, bless, and show again, cure illness and, through reading, prevent injuries or make them better. In addition, they could stop blood, calm run-away horses and a lot more... The cunning folk did both good and bad” (Kristensen 1934, vol. 6: 141).

This ambivalence over the identification of a person as a witch or as a cunning person lay at the heart of several cases in which cunning folk were brought to court on the charge of witchcraft. Kirsten “Pinn” Poulsdatter, a cunning person on Læsø, for example, was brought to court in 1634 accused of witchcraft (Johansen 1991: 90-1, and 273; Viborg landsting). During her trial, Kirsten said that she did not consider taking the “mælke-lykke” (milk luck) from a man and subsequently returning it to him as witchcraft. Rather, she saw it as part of the abilities of a cunning person. Similarly, a witness against her mentioned that she had told him that if he gave her some grain while he was sowing his fields, he would get a thousand-fold return. Although his harvest was quite good that year, he blamed a subsequent poor harvest on her having crossed his fields. In the eyes of the witness—and in her own eyes as well—one and the same person was quite capable of doing both good and bad (Johansen 1991: 91; Viborg Landsting B24.524: 309r-312r). 21 Kirsten was eventually convicted not of witchcraft but rather on the lesser charges of using “indbildnede konster”—the magic of a cunning person—and her conviction led to a sentence of banishment.

Despite the thin line separating cunning from witchcraft, the number of cunning folk who were actually accused of and found guilty of crossing that line constituted less than ten percent of the total of witchcraft pros-
ecutions in Jutland (Johansen 1991: 91). So, while the cunning folk should have been an obvious group from which to choose potential witches, this did not occur. It is certainly possible that far more cunning folk than were ever brought to trial were on the verge of developing reputations as witches, perhaps among disgruntled or suspicious customers or perhaps through the tactical deployment of narrative by competing cunning folk. However, given the fact that so few cunning folk were brought to court on charges of witchcraft, even in spite of the very thin line that separated the cunning arts from witchcraft, one must conclude that the benefit to the local community of having the cunning person as a local resource to help with curing illness and reversing misfortune outweighed any potential liability associated with their continued presence. In addition, the possibility for community censure—perhaps in the form of seeking out another cunning person—coupled to the strong corrective factor represented by the threat of execution for crossing the line over to deliberately malicious acts were apparently sufficient to keep most cunning folk on the straight and narrow.

It is also possible—indeed even likely—that cunning folk were able to stave off narrative onslaughts which labeled their activities as witchcraft by mobilizing their customers to tell counter narratives. Since a single allegation of maleficium had little chance of being substantiated in court unless there were impartial witnesses who would support the allegation, a cunning person—if faced with a potential accusation—could rely on their customer base to contest the allegation, and nip their developing reputation as a witch in the bud. Conversely, a person who did not have a reputation as a cunning person would have greater difficulty counteracting the narratives that acted as a foundation for a witch reputation. As Johansen (1991: 48) points out, most people tried for witchcraft had developed a reputation as a witch long before they were brought to trial. A cunning person—who had conversely developed a reputation as a cunning person and not as a witch—was in a relatively secure position: they had close contact to a large group of people who could attest to their skills as a cunning person. In turn, these pronouncements would have the narrative potential to weaken any developing reputation the cunning person might have had as a witch. A marginalized person, one without a strong community base, in contrast, would be powerless to counteract any developing reputation for witchcraft.

By the time Tang Kristensen began his legend collecting in the late nineteenth century, the social and political situation in Denmark was considerably different than that of the seventeenth century. The era of the witchcraft trials was long over and the zeal to burn whomever happened
to find herself on the wrong end of a story had dissipated. The laws had changed and, by 1866, it was no longer possible to punish someone for witchcraft, a practice that had stopped for all intents and purposes long before the laws reflected the de facto situation (Johansen 1991: 25). Accordingly, the motivations for the dissemination of stories about witches and cunning folk must also have changed. Although some folklorists would like to see the nineteenth century legend tradition as a survival—a memory of time long passed preserved in the minds of the idyllic rural folk—contemporary theorists have shown that tradition participants rarely continue a tradition if it no longer produces meaning (Honko 1984: 40-1; Ingversen 1995). Since stories of witches and cunning folk were quite popular during the late nineteenth century, the tales must have been meaningful for both the tellers and the audiences. Accordingly, the motivation for the continued telling of stories about both cunning folk and witches should be sought in the particular historical situation of the late nineteenth century, where cunning folk still provided the much-needed service of medical and veterinary care for the poor, and where the accusations of witchcraft, which had the power to kill in the past, could now be deployed as a means for casting aspersions on the abilities of competing cunning folk—an echo of Muchembled’s idea that one village’s cunning person is another village’s witch (Muchembled 1979: 55).

The stories of witches and cunning folk can also be read in part in the context of profound changes in the power of the Lutheran church. The promulgation of the democratic constitution of 1849 led to a refiguration of the connection between the church and the crown, and meant that the previously powerful Lutheran church found itself in a considerably different position than two hundred years earlier. Concomitant to these changes in the previously unchallenged spiritual authority of the Lutheran church were developments in the political landscape of local communities. Farm owners emerged as a politically powerful class and cotters followed closely on their heals. Power and authority were no longer concentrated in the hands of the crown and the church, but rather diluted to a far greater degree among the general population. Stories endorsing the powers of local cunning folk emerged as clear challenges to the authority of local church authorities, a challenge that the church had already felt in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Tangherlini 1998). At the same time, stories accusing a person of witchcraft no longer carried with them the potential for horrific punishment at the hands of the church or government, but rather a far less physically threatening punishment—community censure. If a person had a reputation as a witch, you would be inclined to avoid them.
Perhaps the greatest change to effect the cunning folks’ practice were two laws that were promulgated approximately one hundred years apart. The first, the apothecary law of 1672, was instituted to protect apothecaries from the competition they felt from the cunning folk (Rørbye 1976: 201). The law essentially made it illegal for persons other than apothecaries to sell or distribute medicines. While the law made a great deal of the cunning folks’ practice illegal, it was not until the kvaksalver law of 1794 that the cunning folk found themselves decisively on the wrong side of the law. The cover of the statute makes clear that it is directed against cunning folk:

Statute concerning the punishment for quacks who, under the name of cunning men or women, take it upon themselves to cure illnesses among the peasantry in spite of the fact that they are completely unknowing in the art of medicine and who, through the improper use of medicines, ruin the health and the use of limbs of people who are so simple-minded that they seek help from them and subject themselves to their cures, as well as measures to prevent, stop and cure contagious diseases (Rørbye 1976: 208).

Unlike the laws against witchcraft which included the cunning folk but were rarely used against them, the kvaksalver law, with its harsh penalties was not only directed explicitly at the cunning folk, but was also used with relative frequency.25

The institution of the law speaks to the developing political power of the physicians and their Collegium Medicum. Not only did treatments proposed by the cunning folk contradict the increasingly scientific approach represented by the physicians, but the cunning folk also represented a competitive threat to the physicians’ local practices (Rørbye 1976: 22). Part of the cunning folks’ success in the market for patients lay in the competitive advantages they had over the physicians. The physician C. D. Hahn and the surgeon A. H. Flock complain in a report to the Collegium Medicum that “the so-called cunning folk are a destructive nuisance for farmers; the farmers prefer to use the cunning folk because they are their equals…” (Rørbye 1976: 206). Also, the cunning folks’ fees, which were rarely requested directly as a means to sidestep the letter of the law, were significantly less than those of the physicians.

Much to the displeasure of the physicians, the kvaksalver law included a sixth paragraph, which stated, “Should someone who is not in fact a doctor have acquired excellent knowledge or superior ability in one or another aspect of the art of medicine, or in curing one or another illness then, as long as he has testimony from the chief administrative officer of the county and of the county physician attesting to this skill, he can
expect to be given permission from the Chancellery to practice, albeit only in the district in which he lives…” (Rørbye 1976: 207-9). The inclusion of this paragraph made it possible for certain cunning folk to gain institutional legitimacy and accordingly opened the market for healers to greater legal competition.

Further underlining the physicians' otherwise strong position was the standard practice by which legal authorities would not intervene with juridical sanctions until a physician or apothecary filed a complaint, an interesting corollary to the practice in the preceding centuries in which a specific accusation of substantiated maleficium was needed to set the legal wheels of the witch trial in motion. In short, paragraph six of the kvæksalver law guaranteed a lively competition among cunning folk—who now had the potential for official sanction—and physicians. This competition was, in turn, complemented by the competition among the cunning folk themselves who tried simultaneously to develop their customer base and to avoid angering the local apothecary or physician.

Competition among cunning folk was certainly a well known aspect of the rural economic landscape as attested by records from this period (Rørbye 1976). A clear example of such competition may be found in the case of Birthe Jensen (Rørbye 1977: 73-5; Holm 1883). Although her practice developed quite quickly after her purchase of “den kloge mands bog” [the cunning man’s book] she soon encountered difficulties because many felt that she had cheated them out of their money (Rørbye 1976: 46-48). A neighboring cunning man saw Jensen’s plummeting popularity as an opportunity to eliminate a competitor and began suggesting that Jensen was in fact a witch (Rørbye 1977: 73-4; Holm 1883). Soon Jensen found herself the subject of a latter day witch hunt, that in fact was “a well thought out conspiracy against the unsuspecting Birthe, which was set in motion by another local cunning woman who had less success with her business and was therefore envious and hateful towards her. She schemed to have Birthe chased away and thus get her out of the way” (Holm 1883 cited in Rørbye 1977: 73). While not always as intense as in this case, the competition among cunning folk and debates among their customers concerning who had the better cunning person apparently acted as an impetus for the perpetuation of stories about witches and witchcraft (Rørbye 1977: 73).

Doubtlessly, stories of cunning folk played into the market for their services, with positive stories adding to both the reputation of and potential customer base for a cunning man or woman, and negative stories detracting from that base.26 In the nineteenth century villages where Kristensen collected stories, it is quite clear that not everybody accepted the purported
abilities of specific cunning folk (as well as the abilities of any cunning folk, for that matter). In the context of the competition among cunning folk, stories people told about a cunning person’s abilities (or distinct lack of abilities) could act as signaling devices, indicating to listeners how the narrator would act in a given situation. Here, the “game” being played could be called “healing,” with possible positive or negative outcomes dependent, according to the story tradition, entirely on the choice of healer. 27 Stories would then be used as a means for informing the choice of the person confronted with the game, a process that echoes de Certeau’s notion that stories are “repertoires of schemes of action...mementos [that] teach the tactics possible within a given system” (de Certeau 1984: 23). In some cases, one could easily imagine the competing folk healer as the originator of the stories, as in the case of Jensen above. Labeling someone a witch would indicate a negative evaluation of the intentions of the folk healer, imply that their skills were suspect and indicate that, in the opinion of the story teller, they were not someone one would want to employ. In other cases, the bidding was likely done by the folk healer’s circle of patients. Ane Poulsen, for example, is known primarily through the stories told about her, and the enthusiasm of one of her patients, “an invalid...said that he preferred her over all other cunning folk” (Rørbye 1976: 17). 28 This type of loyalty seems to have been quite wide spread, and word of mouth played a significant role in folk healers developing, sustaining and increasing their circle of patients.

Legend telling can be seen accordingly as a performative locus employed by tradition participants to negotiate their conflicting perceptions of the various cunning folk mentioned in their stories. Furthermore, deciding to tell legends about cunning folk and deciding on the resolution of these encounters allowed tradition participants the opportunity to engage in the social valuation of their services. Those who did not value the abilities of a particular cunning man or woman might tell stories in which an attempted cure failed:

I had an uncle who was nearly blind. He went to the Vindblæs woman for advice, and she gave him some herbs, which he was to boil and then he was supposed to drink it. In with the herbs there was a piece of paper with nine little tabs just like a comb, but the paper was narrower at one end than at the other. Then he was also supposed to take one of the tabs each morning for nine mornings, and start at the narrow end. He was also supposed to go to a mill and get some grease and make a poultice and put it on his neck. It didn’t help (Kristensen 1980 [1892-1901] vol. 4: 585).
Through the repeated telling of stories such as this one that cast aspersions on a cunning person’s healing talents, a cunning person who had once been popular could quickly lose his or her reputation as an adept practitioner and subsequently see their patients disappear. Rørbye provides the example of Vilhelm Johnsen from Fakseamoe who experienced such a decline in reputation and popularity: “He had a certain following as a cunning man for many years, but his fine salves and good advice became suspect as he got older” (Rørbye 1976: 15). Although it is unclear precisely why his cures began to be suspect, it is clear that the loss of reputation—built entirely on word of mouth—led to a decline in his popularity. In other stories, it is clear that a distinct hierarchy among cunning folk obtained with the master healer being supplanted by a less favored cunning man after the master’s death: “As long as Wise Anders was alive, you fetched him, but after he died, you went off to find [Wise] Jokum...” (Kristensen 1936: 113).

Other tradition participants negatively inclined toward a specific cunning man or woman might focus on their potential alliance with the Devil and directly or indirectly label him or her a witch. In Slangerup parish, for example, none of Kirsten Bøjsen’s patients’ stories were ever recorded and, consequently, according to Rørbye, “we know her today only as a gossipy, scheming, greedy witch” (Rørbye 1976: 21). In the case of Ane Sørensen, the “Reerslevkomen,” Rørbye mentions,

Among the local people there were many who were afraid of her, indeed they considered her to be a witch. Many stories are told about how she could see and hear more than others. When she had visitors, she often knew what they were suffering from even before the patient had said anything, but one had to be careful not to say anything bad about her because then she could cause great harm. The witchcraft could result in a great many discomforts. It could be expressed as an inability to churn butter or, in more serious instances, illness or death among the farm animals (Rørbye 1976: 30).

As her reputation as a “witch”—or at least as a cunning person who frequently used magic—grew, Ane’s initially large customer base began to dwindle, a clear indication that a reputation for witchcraft could damage business (Rørbye 1976: 29). In Kristensen’s collections, one finds numerous stories that could easily be deployed in contributing to a cunning person’s developing reputation as a witch. For example, Peder Stampe from Dejbjærg tells the following story:

Niels Knudsen in Lem, who is dead now, he went and asked my father to come by many times. But he didn’t want to go over there
since he’d heard talk that Niels Knudsen was somewhat cunning and could witch. He kept trying anyway and said, “You should come over to me, then I’ll teach you how to shoot so you’ll never miss.” But my father didn’t dare. One day he was out hunting and came by there. Then a hare came out of Niels Knudsen’s cabbage patch, there was a hole in the wall and it came out of that. It kept on running in front of him and looking back at him, and he didn’t dare shoot it, since he believed that it was Niels Knudsen himself or some other supernatural hare (Kristensen 1980 [1892-1901], vol. 6: 306).

In another account, a cunning person is saved from the Devil whom he has called to him by another cunning person:

A cunning man in Sønderhå sat at the end of his table and couldn’t go anywhere since he had a visit from the Evil One, who he’d called to himself, and to get rid of him he sent for Hans Plovmand from Skyum. But he said that there wasn’t any hurry. Let him be afflicted with him a little bit. Finally he came and drove him away. “Now I’ve saved you two times, but if he comes a third time, then there’s no way in Hell that I can save you.” (Kristensen 1980(1892-1901), vol. 6: 110).

Any negative evaluations of the abilities or allegiances of a particular cunning man or woman such as one finds in these accounts could be deployed by rivals to drive away potential customers (and presumably drive them to the doorstep of another cunning man or woman). In the second story, it could be simultaneously be used to attract customers to the more competent cunning man Hans Plovmand.

Not all cunning folk fought developing a reputation for witchcraft. Niels Mikkelsen, for example, actively sowed the seeds of ambivalence in his local community. According to Rørbye,

The Helmdrup smith was also interested in witchcraft. After he came home after being out practicing, and people asked him what he’d been doing, he would gladly answer—I’ve been out witching—But why do you answer like that when you don’t believe in witches yourself? his neighbor asked him once—Well, when I say things like that, people don’t ask any more and then I don’t have to give long explanations… A great deal suggests that Niels Mikkelsen was not as dismissive of witchcraft as the exchange of words with his neighbor might have us believe…When he got angry…he would threaten to bewitch people (Rørbye 1976: 125-6).

In the seventeenth century, a flippant answer such as the one Mikkelsen provides could have easily become the grounds for a court case and his sub-
sequent immolation. As such, it reveals the profound change in attitudes towards using the appellation “witch” over the course of several hundred years. Furthermore, Mikkelsen’s answer and his actions underscore the close relationship between cunning and witchcraft, a relationship that cunning folk in the seventeenth century had studiously avoided.34 Despite the possibility of using stories as a rhetorical weapon emphasizing the negative aspects of cunning or a cunning person’s individual talents or allegiances, given the large numbers of positively resolved legends concerning cunning folk—well over seventy percent of all such stories have positive resolutions—one must conclude that most tradition participants valued their services.35 These people would also be inclined to tell stories which described the cunning folk to be more adept at curing than local physicians, as in the following account:

There was an old cunning man who lived on Balle Højbjærg a little northwest of Balle, the old ones called him Hans Kristian, and he was a kind of doctor in everything, but especially for broken bones. People also went to him for toothaches. He was a really nice old man... There was a farmhand down in Kjeldkær who was unlucky enough to break his leg. So they sent for Doctor Ørbech in Vejle, he was their doctor. He came and bound the leg and then the farmhand was to stay in bed for six weeks. But he nearly died from the pain, because the leg was not set properly of course. So he asked for someone to fetch Hans Kristian, but they wouldn’t, they couldn’t have a quack come to the farm. But the farmhand gets another farmhand to get him that night, and when Hans Kristian comes down there and examines him, he rips all the stuff off, which the Doctor had bound around the leg, and fixed it again, and now the sick farmhand didn’t have any pain. Then he told him that, if he kept still for five days, he could get up again. He did that and he got better. Now it happens that the doctor came back to the area and then he decides to make a sick visit at Kjeldkjaer. The farmhand is standing there loading manure. When the doctor sees that he gets whistling mad and he gets up on his wagon again and leaves for Vejle. But then among other things he had an errand at Braesten Inn, and when he comes in, the room is full of people, and Hans Kristian also happens to be there. Now he was a little man, and he sat quietly in a corner and the doctor didn’t notice him. He begins to talk loudly about this Hans Kristian from Balle Mark, and he would take care of him who’d done it. Then Hans Kristian gets up and says, “If you want to do something to the man, he’s right here. But I want you to know that if you want to take care of broken bones that you’re a real bun-
gler." The doctor flies out the door and leaves (Kristensen 1936: 139-40).

The competition between physicians and cunning folk is brought to the fore in this story, as are the conflicting notions of the abilities of cunning folk. The sharp competition between physicians and the cunning folk could—and often did—lead to a formal accusation of breaking the kvaksalver law with a subsequent court case, as the physicians alludes to in the second part of the story. Certainly, many cunning folk found themselves on the wrong side of the law, and local physicians and apothecaries frequently pursued these cases to their fullest extent. Despite conviction, many cunning folk would return to their practice—often in a slightly more discrete form—soon after paying their fines or serving their sentence. Stories such as the preceding could be used then as a means for stealing customers from a physician or, after a conviction, reclaiming lost customers.

Interestingly, it is not clear that the legal proceedings brought against the cunning folk had the effect intended by the physicians or apothecaries. While trial and punishment for witchcraft always had the intended effect—namely the elimination of a witch from the local community—the trial and punishment for breaking the kvaksalver law did not have as clear a result. For example, the competition between Karen Jensen, the “kloge kone i Stenløse” [the cunning woman in Stenløse], and the local physician was apparently intense, and since she was among the most popular cunning folk on Zealand, local newspapers considered the physician’s legal proceedings against her a “forfølgelse” or witch hunt (Rørbye 1976: 21). Frida Hansen-Børsholt, another cunning woman, mentioned that “I sometimes think that it is probably good for me with those lawsuits, its good for one to feel the power of one’s superiors, then one takes better care. And then it is also a really good advertisement [reklame] for one,” clearly alluding to the positive element with such court proceedings, namely the ability to get her name out to a wider potential customer base (Rørbye 1976: 87). Indeed, her use of the word “reklame” speaks to a very clear understanding of the need for publicity—even negative publicity—to develop greater market share.

Not all stories that tell about the abilities or faults of a cunning person necessarily came from the person’s patients or detractors. Cunning folk themselves or, since cunning folk often passed their practices on to their relatives, close family members also told stories of their own prowess. A close relative, such as a son or nephew, would have had a vested economic stake in telling such legends, as in the case of Jørgen Madsen from Grejs:

Peder Sillestovved was my maternal uncle. One time when I was
down at his house, an eighteen year old boy came riding up and gave him a five crown note, because he had cured him, and he said, "We could have sent it, but my mother thought that you should see me.” Now he was completely healthy, but when he had come the first time, he had pox all over his face, and his mother had spent 200 crowns on doctors. Peder Sillesthouved said to him when he came, “If the advice I give you doesn’t help within eight days, it won’t help for you to come to me again” (Kristensen 1936: 119).

Here, Madsen uses the story to both emphasize his connection to Sillesthouved, to laud the remarkable abilities of his uncle (and his reasonable prices), and to challenge the curative abilities (and the extortionate prices) of the local physician. Addressing the presentation of self in storytelling, Erving Goffman (1959: 242) suggests that “when an individual appears before others, he knowingly and unwittingly projects a definition of the situation, of which a conception of himself is an important part.” While such a presentation of self may be part of a storytelling tactic designed to increase the prestige and importance of the self in the community, it may also play into the market concerns of cunning folk. In the case of “Maren Haaning,” a family of folk healers in northern Jutland, for example, it is clear that the family deployed stories as part of their ever-developing reputation as extraordinarily adept cunning people (Rørbye 1976: 104-9).

It seems likely that cunning folk have always been deeply engaged in market behavior as a means for expanding their market share. In the seventeenth century, the cunning folk represented the only access to medical services for large segments of the population and, accordingly, competition for patients existed primarily between cunning folk. A reputation as a cunning person was not only useful for attracting customers but it was also helpful for keeping out of court, since such a reputation could be used to deflate a burgeoning reputation for witchcraft. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, cunning folk seemed more and more likely to develop reputations as both—competent healers among their supporters, and frightening witches among their detractors. The market for healers was also no longer as simple as it once had been, since the practices of physicians and apothecaries were less and less concentrated exclusively in large population centers. Accordingly, competition for patients was no longer limited to that between cunning folk but now also included these two groups. Furthermore, these two groups began developing considerable political power and started to advocate for restrictive legal ordinances that could tip the competitive balance in their favor. While the cunning folk could still rely on their reputations to attract patients, the reputation
would no longer keep them out of court. In fact it could do just the opposite since having a reputation as a cunning person could bring one to the attention of the local physician or apothecary who could, in turn, file a complaint for quackery.

Witches and cunning folk are an interesting pair. Johansen notes that, “The situation in Denmark was similar to that of England, where ‘generally speaking, the cunning folk and the maleficient witches were believed to be two separate species’” (Johansen 1995: 196). But this does not tell the whole story—while they were two different species, they were still closely related, at least in narrative and folk belief. Indeed, in many stories—and in many court cases—the dividing line separating the two species was one determined by the narrator. The motivations for such narrative distinction—specious or not—were closely linked to economic behavior, as witches and cunning folk alike were closely linked to the economic wellbeing of communities. While cunning folk were generally considered an economic asset, protecting as they did both the health of people and animals, witches were considered to be an economic liability. During the seventeenth century, the corporeal punishment that followed the successful designation of someone as a witch played a significant role in narrative tradition. Accusations of witchcraft could be tactically deployed as a move in escalating antagonisms directed at a particular individual. Those who did not have the backing of the community (or had lost that backing) and had through repeated narrative salvos developed the reputation of a witch could find themselves facing execution. Those who did have the backing of the community—and it appears that most cunning folk had such support—could stave off potential narrative threats to their livelihood (and life) by mobilizing their customers, and thereby avoid developing a reputation as a witch. In the worst case where the cunning woman found herself in court, she could use her reputation as a cunning woman to mitigate the sentence. By the nineteenth century, calling someone a “witch”—with the appellation’s diminished potential to bring harm—seems to have become more closely linked to the market for cunning folk. A cunning man or woman whose abilities were considered to be deficient—perhaps by a competitor (including physicians), or by a competitor’s customer, or perhaps by a dissatisfied customer—could quite easily find themselves labeled a “witch” in local narrative tradition. While this label could no longer precipitate such drastic consequences as banishment or execution, it could significantly affect the cunning person’s ability to attract new customers.

Cunning folk were apparently quite adept at keeping their names clean during the time of the witchcraft trials, perhaps because they spent considerable effort in deflecting narrative assaults. Their nineteenth cen-
tury counterparts, in contrast, seem to have been less successful in keeping their names free of the label witch, perhaps because, in the absence of severe punishment, people were more inclined to make such accusations. What certainly obtains in both of these historical periods is the important role that narrative tradition plays in the ascription of this label to an individual. Already in the seventeenth century, the answer to the question, “How do you know she’s a witch?” is not, “She turned me into a newt,” or some other example of physically verifiable maleficium, but rather, “Because I say so.”

University of California, Los Angeles

Notes

1 In the legend world, villagers are, of course, subject to constant threats from the supernatural (trolls, elves, ghosts, Satan, etc.), the natural (weather, disease, etc.) and the social (robbers, beggars, Gypsies, etc.). The question, "How do you know she’s a witch?", comes from the comical film, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (Gillian and Jones: 1975). I would like to thank Lone Ree Milkaer, Trine Ravn, Caroline Mi-Ae Baek, Birgit Dyrgsing, Helle Preuss Justesen and Nina Wittendorff, all graduate students at the Center for Folklore at the University of Copenhagen, as well as Archivist Dr. Gustav Henningsen from *Dansk folkemindesamling* for their helpful suggestions.

2 I use the feminine nominative pronoun "she" here as most witches attested in the tradition are female. There are, however, attestations of men accused of witchcraft and, while the Danish word "heks" implies a woman, some legends do use the term in reference to a man. See also Henningsen 1995: 126. The term "heks" was not actually used in Danish law until the end of the seventeenth century; until then, the words *trollddom, troldfolk, troldkvinde* and *trolldmand* were used (Johansen 1991: 14). However, with the Danish law of 1683, a clear distinction was made between the category "heks," designating people who had made a pact with the Devil. Article ten of the law reads, "Befindis nogen Trolldmand eller Trolldvinde at have forsoret Gud och sin hellige Daab och Christendom, og hengivet sig til Dievelen, den bør levendis at kastis paa ilden og opbærendis" [If it is found that a *trolldmand* or a *trolldvinde* has forsorn God and his holy baptism and Christianity, and given him or herself to the Devil, then they are to be thrown live on to the fire and burned up] (Johansen 1991: 24). The category of *trolfdfolk* was used in article eleven of the law, in contrast to designate people who, without being in league with the Devil, used magic to hurt others; they were subject to a sentence of hard labor for the rest of their lives. In article twelve of the same law, which was a reiteration of the law of 1617, the punishment for people who "befindis med Segnen, Manen, Maalen, Igienvising" [employ blessing, conjuring, measuring, showing again] or, in other words, cunning folk, was confiscation of their possessions and banishment from the kingdom (Johansen 1991: 24).
3 Jens Chr. Johansen's (1991) study of witchcraft trials in Denmark provides the most complete picture of both conceptions of and laws concerning witchcraft in seventeenth century Denmark. Accordingly, I rely on it heavily in the first section of this article. Similarly, Birgitte Rørbye's (1976) compendium of material concerning cunning folk collects a wealth of primarily biographical information from a broad array of sources; consequently, I rely on it heavily in the second section of this article.

4 Following the precedent of the Kalundborgskes recess from 1576, the most common punishment for those found guilty of witchcraft in Denmark was execution by burning (Johansen 1991: 24), although this punishment was not explicitly prescribed in Danish law until 1683. Jacobsen (1966: 174) notes that none of the earlier laws specified which form of execution was to be used. See, for example, the statute of the twelfth of October, 1617.

5 While according to law, a trial could have proceeded with evidence of a pact with the devil, actual cases that concern exclusively such Satanic allegiance are remarkably few in number and suggest that the courts—and the general public who brought the accusations to court in the first place—were primarily concerned with deliberately harmful acts (Johansen 1991: 25).

6 The first category of disallowed testimony meant that the accusation had to be based on the testimony of impartial witnesses.

7 Here, rumor is taken to be a hyper-active transmissionary state of legend (Tangherlini 1994: 17).

8 Numerous scholars have distinguished between large and small witchhunts or other similar groupings (Midelfort 1972; Monter 1976; Henningsen 1980). As Henningsen (1980) notes, it was in the individual cases (or small witchhunts) that a charge of maleficium was important, a charge that had far lesser importance in the "large" witchhunts.

9 As Johansen (1991: 35) notes, the church did not focus its propaganda on harmful trolldom but rather on the cunning folk; nevertheless, their interest in witchcraft and its implications for the church did lay the groundwork for the witchcraft trials.

10 Johansen provides a clear description of the standard practice from accusation to execution for Jutland; this same procedure obtained for the rest of Denmark with only small modifications (Johansen 1991: 26-30). All cases in which a person was found guilty on the local level (birke-, herreds- or byting) were automatically appealed to the landsting, whose judges tended to be more concerned with the technical aspects of the law than was always the case at the local level (Johansen 1991: 26-30). Tørnsø also provides an appendix in which legal procedure concerning witchcraft trials is laid out in brief (1986: 166).

11 Ironically, the law of 1617 was part of a series of three laws that were approved in October, 1617 as part of the centenary celebrations of Luther posting the 95 theses on the door of the cathedral in Wittenberg and, as such, were intended to express the strong relationship between the secular authorities and the Lutheran church (Tamm 1990: 100).

12 Tørnsø (1986: 162-3) provides excerpts of the relevant laws concerning witchcraft in Denmark.

13 Legal theorists generally propose that "found law" (common law) is far more
efficient than "made law" (statutory law) (Posner 1981).

14 Interestingly, the Danish law concerning the punishment of people who practiced cunning arts with malicious intent was not changed until 1866. As such, it was possible to be punished for maleficium well into the nineteenth century (Johansen 1991: 25).

15 As Merete Birkelund points out, accusations of witchcraft never came from people who did not know the accused (Birkelund 1983: 42).

16 Garrett describes one such tit-for-tat situation, with an escalating animosity between two families in the village of Anjeux in France in 1628 (Garrett 1977: 62-3).

17 See also Grell 1995: 11.

18 Throughout this paper, I use the term "tactic" in the sense proposed by de Certeau (1984: xix).

19 Johansen lists a total of thirty-six cunning folk, out of a total of 463 persons, who were accused of witchcraft in Jutland in the period from 1609-1687 (Johansen 1991: 88). Tørnsø discusses two interesting cases of cunning folk accused of witchcraft, namely Anne Nisdatter (Tørnsø 1986: 101-4) and the surprising case of Jens Hansen Rusk who, besides being a cunning man, was also a minister (Tørnsø 1986: 11-6 and 125-6). For a discussion of a similar phenomenon in England of only small numbers of cunning folk accused of witchcraft, see Macfarlane (1970: 127f).

20 This ambivalence is not unique to the Danish situation and has been noted by numerous other scholars (Dömötör 1978/1980: 183; Garrett 1977: 56-7; Macfarlane 1970; Kristóf 1991/1992). Henningsen notes that this is a functional part of contemporary Danish folk belief as well (Henningsen 1995: 130-1).

21 Apparently, this ambivalence has been a characteristic of the cunning folk in folk belief through history; Henningsen, in a discussion of "Kloge Christen," a cunning person from the early nineteenth century, mentions that, "Kloge Christen var både elsket og frygtet af sogneboerne, for han kunne ikke blot hjælpe, men også gøre ondt" [Wise Christen was both loved and feared by the community, since he could not only help but he could also do evil] (Henningsen 1978: 76).

22 The prosecution of witches started to wane dramatically by the end of the seventeenth century. The last witch burning appears to have taken place in 1722 (Henningsen 1975: 106-110) and the last murder of a witch in 1800 (Henningsen 1975: 117). By 1797, Christian Brorson's interpretation of Danish Law, which proposed that the paragraph concerning witchcraft could not be applied, effectively eliminated the potential for future trials of "rette troldfolk" [true witches] (Henningsen 1975: 103). From 1821, most of the cases concerning witchcraft were what Henningsen refers to as "reverse" trials, where it was the accuser—and not the accused—who was on trial since these cases focused on the witchcraft accusation as an act of "libel" (Henningsen 1975: 118).

23 In an earlier article, I slightly overstated the implications of the 1849 constitution for the relationship between the Lutheran church and the Danish state (Tangherlini 1998: 163). With the constitution, the previous requirement that all of the citizens belong to the King's church was reversed, so that now the
King was required to belong to the people's church. Furthermore, the constitution allowed for religious freedom, and represented a legislative diminution of the role of the Lutheran church in the Danish state.

24 Amusingly, among the many people charged with witchcraft in the nineteenth century accounts, one finds a surprising preponderance of ministers' wives. See Kristensen 1892-1901 (1980), vol. 6.

25 Part of the motivation for instituting the law lay in the increasing spread of venereal diseases which medical authorities blamed in large part on the ineffective cures of the cunning folk (Rørbye 1976: 206). Sixty or so years later, in 1854, the punishment for breaking the law was reduced considerably (Rørbye 1976: 216).

26 My own fieldwork among shamans in Korea supports the use of storytelling as part of the market behavior of competing cunning folk and their customers in rural communities. Walter Goldschmidt suggests that, "the general conceptual apparatus of game theory is useful...as a mode of determining what the values actually are in a given society. By examining the strategies that the ethnographer finds to be regularly employed, he can determine where the payoff is, and what the values are" (Goldschmidt 1969: 73). See also Hamburger 1979.

28 It is unclear when Ane was born although she died in 1901. She lived in Kulhuset near Jægerspris in Northern Zealand, and was never convicted for breaking the *kvaksalver* law (Rørbye 1976: 17).

29 The "Vindblæs kone" is another name for Maren Haaning which, in turn, was the name of several women in the family, covering several generations. The family lived in Vindblæs near Løgstør in Northern Jutland. The story here could refer to any of the three cunning folk who went by the name "Maren Haaning" or "Vindblæs konen," namely Maren Kirstine Christensdatter Haaning (1782-1853), Maren Jensdatter Haaning (1820-1895) or Karen Marie (Maren) Rasmussen Haaning (1849-1914). Given the informant, Kirsten Marie Pedersdatter's age when she told the story, she seems to be referring to Maren Jensdatter Haaning. For more information on Vindblæs konen, see Rørbye 1976: 104-9.

30 Vilhelm Johnsen died around 1880 after living alone in Fakseemose in northern Zealand. He was never convicted of breaking the *kvaksalver* law (Rørbye 1976: 15).

31 Kirsten Bøjsen was born in 1857 and died in 1927. She lived near Slingerup west of Copenhagen and was convicted of breaking the *kvaksalver* law (Rørbye 1976: 21).

32 Ane Sørensen, from Reerslev in western Zealand, was born in 1812 and died in 1888. She was never convicted of breaking the *kvaksalver* law (Rørbye 1976: 28).

33 Mikkelsen was born in 1835 and died in 1910. He worked as a cotter, smith and butcher in Egtved in eastern Jutland, and was never convicted of breaking the *kvaksalver* law (Rørbye 1976: 125).

34 Ironically, it may also indicate that the Lutheran church's positions concerning the satanic nature of the cunning folk had finally become an expressed part of folk belief. It may also be evidence of a *complexio oppositorum*, where Lutheran
belief and folk belief are reconciled despite a seeming contradiction (Pleijel 1970).

35 This percentage is based on the stories of cunning folk printed in Kristensen 1892-1901 (1980) and 1936. For a discussion of positive resolution in legend, see Tangherlini 1994: 126.

36 Karen Jensen was born in 1827 and died some time after 1927. She lived in Stenløse, west of Copenhagen, and was convicted of breaking the kvæksalter law (Rørbye 1976: 21).

37 Frida Hansen-Børsholt was born in approximately 1895 and died some time after 1955. She owned the farm “Lykkebo” in Tolne, in northern Jutland, and was convicted not only of breaking the kvæksalter law, but also of illegally selling and distributing medicine (a breach of the apothecary law) (Rørbye 1976: 86).

38 Peder Sillesthoved is the father of Søren Pedersen Sillesthoved, a famous cunning man who lived in Give in eastern Jutland (1814-1893). It is also possible, perhaps even likely, that Jørgen Madsen is referring here to Søren himself who was well known for his competition with the nearest doctor, C. L. Boye (1823-1880), from Jelling. In a series of stories collected from P. Johnsen Pedersen, for example, Søren Sillesthoved is also referred to as Pejer Sillesthoved (Kristensen 1936: 120-1).

Works Cited


Hamburger, Henry. 1979. Games as models of social phenomena. San Francisco: W.
H. Freeman. 


Holm, Emil Seier Malling. 1883. *Fra en Forhørsvirksomhed.* Copenhagen.


HOW DO YOU KNOW SHE'S A WITCH?

liard/Gallimard.

*Western Folklore* 57:153-178.