

“To market! To market!”: Markets and the Märchen in Nineteenth Century Denmark¹

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Bønderne skulle føre deris Vare til Kiøbstæderne, og dem paa offentlig Axeltorve og Markeder fal holde, og ej dem til Høkkere og Forprangere, som Landet omløbe, sælge. Giøre de berimod, have forbrut Varenis Værd til Kongen, og Varenne, om de af Kongens Foged antreffis kunde, iligemaade være Kongen hiemfaldne (Danske Lov 1683, Book 3, Chapter13, Paragraph 26).²

Concerns about markets and their regulation have crept into everyday conversations in no small part due to the recent collapse of global financial markets. The disintegration of the largely unregulated Icelandic banking system in late 2008 and the ensuing tsunami of financial devastation that swept over the country stands as a noteworthy example of the domino-like cascade of financial failures that has shaken the world during the past five years. Subsequent events such as the monumental fraud of Bernard Madoff's Ponzi scheme have added fuel to that narrative fire. There can be little doubt that the economic integrity of communities large and small alike has been threatened by these events. Not surprisingly, stories that address the underlying causes of the crisis, detail its impact on individuals and families, and explore possible reactions from the reasonable to the extreme have become not only a mainstay of the popular mediascape, but also an important part of peoples' informal storytelling (Appadurai 1996).

Michel de Certeau reminds us that stories, particularly informal narratives about events from everyday life, act as “repertoires of schemes of action,” affording people an opportunity to evaluate collectively a range of possible reactions to the situations presented

in these stories (de Certeau 1984; Labov and Waletzky 1967). The complications presented in these stories mirror events that people confront in their daily lives and often revolve around the codification of threat. As such, the stories reflect an ongoing realistic engagement of storytellers and their audiences through storytelling with their social, political and physical environments (Tangherlini 1994). Examining how storytellers represent these threats, the various strategies they propose to repel these threats, and the success or failure of those strategies offers a fruitful avenue of investigation into the role storytelling plays in the ongoing social negotiation among community members of the shifting values governing economic and social behavior. The manifestation of economic threat in traditional storytelling is usually highly personalized and focuses more on individuals than institutions. In this manner, systemic threats such as wide scale financial crises or underlying changes in economic organization that challenge existing ways of “doing things” are brought down to the level of micro-economics. Nevertheless, these individual crises are often cast as arising from macro-economic currents far beyond the control of individuals and small communities. Sometimes storytellers attribute these threats to the machinations of the ruling classes and other times they attribute them to the incomprehensible actions and unstoppable efforts of supernatural or magical beings.

The strategies to deal with these threats and the outcomes of these strategies contribute to the ongoing negotiation of social ideology where the rules governing economic behavior comprise a key component of that ideology (Tangherlini 2008a, 2008b, and 2010). These stories offer insight into economic questions such as what to trade, where to trade, when to trade, with whom to trade, and further comment on the role of money in trade and institutional rules governing trade. In short, the stories comment on economic behavior, markets and their regulation. Stories that explore economic threats and the strategies to countermand these threats are by no means recent phenomena and can be found in most archives of traditional narratives. At the same time, many of these stories have been overlooked as potential sources for understanding normal peoples’ responses both to gradual changes

and catastrophic shifts in the economic landscape since their subject matter is not overtly linked to these economic events.

In a now classic article from 1982, John Lindow explored the role that stories of buried treasure play in addressing the rapidly changing rules of economic behavior in eighteenth and nineteenth century Sweden. Lindow considers George Foster's notion of "limited good," a concept Foster developed to describe economic behavior in peasant societies, and offers a critical exploration of the motivations storytellers may have had for telling these tales. Ultimately, Lindow rejects the discussions of limited and unlimited good that have swirled around tales of buried treasure since Foster's seminal article as overly normative (Foster 1965; Kaplan and Saler 1966; Foster 1966; Dundes 1971; Mullen 1978). Rather than attempting to align the ambiguous aspects of Swedish tradition with one economic model or another, he proposes to read the stories according to their relevance to the storytellers' lived experiences, noting, "Rather than seek limited or unlimited good, I would look first to the realistic background of the traditions" (Lindow 1982, 272). In so doing, he provides an analysis that reveals how these stories created meaning for their largely rural narrators and audiences even as the attitudes expressed in these stories toward treasure and its acquisition remained ambivalent.

Most recent studies of traditional Scandinavian narrative as a window onto the changing economic conditions of nineteenth century farming communities have followed Lindow's lead and focused primarily on legend tradition. Legend, given its close connection to the everyday life of the storytellers, is well suited for addressing issues such as economic threat and economic opportunity (Tangherlini 1995, 1998a, 1998b, 2008b, 2010; Lindow 2010). By way of contrast, the *Märchen* has rarely been explored in the context of economic behavior. One exception to this may be Bengt Holbek's monumental study of the nineteenth century Danish *Märchen* (Holbek 1987). In this largely psychoanalytical exploration of the *Märchen*, Holbek recognizes that the tension between the actors on the high level and the actors on the low level recapitulates class divisions in eighteenth and nineteenth century Scandinavia (Holbek 1987, 525). The resolution of the tale with a

low level actor marrying a high level actor expresses a form of economic wishful thinking. In a time when economic mobility was severely limited, the characteristic *Märchen* move of the poor young boy to rich royal was one of pure fantasy, but one redolent of the economic longings of the largely peasant class who told *Märchen* (Holbek 1987).

Holbek's observations notwithstanding, studies of the *Märchen* rarely explore the economic dimension of these tales and, if they do, address it *inter alia*. Since the inception of the field of folklore, the main focus of *Märchen* studies has been on discovering narrative structures; classifying tales according to motifs and types; the historical development of the tales; the geographical distribution of tale types and motifs; source criticism; the psychological dimensions of tales and tale telling; and storytellers and their communities (Propp 1928; Röhrich 1964; Lüthi 1968; Dégh 1962; Dundes 1964; Holbek 1987; Uther 2004; Bottigheimer 2009; Ziolkowski 2010). Lindow's work broadens this state of affairs, as his article includes a consideration of *Märchen* alongside legends in his discussion of the buried treasure tales (Lindow 1982). If one takes a cue from Lindow and considers the realistic background of certain *Märchen*, it becomes clear that these tales, in a manner similar to the legend, also offer narrators an opportunity to interrogate aspects of economic organization and to suggest solutions to problems such as poverty that confronted many *Märchen* narrators and their audiences.

Not surprisingly, the solutions to economic problems proposed in *Märchen* are usually more extreme than the solutions offered in legend. Economic features of the *Märchen* tend to be exaggerated—poor people are destitute, the wealthy are kings, queens, princes and princesses, money is heaped up in giant piles, and treasures are so immense or so valuable that they exist far beyond the realm of human experience. Exaggeration and the representation of quality by quantity are, of course, well-known characteristics of the European *Märchen* (Holbek 1987, 442-444). Although common wisdom proposes that *Märchen* take place in an imagined world—one that follows its own internal logic and can be at a great physical and historical remove from the external reality of the tale tellers—

studies such as Holbek's propose anchoring the *Märchen* world in a reality much closer to that of the storytellers (Galloway Young 1987; Holbek 1987). The fictive world of the *Märchen* is not foreign to the world in which the storytellers lived their daily lives and the intersection between these two worlds—the fictive world of the *Märchen* on the one hand and the real world of daily life on the other hand—can for some tales be much greater than usually acknowledged. While legends quite clearly rely on a fictive model of the narrator's daily world, that same fictive model informs numerous *Märchen* as well. Since it is far beyond the scope of this brief study to explore the generic differences between legend and *Märchen*, a more productive route will be to posit that the boundary between these genres in the repertoires of many nineteenth century Nordic storytellers is fuzzy, and that the stark division between the fictive world of the *Märchen* and the realistic world of the legend is not a productive division (Grimm 1816; Pentikäinen 1968). Breaking this immutable boundary between the legend and *Märchen* allows for a consideration of economic concerns and behavior in the *Märchen* as closely related to the external reality of the tale tellers and recognizes that etic categories such as *Märchen* and legend often have little relevance to the storytellers themselves (Dundes 1962).

A common opening for many *Märchen* in Danish tradition takes the form of Vladimir Propp's well-known eighth function, lack (Propp 1928). A poor family teeters precariously on the brink of financial ruin and decides to sell their last valuable possession—a cow for example—at the local market. In a tale told by Margrete Jensdatter, the situation is presented as follows:³

Der var en Mand og en Kone, de sad ved en bitte Næring og kunde ikke vel begaa dem. Saa Længe Konen havde noget Lærred at sælge, saa flyede hun Manden et Stykke efter et andet, for at han kunde faa en Skilling til at faa Udgifterne dækket, men til sidst var det forbi med det, og saa gik det dem til sidst saa nær, at de havde ikke uden deres Ko at gjøre i Penge. Saa siger Manden om han skulde ikke trække til Marked og sælge den. Jo, det tykte Konen nok; der var jo ikke andet at gjøre, og det var da bedst at blive ved Husværselet saa længe de kunde. Han

trækker altsaa med den og paa Vejen kommer han saa til en Mand, der gik i forunderlig Klædedragt. Han gik i en stor lang Kappe, der naaede ham rent ned til Halene, og saa var det endda en Sommerdag. De kommer saa i Følge med hinanden, og Manden spørger ham, om han skulde til Marked. Ja han skulde, nu var det gaaet ham saa nær, at han havde ikke andet end den Ko at sælge. “Vil du sælge den til mig?” siger den fremmede. “Jo, det vil a jo nok, hvis du vil give nok for den.”

[There was a husband and wife, they had a tiny little holding and couldn't make ends meet. As long as the wife had some canvas to sell, she would give her husband one piece after another, so that he could get a shilling to cover their expenses, but finally it was over with that, and finally it got so bad that they didn't have anything left that they could convert to money but their cow. Then the husband asks if he shouldn't pull it off to market and sell it. Yes, the wife thought that he should do that; there was nothing else to do and it was best to have a roof over their heads as long as possible. He pulls it along and along the road he meets a man who was walking along in a strange outfit. He was wearing a big long cape that reached all the way to his heels even though it was still summer. They follow along with each other, and the man asks him if he was headed to market. Yes he was, now things had gotten so bad that he had nothing but his cow to sell. “Will you sell it to me?” asks the stranger. “Yes, I certainly will, if you'll give me enough for it.”]

The opening of this tale sets the action firmly in late nineteenth century rural Denmark, with all of the economic challenges confronting the rural poor. Here, the couple subsists on a tiny plot of land and worries about the specter of homelessness at a time of decreasing government investments in poverty assistance (Jørgensen 1940; Tangherlini 2010). Margrete Jensdatter had a great deal of personal experience with situations like this, having spent much of her adult life flirting with life in the Danish poor houses. Perched on the edge of homelessness, she too worked at last ditch

enterprises that had little chance of staving off the inexorable march of poverty. By situating her tale in a fictive world reminiscent of her own environment, the wishful thinking of the *Märchen* becomes intensified—the story is not a pure flight of fantasy but rather the exploration of a more grounded “what if” scenario.

The opening of the tale also defines a lack that is historically conditioned. As the Danish economy moved fitfully toward a relatively open-market system replacing the inefficient yet relatively low-risk manorial system, many small holders, day-laborers, single mothers and elderly *aftægtsfolk* [pensioners] found themselves in increasingly difficult economic situations (Tangherlini 2010; Dybdahl 1982, 9). While the late nineteenth century saw an explosion in the number of small holdings, the land these small holders acquired was often the worst possible land: it was too rocky, too small or too nutrient-poor to produce enough food to support a family let alone farm animals (Hvidt 1990; Bjørn et. al. 1988). Consequently, many small holders had to rely on secondary sources of income such as weaving, clog making, bread distribution, or knitting. In many cases, small holders simply hired themselves out to more prosperous farmers as day laborers. These endeavors often lead to an unsustainable economic cycle: too much time spent earning money to support the farm meant not enough time spent farming. When the farm faltered, people were forced to work harder in their secondary employment, leaving even less time for their own farming. Ultimately, many of these smallholdings proved to be unsustainable and were acquired by larger farms or simply abandoned.⁴

The opening situation of Margrete’s tale, then, refracts many of the economic concerns of her peers: with the dissolution of the manorial system starting in the late eighteenth century, farmers, small holders and day laborers became, willingly and unwillingly, individual players in the greater market-based economy. They could no longer rely on the *fælleskab* [collective] that characterized social organization during the manorial period for support (Christiansen 1996). At the same time, the promise of economic stability that came with private ownership proved to be illusory for the majority of the new small holders. Their economic situation was no more

stable than the recently drained heath on which many of their houses were built (Dybdahl 1982, 93-104). Margrete's audience would have recognized their own economic concerns from the very opening lines of the story.

The couple's decision to "liquidate" their economic lack appears perfectly rational: given the choice between homelessness and the sale of a capital investment (the cow) they choose to sell the cow. They seem to be well aware of the risk they are taking by selling their only cow: they will no longer be able to produce milk or butter and consequently will have limited opportunities for economic survival. In short, the sale amounts to an act of desperation that will only stave off the seemingly inevitable descent into poverty by a few months. Yet they understandably find this preferable to leaving their house and throwing themselves on the mercy of the deeply troubled poverty assistance system (Jørgensen 1940).

What is left unsaid in this tale, since Margrete and her audience easily understood it, was that the possibility of having a choice of this sort was a relatively new phenomenon. Prior to the changes of the late eighteenth century that included the elimination of adscription and villeinage, the partitioning of the large manors, the sale of the Royal estates, as well as the reapportionment of the fields, most of the rural population had few marketable assets that were theirs to sell (Hvidt 1990 242-243). If they were in a position to sell assets, they would usually sell to the manor or other members of the closely circumscribed *fælleskab*. It was not until the Constitutional reforms of the late 1840s and subsequent legislative implementation of those reforms in the ensuing decades that small holders and day laborers became meaningfully integrated into the monetized market economy (Hvidt 1990, 243). Seen in this light, Margrete's tale foregrounds these new rules of economic behavior for small holders and day laborers, the ones on the lowest rungs of the economic ladder who had previously been denied meaningful access to the markets. These people were far less experienced with markets and their vicissitudes and found themselves at a distinct disadvantage in many economic transactions. The markets, of course, were far from being "free," and commercial interests, such

as the market towns, the larger land holders, the craftsmen and other guilds used their political clout to structure these new markets in such a manner that preserved as many of their earlier advantages as possible. So, not only were small holders new to the markets, a disadvantage in and of itself, the markets were skewed against them. Despite these clear disadvantages, the new social organization forced the rural lower classes into an economic position where they had to contend with the capricious nature of these allegedly open and increasingly global markets. Consequently, storytelling offered a productive forum for exploring the markets and proposing possible strategies for making the markets work in one's own interest. It could also be used to exact narrative revenge on the people who had mastered the new economy and exploited this position of economic ascendancy to take advantage of those on lower rungs of the economic ladder (Tangherlini 2008b, 360).

While Margrete's story has her couple turning toward the open markets as a last ditch effort to forestall the march of economic change, the decision to sell goods at market does not accrue only to those in dire financial straits in Danish *Märchen*. The anonymous monetized market was quite distant from the earlier highly localized barter dominated system of exchange that was well understood and the rules of which were greatly influenced by the likelihood of repeated transactions.⁵ Peder Johansen tells a story where the opening situation describes a single mother who sends her seemingly dim-witted son to market. In this case the item to be sold at market is homespun—a product that would have previously been used in barter or traded locally. While one can infer that the family's economic situation is not as drastic as in the previous tale (selling the loom, for instance, would be analogous to selling one's cow), the capital risk associated with weaving homespun “on spec” lingers just below the surface and contributes to the tension of the opening situation:

Der ude paa Dover Hede laa et lille Hus, og i det boede ikke andre end en gammel Kone og hendes Søn. En Dag, som Konen var ved at væve, blev hun lige færdig med et kjønt Stykke Vadmel, og aaa siger hun til Knægten: “Hør, Jens, nu kan du tage det Stykke Vadmel og gaa til Aarhus

med og sælge for mig. Det kan ikke hjælpe, du gaar til Skanderborg, for der kan du ikke blive af med det, og du skal have en Mark for Alen. Men lad mig nu se, du bærer dig lidt ordentlig ad.”—“Ja, det skal a nok,” siger han, og han tager Tøjet og gaar med. Saa gaar han nu om ad Hemstok. Der staar de Henstok Mænd uden for og Snakker. “Hvor skal du hen med det Tøj?” siger de, “du farer saa stærkt.”—“Ja, a skal til Aarhus med det for min Moder.”—“Naa, det skal du, hvad skal det da koste?”—“Det skal koste en Mark.”—“Ja, saa er det da ikke værd, du gaar længere for den Sags Skyld, saa vil vi tage det.” Det var Knægten saa meget glad til, og han faar hans Mark, og de faar Vadmelet.

[There was a tiny little house out there on Dover heath, and no one lived there but an old woman and her son. One day as the woman was weaving, she finished up a very nice piece of homespun and so she says to the boy: “Listen Jens, now you can take this piece of homespun and go to Aarhus with it and sell it for me. It won’t help going to Skanderborg, because you won’t be able to get rid of it there, and you’re to get 1 mark for each two-foot length. But please let me see that you can do this properly.”—“I certainly will,” he says, and he takes the cloth and goes off. Now he goes past Hemstok. The Hemstok men are standing outside there talking. “Where are you going with that cloth?” they say, “You’re going so fast.”—“Yes, I’m bringing it to Aarhus for my mother.”—“Oh, are you now? How much does it cost?”—“It costs one Mark.”—“Well, then it’s not worth your trouble going any further for that, we’ll take it.” The boy was quite happy about that and he gets his Mark and they get the homespun.]

The young man circumvents the market and its vagaries by selling local, a resolution to the initial situation reminiscent of the local sale of the cow in Margrete’s story. The boy does not have nearly the same success as Margrete’s couple: in their case, avoiding the market (and thus avoiding at least momentarily the intrusion of

market economics in their daily lives) leads, after some difficulty, to great and lasting fortune. In this case, the boy discovers he has been cheated, having sold the entire bolt of homespun for the much lower unit price.

In another tale, an impoverished couple decides on a different strategy for staving off the collapse of their personal economy.⁶ Rather than selling assets, they decide to hire a young man to make one last attempt at reaching sustainability: if they can produce enough to feed themselves and a worker, they will be able to hold onto their farm, sell their surplus at market and use this new capital to reinvest in their operation. Again, from the repertoire of Peder Johansen:

En Aften omkring ved Novembers Tide sad Manden i Hellede og Snakkede med hans Kone om, at de ikke kunde Svare, hvad de kunde, og at de blev nødt til at opgive det, dersom der ikke blev andet Raad. Saa gav hun ham det Raad, at han skulde se at faa sig en stærk Karl, og saa skulde de arbejde dygtig paa Jorden, saa maatte de nok kunne saa Føden ud af saadan en Mark. Han befandt, at Raadet var godt, og gik saa til Ry Marked, hvor der var Folkemarked den Gang. Da han kommer ned til Glentholm, som den Gang kaldtes Ry Mølle, saa kom han i Følge med en stor Karl, og de gik og snakkede med hinanden. Saa viste det sig, at de gik efter det samme, og kom ogsaa til Rette paa halvvejs. De gik da hjem igjen, og Lønnen blev saadan, at Karlen skulde gaa for, hvad Manden kunde give, og siden, naar Manden faldt fra, skulde han have Støtterne (hus og det hele).

[One evening, around November, the farmer in Hell sat and talked to his wife and said they couldn't pay what they owed and they'd be forced to give up, unless they figured something out. She told him that he should find a good strong farmhand and work hard on the land, and then they should be able to get food from such a field. He thought the advice was sound and he went to Ry market, where in those days there was a general market. When he

gets down here to Glentholm, they called it Ry Mill in those days, he catches up with a big farmhand, and they went along and talked together. It turned out that they were headed to find the same thing and they reach an agreement about half way there. They went back home and the pay was going to be that the farmhand was to get what the farmer could afford, and when the farmer later gave up farming, he was to get the property (the house and everything).]

The agreement that the man makes with the farmhand is not unusual as it mimics the standard outlines of an *aftag* agreement, a form of pension guarantee that allowed for the relatively stable transfer of real property while insuring that elderly people would not live out their last days in utter poverty. In each of these cases, a brief transaction on the way to the market concludes the opening situation and sets up the ensuing action. Each tale leads in its own fashion to a positive outcome for the initially poor farmers. Just as importantly, the resolutions of the tales have devastating consequences for the poor farmers' wealthy antagonists.

All of these tales are marked by considerable violence subsequent to the initial transaction. This violence gestures metaphorically to the underlying violence wrought by the market system itself. In the first tale, the bottle the man receives turns out to contain a magical genie that provides the couple with food and riches. A jealous and wealthy neighbor tricks the man into selling him the bottle, and the next bottle the man acquires contains violent gremlins that beat him senseless. Ultimately the man manages to swap bottles with his now even wealthier neighbor, recovers the first bottle and the wealth that flows from it, and his wealthy neighbor is forced into poverty. In the second story, the young man is tricked by the Hemstok men several times before he finally turns the tables on them, first tricking them out of their money, then tricking them into destroying their own livestock, and finally tricking them into killing their wives and drowning themselves. In the third story, a variant of the widely attested Big Claus Little Claus story, the farmhand is able to guarantee wealth

for himself and his employer, while laying utter ruin to the wealthy neighbor, the neighbor's family and farm.

All of these initial transactions seem quite innocuous: in the first tale, the farmer trades his wreck of a cow for a magical bottle, in the second tale, the young man agrees to sell the homespun locally for what he thinks is a good price and, in the third tale, the farmer and the farmhand reach an agreement before they reach the marketplace. What goes unsaid is that all of these transactions are illegal and would be immediately recognized as such by a contemporary audience. Because of these early transgressive transactions, the ensuing almost spasmodic violence that characterizes these tales is likely not as unexpected for the contemporaneous audiences as it is for the modern reader. A fourth tale told by Villads Skov highlights the transgressive nature of these initial transactions:

Det var gaaet den fattige saa nær, at han havde ikke uden én Ko, og den skulde han nødsages til at sælge for at faa Brød i Huset. Saa trækker han til Marked med den en Dag, men da han kom til en Korsvej, kom der i det samme en Vogn kjørende med den anden Vej, og der sad en tre Karle paa. De spurgte ham, hvor han vilde hen, og han vilde saa ogsaa vide, hvor de skulde hen. Ja, de skulde da hen at hænge det Menneske, der sad imellem dem, for det var en Mestertyv,

“Jeg synes, at det er en stor Synd at hænge ham”, siger den fattige, “for det er jo et Menneske, der er frisk og rask.”

Ja, det kunde ikke hjælpe, hænges skulde han. “Men maaske du kunde have Lyst til at at bytte og have en Karl for en Ko, saa kan vi blive fri for at hænge ham, og du faar din Vilje.”

Ja. det var ogsaa det samme, siger han, og saa bliver han resolveret paa at gjøre den Handel med dem, og de

beslutter dem til at sige, naar de kom tilbage, at Tyven var rendt fra dem.

[Things had gone so bad for the poor one that he had nothing but a single cow left, and it looked like he was going to have to sell it to get some food. So one day he drags it off to market, but when he gets to an intersection, a wagon all of a sudden comes driving up in the other direction, and there were three farmhands sitting in it. They asked him where he was going, and he wanted to know where they were going. Well, they were going to hang the person sitting in between them, because he was a master thief.

“I think it is quite a sin to hang him,” says the poor man, “because he is a strong, healthy person.”

Well, that didn’t matter, he was to be hung. “But maybe you want to trade and get a farmhand in exchange for a cow, and then we won’t have to hang him, and you’ll get your way.”

Well, that’s all the same to me, he says, and then he decides to make that deal with them, and they decide to say when they get back that the thief had escaped from them.]

That the farmhand is a thief on his way to being executed is an interesting element of this tale and emphasizes its transgressive nature. The farmhand is to be punished for violating the rules of market behavior, a seeming recognition of the necessary and inviolate nature of the regulation of the market place. But all of the men who are party to this trade care little for these rules. Here, everyone is made better off from the trade, offering an amusing gloss on Pareto efficient solutions to any given market problem.⁷ If one disregards the rule of law that has for the most part not served any of these people particularly well, the solution is surprisingly efficient: the men get a valuable cow, the farmer gets a strong farmhand, and the farmhand gets his life. The amusingly subversive

nature of this transgressive deal—exchanging a cow for a thief—is actually present in the other stories as well, albeit not as overtly. All of the stories, then, begin in a transgressive realm that fundamentally challenges the existing laws governing commerce and then proceed to pile transgression on top of transgression until finally a new and inverted economic order emerges.

As in most of Europe, the laws governing markets and the concessions made toward market towns were quite strict in nineteenth century Denmark. Well up into the nineteenth century, market towns were given privileged status in Denmark as a form of protection for the town-centered trades, but also as a means for preventing the development of a black market not easily subject to taxation. A one and a half *mil* (11.25 km or 7 mile) buffer zone existed around all market towns, preventing any small shops from opening inside this zone. In 1857, a new commerce law codified many of the emerging rules governing trade and was supposed to implement the guarantees of the 1849 Constitution concerning free trade since, prior to then, most trade in the provinces had been governed by the rules set forward in the Danish Law of 1683 (Johansen 1979 35-36). Importantly, the commerce law of 1857 maintained the buffer zone around market towns (Næringslov Section 1, paragraph 14). Even with the adoption of the 1857 law, it took several years for these reforms to be implemented; implementation was inconsistent, and the law generally favored the market towns and other established commercial enterprises. By the mid 1880s, the economic landscape was changing so rapidly that urgent calls for reform of the commerce law finally resulted in a legislative proposal in 1893; even those proposed reforms were never able to gain majority support in parliament (Dybdahl 1982, 228-233). Consequently, most small holders and rural poor found themselves subjected to conflicting and inconsistently enforced rules governing trade and were forced to contend with markets that were not structured to support low level trade.

One of the fundamental rules governing trade up through most of the nineteenth century was the strict prohibition of engaging in transactions on the way to or from markets, practices that were referred to in the earlier Danish laws as *forprang* and *landprang*. The

prohibition was motivated by many factors. Market towns wanted to protect their important role in the surrounding area as centers for trade and all of the direct and indirect economic benefits that accrued to being the center of trade. Similarly, the Crown wanted to make sure that they could exert control on markets through taxation and keep close tabs on the development of commerce throughout the realm. Not all of the rules were entirely skewed toward the Crown and the established merchant class. There was a clear incentive for people to trade at market, where competition could help avert the most obvious abuses in setting prices that occur when one party to the transaction has more information about the current market value of goods than the other. Indeed, this type of abuse lies at the very root of the problem in the second story, where the Hemstok men take advantage of the boy by purchasing his goods at prices far below fair market value. In the other stories, the value of the goods is more difficult to discern—a cow should be more valuable than a bottle, for instance, but it depends a bit on the cow and it depends a bit on the bottle.

Given that strong prohibitions existed against trade on the way to or from markets, and that these prohibitions and the proposed risks attendant breaking these prohibitions were well known among the rural population, the opening situations of these tales signal the narrators' intention to challenge the existing economic order. From the very start the narrators point their protagonists down a road that diverges substantially from the one that hews to the rules governing social and economic interaction—even though they intend initially to follow that road to market, they all seem to decide that their financial well-being might lie well off this standard route; their economic journey on the straight and narrow has not, after all, been smooth. A rural Danish audience would be immediately attuned to the transgressive nature of the transaction that initiates the remaining part of these tales. Alerted to the transgressive nature of the story, the audience would be eager to discover how the poor farmers ultimately turn the tables on the economically oppressive system that dangles the free market in front of them, but erects almost insurmountable barriers to making it work for them.

Since the divergence from the rules governing normal economic behavior happens so early in each of the stories, it seems clear that the narrators present their accounts as challenges to the emerging market system, a system that was clearly skewed in favor of the wealthy. Three of the stories open with a description of the tense relationships between a wealthy farm and a poor farm and, in his introduction to his story, Villads Skov goes so far to mention that his story is about how the poor and rich eventually end up trading places. The reasoning that each of the tales follows is fairly clear: the law forbids one from engaging in transactions outside of the highly regulated market place. These protections are in place largely to preserve the wealth of a few at the expense of many and only offer marginal protection to the small market player. Out of bounds transactions, by contrast, have the potential for remarkably large pay-offs, pay-offs so large that they completely invert the existing economic order. Perhaps the danger of these transactions, then, is more to the existing order than to the poor who, in these tales, realize that they have little to lose and quite a bit to gain. Returning to Lindow's plea for a "realistic" interpretation of the tales, one can imagine that the storytellers and their audiences could find justification for their resistance to the rules of trade that severely limited their options through the telling of these tales—in each one of them, a willingness to skirt the prohibition on trade outside of the markets results in significant positive gains.

Interestingly, the tales align well with the tales of buried treasure considered by Lindow (1982). The bottle that guarantees the ultimate wealth of the poor farmer and his wife is a gift from a mound dweller, a class of supernatural beings closely related both to economic transactions and to buried treasure in Danish legend tradition (Tangherlini 1998b):

Da han nu kommer hjem, saa spørger Maren: "Naa hvad fik du saa for Koen?" "A fik en Flaske!" "En Flaske!" siger hun helt forundet, og saa fortalte han det hele om den Mand, og hvordan han saa ud. Ja, ham kjendte Konen godt nok, det var én af Højfolkene. Nu skulde de til at prøve Flasken, og saa skulde de til at ønske. Manden tykte, an vilde have Gaasesteg, og saa stod den paa

Bordet. Han skar saa Hul paa den, og da var Kroppen udstoppet med ene Penge, og de trillede ud paa Gulvet. Nu kan det nok være, de blev glade, nu havde de jo rigtig Erstatning for deres Ko, og havde Penge nok til Udgifterne. “Ja, vi kan jo ønske os nogle flere en anden Gang,” siger Manden, og de satte dem saa til at spise.

[When he gets home, Maren asks: “Well, what did you get for the cow?”—“I got a bottle!”—“A bottle?” she says, utterly dismayed, and then he told her the whole thing about the man and how he looked. Yes, the wife knew him well, that was one of the mound dwellers. Now they were going to try the bottle, and they were going to wish. The man thought that he wanted roast goose and there it was on the table. He cut into it and the body was stuffed with coins, and they spilled out onto the floor. Now they were happy, now they’d gotten plenty for their cow and had lots of money for their expenses. “Well, we can wish for more another time,” says the husband and they sat down to eat.]

Importantly, the access to the treasure represented by the bottle derives from a willingness to break the laws governing fair trade. But the underlying evaluation that the concept of “fair trade” was hardly apt for the highly regulated market structure that existed in rural Denmark: the shift toward a more broadly based market economy forced small holders to act as market players even when the market was rigged against them. It was not a question so much of limited or unlimited good, but rather a question of whether to play by rules that put one at a significant disadvantage. By stepping outside the bounds of the regular market system and engaging in an illegal transaction with a completely new market segment (here, the “outgroup” of the mound dwellers), the poor farmer is able to secure his well-being and punish the wealthy farmer to boot.

It was not until the rise of the cooperative movement in the final decades of the nineteenth century that many Danish small holders were able to participate in the markets on a more even footing with the farmers and large landholders for whom the new

markets worked well. The cow as a symbol of access to the market was well known to all of the rural population: if one had a cow, one had milk. If one had milk, one could produce butter and possibly cheese. All of these were valuable commodities in high demand that could be sold or bartered. With the prohibition on non-market sales, however, opportunities to develop a sound financial basis even with a very small herd were essentially nonexistent. That two of the stories mention trading cows should come as no surprise. In both of these cases, trading the cow is the last resort—signaling that the farmer and his wife do not expect to remain in the marketplace. If selling a cow is transgressive in its rejection of the emerging market economy, then selling the cow on the way to market is all the more transgressive bordering, in fact, on the subversive. What makes these sales even more intriguing is that they are barter transactions—thus eschewing the last aspect of the emerging market system, the monetized transaction.

In two of the stories, the cow is traded for a farmhand—one of these farmhands is a thief on the way to his execution, while the other one turns out to be a psychopath. In both cases, the farmhand's subsequent actions reject all of the underlying rules of the marketplace and, quite frankly, all of the rules of civil society. An intriguing episode occurs in Villads Skov's tale, where the farmhand uses a seemingly market based negotiation over price to steal butter:

Han faar Bæsterne for og kjører saa af Sted med nogle tomme Fjerdinger. Da han kommer til Sandbakken, fylder han dem med Sand og lægger hvert Laag nok saa kjønt paa. Derefter kjører han til Byen og ind ad en Kjøbmands Gaard, hvor han strax giver sig i Færd med at bære Fjerdingerne ind ad Pakhuset og sætter dem der lige Side med en Del andre Smørfjerdinger. Saa gaar han ind i Butikken og siger, at han er her med et Læs Smør, om de vilde sige ham, hvad Pris de gav for det. Ja, de gav saa og saa meget. Nej, den Pris vilde han ikke sælge Smør for, det var saa og saa godt, han kunde sagtens faa mere for det et andet Sted, og hvad han kunde nu rimle op. Ja, de gav ikke mere, sagde de, og saa rejste han af ud til

Pakhuset og skulde nu have Smørret læsset paa Vognen igjen, men passede naturligvis paa at faa nogle andre Fjerdinger, der var virkeligt Smør i, og saa kjørte han lige hjem til den fattige Mand med det.

[He gets the horses harnessed up and drives off with some of the empty forms. When he gets to the sand pit, he fills them with sand and puts each cover on nicely. Then he drives to the town and into a grocer's farm, where he immediately begins carrying the forms into the warehouse and puts them down next to the other butter forms. Then he goes into the store and says that he has come with a load of butter, and he wanted to know what they would pay for it. Well, they paid so and so much. No, he wouldn't sell butter for that price, it was so and so good the butter, he could certainly get more for it another place, and whatever, he just made something up. Well, they wouldn't pay any more, they said, and so he went out to the warehouse and was going to load the butter back into the wagon, but made sure of course that he took some other forms, which really had butter in them, and then he drove straight home to the poor man with it.]

As noted, the trade of the cow for the farmhand that initiates the story is well outside the bounds of legal behavior, violating not only market rules but also freeing a dangerous criminal (whose crime was theft, the antithesis of proper market behavior). Here, the theft of butter relies on the idea of a market for its success—by expressing his disgust at the low price offered for his fictitious butter, the farmhand is able to make off with the dairy's butter. Indeed, much of the story, from the trade at the beginning of the story, to the theft of grain to this theft of butter rely either on the violation of the rules that govern trade or a deliberate manipulation of the transaction setting, such as the substitution of sand for butter. Through these manipulations, the narrator exacts at least narrative revenge on the wealthy who, in the view of many poor small holders, had unfairly structured the market in their favor. In their stories, the storytellers repay systemic theft with actual theft and systemic violence with actual violence.

The labor market was equally regulated as the market for goods. Although the *stávmsbånd*, a system of registration that guaranteed the manor farms a steady and essentially captive labor supply, had been abolished at the end of the eighteenth century, the movement of young men and women between farms was still highly regulated. Consequently, opportunities for employment were limited, and the chances of finding an exceptional farmhand for reasonable wages were similarly limited. In the ATU 1535 tales, the poor farmer is able to find such a worker whose uncouth methods help him attain significant wealth. The attainment of wealth always comes at the expense of others—but this should not be interpreted as a case of the zero sum game of limited good. Rather, those who are punished are the wealthy—people who have taken unfair advantage of others to advance their own fortunes. As such they are worthy of punishment.

Throughout these stories a profound critique of the structure of the emerging free market system bubbles just beneath the surface. The rules governing trade were skewed against the small holders, at the same time as those small holders were being increasingly forced to act as regular actors in the market. To most small holders, many of the rules must have seemed both capricious and unfair—why should a person not trade on the way to and from market, when the market offered little opportunity for participation as an equal? In legends of buried treasure, breaking the rules usually results in punishment of one form or another. Treasure hunts fail when the hunters see their village in flames, or when they violate the interdiction on talking—resolutions that suggest that community takes precedence over individual gain. The premise, of course, is that the community is strong and mutually supportive, and that the distribution of wealth is fair and equitable, despite its irregularity. These tales reject that suggestion. Instead, the emergence of the free market economy forces people into untenable situations where they have to sell their last productive possessions to unscrupulous traders. Their only hope is to step outside the bounds of this highly regulated market and play by a different set of rules.

Lindow's proposal to read the tales in a "realistic" context proves to be a productive one. The shifting terrain of economic

production and trade placed many small holders in dire straits. The playing field was tilted against them, and strategies for overcoming the obstacles to sustainability were hard to come by. The what-if scenarios of stepping outside the boundaries of that economic playing field explored in these narratives must have been liberating. Using the market against the very ones who had structured the market must also have been appealing. Generally, people do not consider *Märchen* to be subversive. But in these cases, the rural audience would have recognized early on in the tale that these were stories about crossing boundaries, breaking the law and upending the emerging economic order. Interestingly, it did not take long for the small holders to upend the market system that put them at a competitive disadvantage. They did not do it by eschewing the rules of trade, but rather by cleverly making the market work for them. By banding together in cooperatives in the waning decades of the nineteenth century, the Danish small holder, once unable to compete in the free market, all of a sudden found himself part of a global economy supplying butter and cheese to kings and queens. The buried treasure turned out not to be buried at all. It was in the cow being dragged off to market.

Notes

¹ For the sake of this study, the German term *Märchen* is used to refer to any tale cataloged in the index of Danish Fairy Tales in the Evald Tang Kristensen collection (Brandt 1974).

² Peasants are to bring their wares to the market towns, and keep to the plazas and markets, and shall not sell their wares to the hucksters and deal makers who wander about the countryside. If they violate this rule, and thereby infringe the value of the wares to the Crown, and the wares, if recovered by the Royal bailiff, shall be confiscated by the Crown.

³ The full texts of all four of the stories considered in this study are available at <http://www.purl.org/lindow/tales.html>. These stories can be categorized as falling into three categories. Two of the tales involve acquiring the services of a farmhand who turns out to be ruthless in his murderous efficiency in gaining wealth for the family who hires him. These tales have many similarities to tales classified as ATU 1535. One of

the tales involves trading a cow for a magical bottle that in turn becomes the object of the wealthy farmer's jealousy, and is similar to ATU 564, 595a, 331 and 332. The fourth story involves the young man who is repeatedly cheated out of his goods on his way to market, before violently turning the tables on his antagonists.

⁴ This process offers a strange echo to the American housing market in the last years of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

⁵ Strategies for transactions when one has a high expectation of future transactions are considerably different than situations where the likelihood for future transactions is small or non-existent. In the first situation, one would more likely pursue a strategy of "tit-for-tat," recognizing that one should not try to cheat a potential future trading partner. In the latter situation, one may be more likely to pursue a "winner-take-all" strategy, where one has no consideration for potential retaliation. A discussion of these strategies and an overview of the shift from a barter economy to a monetized economy can be found in Tangherlini 1998b.

⁶ This tale is similar to ATU 1535.

⁷ A "Pareto Efficient" solution to a problem is one in which no solution exists that would make parties any better off without making someone worse off.