And the Wagon Came Rolling In . . .: Legend and the Politics of (Self-) Censorship in Nineteenth-Century Denmark

ABSTRACT: Buried in the thousands of pages of Evald Tang Kristensen's remarkable collection of nineteenth century Danish folklore is an amusing, yet shockingly obscene, story told by "Bitte" Jens Kristensen, a cobbler and smallholder from northern Jutland. Tang Kristensen's decision to break the story into three parts, publishing two of those parts separately, and not publishing the most obscene section of the story, is an intriguing case of politically motivated censorship in nineteenth-century Denmark. This censorship and Tang Kristensen's uncharacteristic editorializing raise important questions concerning distortion of the truth. Tang Kristensen's deliberate misrepresentation of the stories and his targeted attack on ethnic outsiders in Denmark (in this case Jewish peddlers) resonates with the issues of censorship and distortion that are an important part of contemporary Danish debates about freedom of the press and immigration. These debates have long been part of the Danish media landscape, but have gathered considerable steam in the aftermath of the Muhammad cartoon crisis.

In 2006 and 2007 Denmark was frequently in the news. The decision by the editors of Jyllands Posten in September 2005 to publish a series of caricatures depicting the prophet Muhammad quickly led to a vigorous debate in Denmark concerning constitutionally guaranteed freedoms—of the press, of expression, and of religion—as well as heated discussions about the position of immigrants in contemporary
Danish society. The debate quickly escalated into a violent shouting match pitting one group touting freedom of the press against another group touting religious tolerance (both positions masking far more vitriolic positions related to ethnic intolerance, xenophobia, and economic distrust), all informed by a renascent nationalism. In early 2006, the fight spilled over the borders and, at least for a while, questions of representation, censorship, ethnicity, and race in Denmark were on the front pages of newspapers throughout the world (Fattah 2006; Gall and Smith 2006). These discussions also found their way into the academic discourse and became further wedded to important questions of multiculturalism, globalization, civil society, anti-Islamic and anti-immigration sentiment, and racism (Baklouti 2007; Goldstone 2007; Olesen 2007).

This imbroglio was not a sudden flare-up from an unexpected quarter. Problematic, yet widespread, representations of ethnic outsiders in the popular media have long been part of the modern Danish mediascape. These include both the stereotype of the overly sexualized man of Semitic origin and the threat posed by ethnic outsiders to a well-functioning market economy (Tangherlini 1995, 2001; Appadurai 1996; Mørck 1998; Fletting 2003). This history of representation was elided by the waves of violent protest and counter-protest that swept Europe and the Middle East in the wake of the publication of the cartoons. But it should come as little surprise to European cultural historians that the stereotypical representation of ethnic outsiders as overly sexual and economically threatening has a long history in Denmark (Jørgensen 1984:34, 56, 161–68; Blødnikow 1987; Fletting 2003). What might be less well-known, and is certainly less well-documented, is that the manipulation of underlying sources through editorial intrusions and self-censorship to serve specific political agendas also stretches back to the advent of print capitalism in Denmark. John Hersey, in comments on the fine line between journalism (or ethnography) and fiction, proposes the concepts of distortion by subtraction and distortion by addition as two interrelated, yet distinct processes. In his view, the former is less nefarious than the latter as it does not push the journalistic over into fiction (1980). While this may be true in most cases, it is clearly not always the case.

In this short essay, I would like to explore an intriguing case of politically motivated self-censorship (a form of distortion by subtraction) from the folklore collections of Evald Tang Kristensen (1843–1929). Tang Kristensen is important because of his position as the most prolific of all folklore collectors in Europe and because of the role that
his collections played in the politically important nationalistic projects of Svend Grundtvig among others (Rockwell 1982; Holbek 1987; Tangherlini 1994). In particular, I would like to focus on his *Gamle folks fortællinger om det Jyske almueliv* (Old people’s stories about Jutlandic peasant life), a massive twelve-volume collection that was intended to represent the Danish spirit by painting an accurate picture of the challenges of daily life in the rural areas of Jutland as reflected in the words of the peasants themselves (Kristensen 1891–1894, 1900–1902). As he notes in the afterword to the collection,

> The purpose of my work has . . . been to commit to paper features of a disappearing folk life. In other words, these are culture pictures from our forefather’s time that are unrolled for us. These pictures should not only allow people in the future to compare their own time with times past . . . but also give them a key to understanding many spiritual phenomena and events that otherwise cannot be easily explained. (Kristensen 1900–1902, 6:527)\(^4\)

As such, the compendium was unabashedly informed by Romantic nationalist ideas. Because of the overtly political nature of the project, Tang Kristensen’s imposition of self-censorship on some of his collected material can be seen as a photographic negative of the recent cartoon debacle. In Tang Kristensen’s case, by leaving things out (distortion by subtraction)—rather than by putting things out there (distortion by addition)—he enabled a similar politically charged representation of the threatening ethnic outsider that, under the guise of challenging prevailing sentiment, supported an overtly xenophobic ideology.

In 1893 Evald Tang Kristensen published a story about a wandering Jewish peddler in the fifth volume of *Jyske almueliv* (1891–1894).\(^5\) The story had been told to him in February of 1887 by Bitte Jens Kristensen, a small holder and clog maker from northern Jutland. The published version of the story reads as follows:

> There were two sisters who lived here in Oplev, one was rich and the other was poor. They lived in Jens Markussen’s and Anders Jensen’s farms, the two southern farms. The rich one was the oldest and the poor one was such a pretty young woman. When the [poor family] plowed, they had nobody to drive the plow other than a little girl since at that time they used the old wheel plows with four in front. When they were going to harrow, the [poor] wife had to lead the nags herself, since they didn’t have a girl there except when they plowed. When the [nags] were utterly exhausted, she would have to go home and feed the cattle. One day, a wandering Jewish peddler came to the poor sister’s house, just as she’d

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come back from the fields. He showed her his wares and wanted to do business with her. She said that she wasn’t going to buy anything since she didn’t have any money. But he said that she should look around in the old chest with the iron bands that was standing in [the room] there, she’d probably find some money there. No, she knew that there wasn’t any. Well, he showed her one nice piece of clothing after another, as peddlers are wont to do. Yes, she really wanted them, but that didn’t really help matters. Then he gets her to try something on: here’s a piece of clothing that he’d give to her, if he could lie with her for a little while. These wandering Jewish peddlers liked to do that too. She didn’t dare do that, since when her husband saw that she had the clothing, he’d want to know where she’d gotten it, since he knew that she didn’t have any money. Then the peddler takes his purse out and it has all of these silver coins in it. He tosses a shilling to her, and said she could have it. Her husband wouldn’t need to know. When the woman saw that he had that many silver coins she looked at the sun and said, “No, its noon now and my husband will come home. But I have another idea. Tonight he is going to the mill to get grain for the nags. You should come back then and ask for shelter, and it will probably work out.” He liked this suggestion. She talks to her husband about this and tells him that it would be good to get a hold of the money. “Now you should stand out in the entry and greet him, and then you should get ready like you were going to the mill.” Well, the peddler came and wanted shelter there. No, their house wasn’t large enough to give people shelter there. Sure, they had enough room, he knew the place well. But they didn’t have anything to put on the bed, no he’d better go to the inn—there was an inn in Gravlev at that time. No, he couldn’t do that, since he had to head west the next morning. Well, the husband finally let the wife take care of it. She was also hard to convince, but the peddler finally got permission to stay. Then the husband puts on his long jacket, puts a sack under his arm and grabs a staff and asks his wife to feed the nags one more time, and then she was going to make some evening snacks for the peddler. That took a while and she wasn’t done with the snacks before the husband came home. The peddler had just gotten into bed, and now the husband grabs hold of the poor guy. The wife wailed that he shouldn’t beat him like that. Well, he’d been standing outside and heard what he’d talked about to his wife and now he was going to kill them both. She runs over to hit him and in the meantime the peddler grabs his clothes and runs out the door, which the man had opened. The husband ran after him and chased him down to the little woods in Gravlev. So he escaped with his life, but he’d lost his money and his box of wares too, and he didn’t dare go back to get it. (Kristensen 1891–1894, 5:203–04)
At first glance, there is nothing remarkable about this story. It is a variant of the well-known folktale classified as ATU 1359 (Uther 2004:163–65). Here, Bitte Jens modifies the story to incorporate a commentary on the cleverness and at times viciousness with which the local rural population deals with the sneaky and conniving peddlers who wandered the countryside offering various services and goods for sale.

Jewish peddlers were the most frequent targets in these stories because peddlers were generally perceived as untrustworthy outsiders. The additional ethnic mark of being Jewish further isolated them from the general populace. The history of Jewish immigration into Denmark is both long and complicated. Although there is some evidence of small-scale Jewish immigration to Denmark in the early sixteenth century, Frederik II’s “foreign law” of 1569 essentially excluded anyone who was not Lutheran (Hartvig 1951:20). It was not until 1657 that Sephardic Jews were given rights both to live in and conduct business in Denmark (p. 54). The differentiation between Sephardic Jews, who were allotted various privileges, and Ashkenazi Jews, who were not afforded these protections, was not accidental. Sephardic Jews were perceived to be more affluent and thus could assist with Danish mercantilist policies (Jørgensen 1984:30; Lausten 2000). Since not all Sephardim were equally wealthy, many engaged in what became known as “jødehandel” (Jewish trade), trade in items and wares that were not under monopoly control of the guilds, e.g., coffee, tea, used clothing, and knick knacks. This small trade led both to complaints from the grocers’ guild and, simultaneously, the designation of an occupation—jøde—that did not necessarily connote religious affiliation (Lausten 2000:119). To complicate this landscape of suspicion, even poorer Jews, who were predominantly Ashkenazi Jews, did sneak across the border and became part of the emerging group of wandering beggars who had become an increasing policy burden in eighteenth-century Denmark (Jørgensen 1984:38–39).

Sephardic or Ashkenazi Jews were considered to be sexually dangerous not only in folk tradition, but in legislative tradition as well. Some of the first court cases from the early-eighteenth century involving Jews in Denmark were paternity cases in which either the mother or father of the child was Jewish. In the case of Jewish paternity, the man was often severely punished, as in a case from 1726 where Moses Abraham was sentenced to a year of hard labor and then deported (Hartvig 1951:153). In the case of Jewish maternity, the mother was turned over to the Jewish
community for punishment (p. 153). The underlying tension of these early cases—that Jewish men threatened the religious and racial purity of the Danes—is echoed not surprisingly in the oral tradition as well (Katz 1981; Jørgensen 1984; Blüdnikow 1987; Lausten 2000). Tang Kristensen’s recording of Bitte Jens’s story appears to be one more example of this xenophobic sentiment echoed in the oral tradition.

Bitte Jens’s story of the Jewish peddler appears in a volume describing “Livet uden Døre” (Life outdoors), in a section entitled “Drab af kæmmerere” (Murder of peddlers). That an entire section of the volume is dedicated to the murder of peddlers also reflects an increasing tension in the Danish countryside during the late-nineteenth century, not only related to the “foreignness” of the peddlers, but also to the shifting terrain of economic relationships. By the end of the nineteenth century, global trade was having an increasingly negative impact on the Danish economy. Falling grain prices and burgeoning urbanization forced a rapid reorganization of the agricultural economy; this reorganization disproportionately affected the class of rural workers (Villadsen and Gross 1944:135–38). In these stories there is a clear financial incentive for murder; since the victim is a wanderer, the risk of discovery is reduced and the immorality of the act is further attenuated by the wanderer’s ethnic outsider status. The “Murder of peddlers” section precedes one entitled “Tiggere” (Beggars) and follows on another entitled, “Mord” (Murder); taken together, these chapters paint a picture of the Danish countryside marked by misery and violence. Nothing about Bitte Jens’s story sets it apart from the others that surround it—save for one small feature.

One of the hallmarks of Tang Kristensen’s collections is the lack of editorializing that appears in his printed volumes. In many of his forewords, and in the titles of his collections themselves, Tang Kristensen calls attention to the fact that his stories are from handwritten and oral sources and that most of these are previously unpublished. In the afterword to Danske sagn, he draws a clear line between his collection and the earlier, well-known collection of Just Mathias Thiele (1843):

When I had decided to publish the next large collection of Danish legends, I had no intention to draw in the least from Thiele’s work or from the same sources . . . I would only turn to [hand]written sources, whereas he drew on both printed and unprinted sources, although particularly the former . . . I want to emphasize strongly here that I never went to published books for my records as Thiele did. (Kristensen 1892–1901, 7:487–88)
He further prides himself on his absolute fidelity to the words of his informants, "to be a good collector one needs to have particularly good control of the pen so that one can immediately and quickly begin writing down what is being told. It is clearly impressive when the pen moves very fluidly and when one can afterwards read aloud word for word what has been told" (Kristensen 1891:321). This characterization of his collected stories gives both the stories and the collection considerable political weight as the unadulterated representations of peasant life and therefore, by Romantic nationalist logic, as a pure expression of "den danske ånd" (the Danish spirit).

Apart from his self-reflexive grandstanding on the value of his sources, Tang Kristensen rarely comments on the stories, other than to mention a still visible feature in the landscape here, to add the dates that a minister was employed in a parish there, or other small annotations of a factual nature. For example, at the end of a story about a nobleman, he notes, "Frederik Kjær blev adlet under navnet Kjærskjold" (Frederik Kjær was ennobled with the name Kjærskjold) (Kristensen 1892–1901, 4:168), while at the end of another story about a minister named Grønlund he adds, "Hr. David Mogensen Grønlund. 1777–1784" (Kristensen 1892–1901, 4:297). After a story about a robber's den, whose door is later used in a church, he adds, "Fortælleren kan ikke ret huske, om det var vavenset (våbenhuset), der blev bygget om, eller et stykke af kirken" (The narrator cannot remember whether it was the church entry that was rebuilt or whether it was a part of the church itself) (Kristensen 1892–1901, 4:513).

Importantly, these comments solely add external validation of internal story features and never comment on the content of the story itself. Thus, it comes as a surprise that he adds the following lengthy paragraph immediately after the published version of Bitte Jens's story:

When we hear about all the injustice and violence that have been directed at these wandering peddlers, we cannot be entirely silent concerning these people's crass behavior. A large number of other fairytales and jocular legends indicate that it was neither rare nor even uncommon for things to go as described above, and these descriptions seem to be in many ways taken directly from lived experiences. The peddlers should not be considered as totally innocent victims, and many of them have at the very least lived a loose life. When I was a young man, a peddler managed in a quite tricky manner to get me to hide some wares for him. I had no idea there
was something suspicious about this and didn’t suffer any consequences, but he naturally enjoyed taking advantage of my trust and my sympathy for his difficult lot. (Kristensen 1891–1894, 5:204)

Uncharacteristic as it may be, this note encapsulates much of the debate over rural commerce and the poverty assistance laws. Both issues were on the front political burner in Jutland during the last decades of the nineteenth century (Jørgensen 1940; Hvidt and Olsen 1990:242–45).

The status of wanderers was an integral part of the national debate concerning poverty assistance (Jørgensen 1940:164 and 266ff; Hansen 1952). By the end of the nineteenth century, the conventional wisdom had swung away from demonizing the poor and the wanderers. Yet, this position was still at odds with most local opinion. As Jørgensen notes, the “central administration exerted itself to implement a humane viewpoint, while the individual counties were inclined first and foremost to consider the economic side of the question and allow the humane concerns to yield in consideration of the taxpayers’ wallets” (1940:58).

By contrast, ethnic outsiders such as tattere and sigfynere (“Gypsies” or Roma) were still seen by the government—and the rural populace—to be threatening. Hansen provides several accounts of gypsies being driven from the country (1952:14–16) and notes a circular from the Ministry of Justice dated August 8, 1897 that states, “it is forbidden without exception for members of foreign Gypsy troupes to take up residency here in the country . . . similarly, if they nevertheless have come into the country, they will be deported by order of the police” (p. 15). Interestingly, with regards to Jews in Denmark, the laws were far more lenient than they were for Roma. In an 1814 reform, the legislation that had codified discrimination against Jews was repealed and they were given equal citizenship rights in Denmark (Jørgensen 1984:81–85). Their freedoms were further extended by ratification of the constitution in 1849. Similarly, by 1867 most de jure discrimination against the poor had also been rescinded (Jørgensen 1940:112). With these later reforms, the laws began to distinguish between the deserving poor and the undeserving poor, with progressive social policies offered for the deserving poor that recognized the haplessness of their situation (Jørgensen 1940:126). In both cases—that of the Jews and that of the poor—the laws were clearly beginning to align with more progressive social policies and to veer away from the criminalization of poverty and homelessness. Nevertheless, foreignness—and particularly being foreign and poor—was still essentially criminalized.
Timothy R. Tangherlini  
And the Wagon Came Rolling in . . . : 249

Tang Kristensen did not subscribe to the increasingly progressive positions being endorsed by parliament in Copenhagen. He was certainly not inclined toward viewing any foreign or domestic wanderers—and particularly ethnically marked wanderers—as anything other than a threat. Indeed, suspicion of outsiders was still widespread among segments of the rural population and Tang Kristensen took advantage of that. In his own political behavior, Tang Kristensen endorsed a generally conservative position that championed local solutions to local problems. This perspective was predicated on a locally constrained xenophobia, a celebration of self-sufficiency, and a worry that external market players did not prioritize local interests. Although Tang Kristensen generally collected everything he heard, a question certainly can be posed as to how he steered his collection efforts. A query posed to an informant as “Do you know any stories about murdered Jewish peddlers” would be prejudicial at the very least. His story collections do suggest that the locals considered peddlers to be corrupt, with one foot planted firmly on the wrong side of the law. Fueling this suspicion among his rural informants was an economic consideration: the peddlers’ lack of overhead gave them an unfair competitive advantage over the høkere (local grocers) who, after the loosening of the commerce laws in the 1880s, were trying to make a go of it by opening shops outside of towns. The stories about the dishonesty of peddlers might have served an economic purpose at the end of the nineteenth century. Such stories could drive customers away from the peddlers and into the høkereforretninger (local grocery markets), thereby benefiting the local businessmen while at the same time more fully miring these wanderers in poverty (Pedersen 1979). All the better if the peddlers were characterized in narrative as ethnic outsiders, since this served to further demonize them (Tangherlini 1995).

In his note to the published story, Tang Kristensen intriguingly uses his own experiences to comment on Bitte Jens’s story, a rhetorical ploy that emphasizes the ostensible agreement between Tang Kristensen and Bitte Jens’s narrative attack on the ethnically marked peddler. In his memoirs, Tang Kristensen recounts the following experience, which seems quite likely to be about the event to which the note refers:

I experienced something quite remarkable there in Husby, something that I have often recalled later in life. But at the time I was quite innocent, and unaware of a lot of what was going on in the great big world. One day, a wandering peddler came into the school, Bittte-Søren Torup, and offered
his wares for sale. There were silk scarves and other nice clothes, and he had all in all quite a bit of nice women’s things. It never occurred to me that there could be something wrong with these deals; I figured it was all perfectly legal, and I didn’t ask him where he’d gotten his wares. Then, after he’d made some deals with me and the parish clerk’s daughter, he came into my room and, when we were alone, asked me if I couldn’t do him a favor and keep some pictures for him for a while. He couldn’t bring them with him and he’d come back and get them. When I heard that he was from Nissum, I didn’t hesitate to agree, and he came with the package, put it in my chest and it stayed there until he came and got them quite a while later. They were German pictures, all very beautifully colored, that I’ve seen so often framed and behind glass in the parlors of farmers. But I realized later that there absolutely had to be something shady with that affair, otherwise he wouldn’t have asked me to hold onto his pictures. I’m certain that they had been smuggled in, and they were on the lookout for him, since he probably wasn’t allowed to sell that kind of thing. Presumably his other goods were contraband as well, and he got someone else to hide those for him, he probably didn’t dare bring them home. Maybe he’d gotten the clothing by honest means, but I became really suspicious about those pictures. I managed to get by without any problems . . . I’m quite certain that the people out there would pull the wool over the eyes of someone unsuspecting, they weren’t terribly moral. (Kristensen 1923, 1:244)

His memory of the event is fairly complex and seemingly complete. Yet it makes no mention of the outsider status—ethnic or otherwise—of the peddler. Quite to the contrary, the peddler is a local. Indeed, there are almost no commentaries in Tang Kristensen’s memoirs that are directed against ethnic outsiders; rather, many of his personal experience stories encapsulate his own suspicions about locals. As such, these episodes reflect his lifelong paranoia that “insiders” were always ready to pull a fast one on “outsiders” like himself. Furthermore, in the memoirs, his approbation of moral laxity is directed at the local Danes and not outsiders. Ethnic outsiders play virtually no role and are rarely mentioned in his four-volume memoir (1923).9 It is worth noting then, that in his critical note to Bitte Jens’s story, his suspicion of the locals has been modified to a suspicion of ethnically marked outsiders. This change represents a fairly significant shift in the underlying ideology of his personal experience narrative.

But smuggled pictures and stolen scarves are not the only things rotten in Denmark. The entire published story is rotten and the editorial note is utterly misplaced. To make matters worse, Tang Kristensen knew it. In fact, the story and the note are the product of manipulation (a
distortion by addition) and, simultaneously, a deliberate self-censorship (a distortion by subtraction) perpetrated by Tang Kristensen. As a result, the story that he attributes to Bitte Jens borders on fabrication. As Bitte Jens originally told it, the story was neither a commentary on the plight of wandering peddlers nor a critique of their questionable morality—far from it. It was a remarkably obscene and darkly humorous tale that focused on, of all things, female genital mutilation. But this was not the story that Tang Kristensen wanted to tell. Instead, he broke Bitte Jens’s story into three smaller parts, leaving one of those parts unpublished,10 in order to make the story align with his desire to challenge the prevailing and now “politically correct” notion that cast outsiders as victims, to launch a further critique of peddlers (perhaps to settle an old score), and to direct a sharpened barb at the moral laxity of ethnic outsiders in Denmark thereby echoing the xenophobia implicit in conservative social policies.

The second part of the story had in fact already appeared in print several years earlier in 1891, in “Om fortidens landbrug” (Agricultural practices of the past), the first volume of *Fyske almueliv*. It appeared in a section entitled “Avlsredskaberne” (Farm tools):

As a satire about the previously used tool, there is the following story: The first thing I can remember is that they used leather reins, which were just like hemp reins are today. When they had fallen to pieces, then they could be used with the thresher. They had *stavslærer* or *sejløver* [a wooden lyre-shaped harness part] on the horses. It was the custom at the time, after they’d planted, that they’d drive to Nibe to get a load of herring. Then there was this guy who had had a few large drags down there in Nibe and it was evening before he left the town. When he came by Vogslev (Ugslev) church—there’s a big hill there south of the town which he had to go up—he got down and walked beside the wagon. Then it started to rain hard. Since he’d gotten a ways up the hill, he decided to get back up on the wagon and drive, but the wagon had disappeared. He couldn’t see anything on the horses other than the blankets and the bare *sejløver*, since it was raining and it was dark. Now he had no idea what he should do. So then he climbed up on one of the horses and he rode home. So he comes home and takes the blankets and *sejløver* off the horses and hangs them up on some large wooden racks on the north side of the barn that they had there to hang their tools on when they came back from the fields in the spring. He goes inside and tells his wife what’s happened, and that he’d have to go and get the wagon, but now it’d have to wait until the next day since the weather was so bad. But later in the day, it becomes dry and windy, and the reins dried out,
and the wagon came rolling in. It had in fact remained on the road, and the reins had simply stretched a great deal in the rain. When it was ten o'clock, his wagon and herring were back at the farm, it came into the farmyard to him. He used those leather reins as long as he was alive, and he was called Ell-Lavst, probably named for his mother. His son was called Ell-Jens or Jens Nørgård, and he inherited them. A stump of them was still left when Peder Tygesen became a man, and he had enough left to tie his thresher. (Kristensen 1891–1894, 1:61–62)

The remarkably pliant reins make for an amusing tall tale and one cannot help but think that the leather from the Nibe area must be exceptional. But a quick read of the introduction to this story reveals yet another narrative irregularity, reminiscent of the editorial intervention found at the end of the published version of the first part of the story. The reference to the immediately preceding story at the start of this one—a story told several years earlier and dozens of kilometers away from where Bitte Jens lived—gestures toward an impossibility of performance. In Tang Kristensen’s collections, stories are self-contained: they never refer to other stories. The only explanation here can be the unusual intrusion of Tang Kristensen’s editorial pen. But even if one reconnects part one to part two, something is clearly missing.

Returning to the field diary manuscripts, one discovers that Tang Kristensen has skipped over a fairly important part of the story (see figure 1). After the Jewish peddler is chased from the poor couple’s house, and the husband and wife have discovered that he has left his belongings behind, Bitte Jens continues:

So the next morning, they were going to open the chest and look through the peddler’s wares. There they find a purse filled with silver coins. We can’t count them, said the wife, but I’ll go over to my sister and borrow her quarter measure, I think there’s a whole quarter measure, we can measure the money with that. “What do you want it for?” [her rich sister asks,] “You don’t have anything to measure.” “I want to measure my coins,” [replies the poorer sister] “Have you gotten a hold of so many of them?!” So she gets [the measure] and goes home. [When she returns it, her sister notices that] Something glistens [in the measure]. It is a tiny little shilling from Lübek, [the poor sister] was so careless that some of them got stuck between the tangs. The [older] sister is curious [when she] finds the money. “I have them, there is money!” [she thinks] “Where did you get them from?” [she asks the poor sister.] “I’ll tell you how it is. I had my husband cut my thingy out and had our girl bring it up to the minister and I got a whole quarter measure of coins for it.” “That was quite a good
price, do you think he’d buy more?” Yes, she figured he would. Well, she
didn’t really need any money, but she wanted more, and so [she had] hers
[cut out] too. [She] Got her husband to take his straight-razor and sent
the hired girl off with it on a white plate with a little napkin over it and
up to the minister. “Does he buy pussies?” [she inquires]. “What did you
say?” [asks the minister. She] Says it again. “Let me see.” [he says. Then he
blorts out,] “The Devil take me, people are becoming completely stupid,
they take my cows and leave me the mule.” The hired girl gets so scared
hearing the minister swear like that that she ran home but by that time
the woman was dead. Then her husband felt that you couldn’t just throw
something like that away, and he figured he could make a nice cap out
of it. They used to wear fox caps at the time. So he wore it to church one
day and on the way home there was quite a rainstorm, and it got so big
that it plopped down around his neck. The hired girl had really warmed
up the house [in the meantime] and so he sat down to warm himself up
[when he got home] and as [the hat] dried out it shrunk around his neck
and strangled him. Then they had to cut it off of his neck. They tossed
it out onto the manure heap. Another man came to the farm, and it was
their habit that they'd drive manure out in the spring and he finds this thing on the manure heap. He figures he could make a set of reins out of it. (Unpublished field diaries:5243B–5244B)

At this point, the published version from the first volume of *Fyske almueliv* picks up the story. With the restoration of this second episode, a variant of ATU 1535, the published story of the pliant reins makes far more sense while confirming that Nibe leather is not your ordinary leather (Uther 2004:267–69). Read all together, the three parts stand as a "shock and awe" schwank, devoid of the political commentary that Tang Kristensen reads into the published first episode, and far more amusing than the alleged satire contained in the published third episode. But why did Tang Kristensen eliminate this second episode?

To be sure, Tang Kristensen was loath to publish obscene stories. He had refused to publish a similar short episode that Bitte Jens told him several years later, also dealing with a wandering merchant (in this case a tailor) and a woman's genitals:

Ten fox skins and fifteen lengths of velvet, and one barrel of oil [tar], that's what the Tailors were to have to make a pussy, because the woman had lost hers. The man got up in front of her. She sat on a seat board on the wagon and he sat on a hay seat and lifted her skirts but couldn't figure out how all of that was supposed to fit in such a small hole. Then he saw that the tailor had stolen both the fox skins and the velvet, but there was tar. (Unpublished field diaries:4596a)

Tang Kristensen's aggressive editorializing and his apparent unwillingness to publish obscene stories were clearly a form of self-censorship. But why? Most of his collections were self-published, and very few people read the collections in their entirety. In many stories, he simply used ellipses to mask obscenities. Clearly, there was more to the story of this story than simple concern over the naughty bits. Indeed, as the convoluted history behind this story attests, the self-censorship was not only directed at obscenity, but incorporated a political dimension as well.

If Tang Kristensen had abided by his own publication philosophies and printed the story as Bitte Jens had told it, he would have been forced to recognize the story as a fictional, humorous tale—one that fit neither into his conception of the legend nor his conception of stories of daily life. Accordingly, it would have fallen out of his two prestige collections, *Fyske almueliv* and *Danske sagn*. He would then have had to shift it to one of his lesser-known collections, such as *Dansk skjærmtesagn* from 1900,
which does include obscene stories. This shift would not have been a huge problem, since the two short stories would hardly have been missed given the scope of *fyske almueliv*. Clearly, then, Tang Kristensen wanted to print the story in *fyske almueliv* and he wanted to do it on his terms.

By breaking the stories apart he had found an ingenious solution that he clearly felt no one would ever uncover. The first part of the story would be cast as a forceful challenge to the emerging political sensibilities that condemned prejudice directed against ethnic outsiders, particularly peddlers. Not only would he get his version of Bitte Jens's story into print, but he also would have a chance to voice his own deep misgivings toward manipulative peddlers, with whom he apparently felt he had a score to settle, while giving vent to his own festering xenophobia. Indeed, by editorializing on the plight of the poor rural dwellers who were often duped by unscrupulous peddlers, he would further throw people off his editorial track, and perhaps even emerge as a strong voice in the debate concerning commerce and poverty law reform.

The second part of the story, without the obscene bits, could then stand as a trifle—an amusing *schwank* about rural life. It would allow him to foreground a humorous yet romantic discussion of farming implements once common on Danish farms, thus echoing the reference to the old plow the woman was forced to use in the first—now detached—part of the story, and adding a humorous dimension to an otherwise dry discussion of reins. As such, the story would be perfectly at home in the first volume of *fyske almueliv*. Finally, this editorializing would also allow him to remain true to a decision he had made that was intended to “protect” his informants from a negative critique by the burgeoning urban classes who were reading—or at least buying—these collections.

In the afterword to the first six volumes of *fyske almueliv*, he writes:

> There are certain things that have not been included, certain corners of the soul that are not illuminated. Those forces of the soul that have been jumped over, those mainsprings that have not been considered, have not escaped my attention during my collecting efforts; I have had other reasons for not including them. There is immorality for one. I could certainly have illuminated that with quite a few small incidents, but why should I do that? [Immorality] is not nearly as great among the peasantry as it is among the higher classes, and since in the description of the latter’s cultural life there is no emphasis on finding examples of
excesses, but rather there is a tendency to practically throw a veil over them, I can find no reason to place the peasantry in pillory as such. (Kristensen 1891–1894, 6:412)

This consideration of keeping peasant immorality out of the public eye—a clear form of self-censorship—doubtlessly contributed to his decision to edit Bitte Jens’s story. Yet Tang Kristensen tries to play both sides of the fence. In response to criticism of his collections, he writes in the afterword to the addenda to the *fyske almuetiv* collection:

People have also said that I have a particular predilection for presenting the vulgar and the ugly in folk life, but I absolutely must defend myself against such accusations. I have wanted to paint a truthful and accurate picture and, for that to happen, I had to do as I did, and then all other considerations had to yield. (Kristensen 1900–1902, 6:530)

To hear him tell it, on the one hand he censored his material to paint a portrait of his informants that would not subject them to unnecessary approbation. On the other hand, all other considerations had to yield in his efforts to paint as accurate and truthful a portrait of peasant life as possible. The only thing missing in this two-sided portrait, of course, is the woman’s genitalia.

Several related considerations also likely motivated Tang Kristensen’s editorial intervention. First, there was his ongoing reliance on state support for his publication projects. Second was the rapidly increasing reputation of Bitte Jens’s son, Anders Bundgaard. By 1893, Bundgaard had returned from a sojourn in Paris. He was winning important commissions for sculptures in Copenhagen, particularly for the newly built city hall. By 1899 Bundgaard was among the most famous sculptors in Denmark, having executed a commission for the now quite famous Gefjon fountain at Langelinie in Copenhagen (Aalborg amtstidende staff 1954). Since fieldwork ethics were not really part of the landscape of early folklore collection, this consideration may have aligned more with self-preservation. Bundgaard presented his sculptures as springing from his father’s storytelling (Pedersen 1995). It would not serve him or his clearly powerful benefactors well if his father’s stories turned out to be about women chopping out their private parts and selling them to the local minister for a few shillings, and men later parading about with these private parts on their heads or using them as reins for their horses. Tang Kristensen might have engaged in a bit of mental calculus, realizing that future subventions
and government stipends were far more important to his overall work than the accurate publication of a single obscene story. Indeed, in the afterword to *fyske almueliv*, he writes, "for the subventions I have received to cover the cost of printing I want to offer a deep thanks to the ministry. Without such help this work would never have appeared" (Kristensen 1900–1902, 6:530).\(^{11}\) Best not to offend the powers-that-be in Copenhagen.

Tang Kristensen’s decision to manipulate Bitte Jens’s storytelling offers an early glimpse of an issue that dominates debate in the contemporary Danish publishing industry (Tangherlini 2001). The proclaimed fear of succumbing to self-censorship masks the political nature of the distortions inherent in deliberate omission and editorializing. Tang Kristensen’s published versions of Bitte Jens’s story make this clear. By deciding to omit—indeed by self-censoring the obscene parts—Tang Kristensen shifts the focus of the story from the sexually violent and manipulative actions of the Danes to the sexual excesses of the wandering Jew. An absurd series of episodes—so extreme in nature that they border on caricature—is silenced. In their stead one finds a highly politicized and deliberately inaccurate representation of local opinion. By adding things that were not really there, Tang Kristensen forces the interpretation of the edited story in that direction. The contemporary debate suggests that self-censorship is a regrettable reaction of people to an overly sensitive climate that stifles free expression coupled to an equally stifling, yet exaggerated, fear of fundamentalist extremist aggression. The overriding concern in the Danish press is that the publishing world should be free from all such pressures that lead people down the path of self-censorship. The example presented here reveals that self-censorship can also be used as part of a deliberate political project, one that hides behind a criticism of what we would term today politically correct to launch attacks at the most vulnerable segments of society. Tang Kristensen’s text also reveals that manipulations related to the position of foreigners in Denmark have been part of the Danish mediascape for well over a century.

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Notes

1. I would like to thank participants in the Wildcat Canyon Advanced Seminars in Folklore (WCAS-F) for comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Portions of this paper were first presented at the conference, “Tales, Poems and Bawdy Songs: Folkloric Imagi-
nation in the North,” in May 2006, at UCLA. In winter 2006, a greatly revised version was presented at the WCAS-F with the title, “I thought I saw a pussy hat.” This title proved to be so disruptive to the fabric of the openness of the seminars that I realized that it perhaps acted as an unnecessary diversion to the paper itself. Consequently, I decided to revert to the original title, “And the wagon came rolling in . . .” In this change of title, I find myself reflected in the processes of self-censorship that form the theoretical premise contained within this very essay. By including the omitted title here, I perhaps have attenuated the distortions inherent in the titling process.

2. The original cartoons were published in Jyllands Posten on September 30, 2005. An excellent overview of the crisis can be found on the one-year anniversary of the publication of the cartoons in Jyllands Posten (Hansen and Hundevad 2006). The Copenhagen newspaper, Politiken, has continued to run a series of articles on the crisis as it has unfolded over the past several years during 2005–2007. An English language editorial by Flemming Rose, the editor at Jyllands Posten, appeared in the Washington Post in 2006.

3. To a lesser degree, this case also includes editorial intrusion, a form of distortion by addition.

4. This and subsequent translations from the Danish are my own.

5. In this context, it is worth considering stories of the “Wandering Jew” (Hasan-Rokem and Dundes 1986).

6. I say “not surprisingly” as there is a close relationship between legislative initiative and common practice as reflected, and negotiated, in storytelling tradition.

7. Elsewhere, I have shown how ethnic outsiders have been “dehumanized” through the motifemic equivalence drawn between them and supernatural beings. Once dehumanized, it is much easier to justify killing or otherwise excluding or injuring the outsider (Tangherlini 1995). For a discussion of motifeme, see Dundes (1964).

8. Tang Kristensen draws a clear distinction between handwritten sources and printed sources, emphasizing the idea that handwritten sources are closer to the spoken word than the edited printed sources.

9. For example, he uses the word Jøde (Jew) or Jøder (Jews) four times in his entire memoir; three of these are references to stories or ballads. The fourth mention refers to a grocer for whom his daughter Frederikke was working. He writes, “Baade han og hans Frue var Jøder, og hun talte ikke ret godt dansk, da hun var født i Hamborg” (Both he and his wife were Jews, and she did not speak Danish very well, as she was born in Hamborg) (Kristensen 1923, 4:147).

10. The last item in this list resonates with the current debate over ethnicity in Denmark. There is of course another possibility: he wanted to publish as much of the story as he could. By making the story align with prevailing sentiment—a sentiment that he himself did not endorse—he added the distorting comments. This possibility is convoluted and does not seem likely.

11. Early in his career Tang Kristensen had great difficulty getting government support for his collecting efforts and publication subventions. The tide began to turn in 1887 and he describes how he managed to secure publication subvention for Danske sagn and support for future collecting in his memoirs (1923).
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