Didactic negotiations
A rhetorical analysis of Ludvig Holberg’s The Political Tinker

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ABSTRACT
Ludvig Holberg’s The Political Tinker (1723) is often interpreted as either politically conservative or as an apolitical, psychological satire. This paper claims we should understand this play as a highly political and educational work with subversive potential – without simplifying Holberg’s ideological position as an absolutist. I use Quentin Skinner to ask the question, what was Holberg doing? The answer can be found in Stephen Greenblatt’s terms: He was negotiating. I claim that these two theorists are appropriate for a rhetorical analysis of this early Enlightenment text, and that the term “negotiation” provides a richer understanding of communicative action than Skinner’s approach alone. By considering the context of the play – that is, its inspiration from rapid changes in the public sphere, and real events in Hamburg – one can see how Holberg performed authority and early rhetorical citizenship in a way that made the comedy a specific, didactic form of negotiation.

Keywords
Ludvig Holberg, Early Enlightenment, Comedy, Rhetoric, Negotiations, Quentin Skinner, Stephen Greenblatt

SAMMENDRAG
at disse tre teoretikerne passer godt til analyse av teksten og at forhandlingsbegrepet gir en rikere teksttilgang enn hvis man kun tar utgangspunkt i Skinner. Ved å ta stykkets konkrete kontekst i betraktning (alså den rivende utvikling av den offentlige sfære og historiske hendelser i Hamburg) ser vi hvordan Holberg fremviste makt og autoritet. Dette er et tegn på tidlig retorisk medborgerskap og det gjør komedien til en didaktisk form for forhandling, særegen for Holberg.

Nøkkelord
Ludvig Holberg, tidlig opplysningstid, komedie, retorikk, forhandlinger, Quentin Skinner, Stephen Greenblatt

THE EVENT
The year is 1722, and the date is Friday, September 25.¹ The auditorium is packed at the newly opened Lille Grønnegade Theatre, which can seat an audience of nearly five hundred of Copenhagen’s approximately seventy thousand inhabitants. It is not a big room. About 14 meters long, 32 meters wide. We can observe from preserved posters how the seats are priced. The most expensive, about twenty of them, on the stage itself, probably occupied by rich rakes.² The seats on the main floor are followed by the parterre, the crowded standing area at the back of the main floor. The cheapest seats are in the upper gallery.³ There are few sources of light. The theater’s technicians, using chandeliers among the audience, provided lights during the performance. It is a social event. Similar to theatergoing in London 120 years earlier, as described by Stephen Greenblatt (1988), it depended “upon a felt community: there is . . . no sense of the disappearance of the crowd” (Greenblatt 1988, 5). We can imagine the dynamic when a member of the audience, seated on the rather small stage, could comment on every action through his or her facial expressions or gestures.

If one stepped outside, one found the streets filled with mud, excrement, even dead animals. There were simple wood planks to walk on. Copenhagen was a city filled with beggars, though begging was forbidden. Most of its population lived below what we would today call the poverty line (Henningsen and Wingender 2010, 5–7). One might meet a “visekælling”, a woman who had a broadside ballad⁴ to sell about something spectacular that recently happened (Krefting, Nøding, and Ringvej 2014, 84). Like at the prominent Kongens Nytorv (just down the road from the theater) where in 1724, the Dano-Norwegian author and civil servant Povel Juel would be executed for the most capital offenses in

¹ There are no posters preserved from the opening date, and scholars disagree on whether the premiere was on the 25th or the 26th (Hirshals 2015).
² As Anne B. Jensen claims, it was probably a problem to fit as many as twenty people on stage without putting considerable constraints on the performance (Jensen 1972, 40).
³ See Anne B. Jensen’s “Teateret i Lille Grønnegade 1722–1728” (Jensen 1972). For another extensive description of the birth of the Danish theater, see Elier Nystrøm’s “Den danske komedies oprindelse” (Nystrøm 1918, 76–107), available at archive.org. Holm comments that details about how the audience was organized require further research as they are contradictory in the current research (Holm 2013, 396). The Royal Library also has a webpage dedicated to the Lille Grønnegade Theatre (Scavenius: http://www.kb.dk/da/nb/tema/musikteater/Holbergteater/).
⁴ Skillingsvise – from its price that was one shilling.
the kingdom: lèse-majesté and high treason. First, his right hand was cut off. Then he was decapitated, before his arms and legs were separated from his body. His body parts were later displayed on a stake outside the city (Rian 2014, 130–131). The papers, which would normally love to describe this type of graphic brutality, did not mention it. The nature of the crime was simply too radical – but interestingly for our subject, a broadside ballad was made (Krefting, Nøding, and Ringvej 2014, 53). It is a world of contrasts – between the theater and the scaffold, the general poverty of the people and the openly displayed wealth of the royals. Between the things you can display, and the society you display it in.

The king and queen did not attend the theater. However, the queen's half-sister, Countess Von Holstein was probably there with her husband, who was chancellor of the realm, as well as other members of the elite. This was an attraction. Here one could be entertained and, at the same time, be close to power. Common burghers, soldiers, servants and apprentices filled the rest of the auditorium. Onstage the first original Danish comedy was being presented; namely *The Political Tinker* (The Tinker), by Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754). In the play, the audience watched commoners who wished to participate in matters of State. This was ridiculed, in front of a crowd who could identify with the characters, and who were themselves living under a far more authoritarian regime than Freistadt Hamburg – the city that formed the backdrop for the charade.

**WHY THE TINKER?**

*The Tinker* and its performance in the newly opened Lille Grønnegade is considered the start of Danish institutional theater (Sivertsen 2014, Andersen 1994). It is one of the earliest texts of what Holberg coined his poetic raptus that resulted in 26 Holberg comedies performed between 1722 and 1727. During the late eighteenth century, it was the most popular comedy in northern Europe, performed and published in French, Dutch, and high and low German for both the elite and the common folk (Rossel and Argetsinger 1990, 3). The play has been staged more than four hundred times at the Danish Royal Theater alone. Several common expressions (like “kandestøperi”, for “political amateurism”) have their origin in this play. Moreover, this work played a role in introducing the word “politics” into the Danish language (Jakobsen 2013, 131). The play is still performed today in Denmark and (less frequently) Norway. Folketeateret in Copenhagen performed it the spring of 2017. In other words, it is an important part of northern Euro-

5. The story about Juul and his clumsy conspiracy with compatriot (and Swedish officer) Gustaf Wilhelm Coyet is truly remarkable and would make for a spectacular movie script. See Rian, and the article “Gustaf Wilhelm Coyet” from the Dictionary of Swedish National Biography (Rian 2014, 130–131, Jacobson 1931).
6. We do not know for sure that the countess Holstein attended this evening. But we know that she attended regularly, and that Montaigu, the manager, wrote to her in the fall of 1723 specifically about how her absence resulted in a decline in audience numbers (Jensen 1972, 85).
7. The very first performance was a Danish translation of Molière’s *The Miser*, Wednesday 23 September.
8. In this “poetic raptus” satirical poems like *Peder Paars* (1719–20) that probably opened the door for him as a comedy writer should be included, as well as *Skæmtedikte* (1721–22) and *Metamorphosis* (1726).
9. A “kandestøper” is actually a pewtersmith, but was translated as “tinker” in the first translation (Argetsinger 1990, 4).
pean cultural heritage, and in Denmark and Norway, still a common reference point in reflections on political culture.\textsuperscript{10}

**NEGOTIATION AS ACTION**
What am I trying to prove in this article? My main argument is that performing authority is different from displaying authority. That is how the Holbergian negotiations became didactic. The *Tinker* shows the audience some of the inner workings of authority. This had a subversive, or even empowering potential in the early Enlightenment and on many later occasions. It still has such power today. Holberg lays the foundation for what we in modern terms can describe as a rhetorical citizen. His writings show that he had strong opinions about how such a citizen should behave.

In investigating this claim, one may run the danger of becoming ahistorical and committing intentional fallacies, such as by applying terms and ideas that were totally foreign in Holberg's day and imagining his inner motives for writing. Performing a rhetorical analysis can help avoid those problems.

First, rhetorical analysis is about understanding context. We do not communicate in a void. An actor, in the present or in the past, relates to the surroundings. This insight is expressed in the ancient Greek concept of kairos, which derives from the name of the god of moment and opportunity. A modern, “thin” version, is timing. But kairos can be understood in a broader fashion. We can see rhetoric as situational thinking, or, as Thomas B. Farrell describes it, “practical reasoning” (Farrell 1995, 72). In terms of analysis (when we are not preparing to communicate but instead would like to understand something), there is ideally no end to the amount of contextual knowledge we should have. However, due to natural limitations, we need at some point to stop asking for context and, rather, look at the relationship between the context and what has been communicated.

This brings us to the second point: rhetoric is the study of how we act through communication (Kjeldsen 2014). That makes Quentin Skinner’s insistence on an inquiry with the goal of revealing what the historical actor was doing, very useful in interpreting classic texts (Skinner 2002, 90–102). As Skinner puts it, “understanding the illocutionary act performed by a speaker” will help us understand their “primary intentions” (Skinner 2002, 98). This can trigger objections that we are about to commit the above-mentioned “intentional fallacy,” a term coined in the classic 1946 essay by William K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley (1946) in which intention is described as a “design or plan in the author’s mind” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 469). But as Skinner has made clear, his concept of intention has nothing to do with finding out what was going on inside the head or heart of an actor in the past. He is concerned with intention as a public event. This makes good sense from a rhetorical perspective. If someone says, “I will kill you tomorrow” and the context makes

\textsuperscript{10} A simple search in the archives of the media monitoring research tool *Retriever* shows that the keyword “kande-støper” pops up every now and then, either in a news story about Holberg or as a way of criticizing a contemporary politician. For example, in 1986, the leading conservative newspaper criticized the Christian Conservative, later prime minister, Bondevik as “Holberg’s apostle” because of his lack of principles: “We bid him good luck with another Holberg quote: ‘For squinting at a seaman’s chart, Is not the whole of steering.’” “Vi sier lykke til, med et annet sitat fra Holberg: ‘Eet er et Søekort at forståa, et andet Skib at føre.’”
this a real possibility, the interpretation would be that the intention of the speech act is a threat. Human psychology allows us to speculate about whether it is an argumentum ad baculum or a sign of mental illness, or a million other things. The crucial point is that Skinner urges us to understand intention as something public, and therefore apply a vocabulary in interpretation that is equal to the one we use when we speak about actions. He contrasts this, in one of his recent lectures, with trying to find beliefs in literary or philosophical texts, something that will give one “a very misleading and certainly very impoverished hermeneutics.”11 Hence, the importance of a contextual interpretation, and the question of what Holberg was doing in this comedy.

How, then, can we try to grasp what Holberg was doing in a meaningful way? First, we obviously need to look at the sources. Because The Tinker is a comedy, a work of art, performed not by Holberg but by the experienced Rene Magnon de Montaigu’s (1661–1737) theater company, in a highly complex social and political context, we need a rich term to describe it as a form of action. We need a complex answer to a seemingly clear question. The answer to the question of what Holberg was doing in The Tinker is that he was negotiating.

This is a term we owe to Greenblatt (Greenblatt 1988, 2011, 2012). Holberg scholars have been inspired by Greenblatt (Nyrnes 2002, Akselberg 2004) but, to my knowledge, none have used Greenblatt to answer Skinner’s question. Surprisingly, there is overall no scholarly research that combines the work of these two theoreticians. Both study the same early modern period. Both base a lot of their understanding of language in the classical rhetorical sense. Throughout his writings, Skinner has been concerned with the reception of classical rhetoric in the Renaissance, which he elaborately discusses in his recent book on William Shakespeare (Skinner 2014). Greenblatt (1988), a Shakespeare scholar, finds the basis of another of his key terms, “social energy”, particularly in Renaissance rhetoric (Greenblatt 1988, 5–6). Most importantly, they both stress the importance of contextual reading. (Greenblatt arguably places a greater focus on what is written on the fringes of the culture.)

The core difference between these two scholars is how they describe their object of study. With Skinner, it is either the historical actor performing an action, in dialogue with his contemporaries, or a concept, like the modern state, being used by different actors and thus changing throughout time (Skinner 2009). With Greenblatt (1988), a work of art, “however intensely marked by the creative intelligence and private obsessions of individuals, are the product of collective negotiation and exchange” (Greenblatt 1988, vii). We can observe that Greenblatt describes the dialectics between an actor and the available language in more sensitive terms than Skinner. Writers negotiate not only with their surroundings, but also with language itself, and its ability to formulate our public intentions. This sensitivity, together with how the term “negotiations” strikes as the most precise description of writing “words that work” – that is, words that change society, written as they were in the absolutist context of early Nordic enlightenment – makes Greenblatt the best answer to Skinner’s question. Hence, we ask here not only what Holberg was doing but also what was at stake in the collective negotiations in which the play appeared. Why the neologism

11. As with many of Skinner’s lectures, this is available on YouTube at the section starting six minutes into the talk; the quote itself is from 08:40: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJYsTJ8vXxg (accessed September 21, 2016).
“didactic negotiations”? By using “didactic” in this context, I simply mean a broad educational practice, including everything from teaching to the difficult-to-translate Dano-Norwegian word “dannelse” — to which perhaps the closest we can get is the German term “Bildung.” As we will see, didactic is the most accurate trademark the sources provide for coining Holberg’s approach to his surroundings.12

HOLBERGIANA
Examining The Tinker in context provides us with the opportunity to explore the extremely rich literature of Holbergiana dating back to the late eighteenth century (Ehrencron-Müller 1933, 1934, 1935; Langslet 2005, 489–492; Glasser 1984, 77–94). The Holbergiana reveals as much a history of interpretation as a history of Ludvig Holberg. Moreover, when we turn to reading Holberg himself (this is part of the attraction), we find almost as many positions as we find in his readership. Holberg is (in)famous for his paradoxes and different positions. He wrote about The Tinker that “no comedy has been written, that in such a degree takes the side of the authorities.”13 These words can be interpreted as: (a) a sign that Holberg needed to reply to the critical remarks he received for a play that he published under a pseudonym; (b) an expression of a theater that was closely tied to the elite,14 but most likely (c) a negotiation between both these positions.

Holberg is essentially contested. Hence, it is symptomatic when Gerald Argetsinger – who with Sven H. Rossel did an important job in translating and introducing Holberg into modern English – wrote, “the deficiencies Holberg satirized with such accuracy in his comedies were of a psychological and not of a political nature” (Argetsinger 1990, XIV); it is equally symptomatic when Bent Holm explains his extreme distaste for the many toothless apolitical performances of Holberg found in Danish theater history (Holm 2013, 150). In later years, most scholarly studies have focused on the ideological Holberg (Olden-Jørgensen and Sejersted 2014, Vinje and Sejersted 2012, Olsen 2016, Koch 2015). Rolv N. Jakobsen’s well-informed article about the “dialectical interplay” between The Tinker and different editions of Holberg’s book on natural law shows how the comedy, in its reception, was read as both reactionary and radical (Jakobsen 2013). Edda has printed several of the most “political” readings of the play (Bing 1914, Foss 1935, Nedergaard 1981) as well as the recent article by Holm about the kaleidoscopic tinker being both a political and comic character (Holm 2015). The Holbergiana is as rich in paradoxes as its object of study. See, for instance, the classical Holbergs statsretlige og politiske Synsmaade, in which Edvard Holm writes that Holberg “probably did not have any strong political interest”15 even though the whole work is about Holberg’s political perspectives (Holm 1879, 26).

12. There are several works on Holberg that present a didactic reading of his plays, most notably Det didaktiske rommet (Nyrnes 2002), written in opposition to Holbergs pedagogiske ideer (Myhre 1969).


14. The previous year, Holberg suffered an accusation toward his satirical poem “Peder Paars,” by Fredrik Rostgaard. Rostgaard himself still participated in the opening of the theater. See, for instance (Hirshals 2015), and (Nystrøm 1918, 84).

15. “Holberg har næppe havt særlig sterk politisk interesse.”
Because we are looking at Holberg as a participant, I will show in the following discussion, through a brief summary of the play, how The Tinker takes a didactic approach to the emerging printed media revolution. Then I discuss how closely the plot was tied to recent political events in Hamburg, how it reflected the inner workings of authority, and finally, how it educated people in rhetorical citizenship.

THE TINKER AND THE NEWSPAPER

“I’ll wring her neck before I see her married to a politician.”¹⁶ That is the clear message from Geske, the unhappy wife of Herman von Bremen, the tinker who has become “very pretentious”¹⁷ recently (Holberg 1990, I, 2). The reason for her frustration is obvious. Her husband has stopped tending to his duties as a craftsman: “when he does some work, which seldom happens, it looks so political that we have to cast it all over again” (II, 1).¹⁸ Not only does Herman fail to provide for his household; he also fulfills the eternal comical trope of standing in the way of young love. As he says to the “fine worthy fellow” Antonius, “I do believe my daughter would be well-off with you. But I want a son-in-law who has studied his politics.” (I, 4)¹⁹ Thus, he angers his wife, his daughter, and, as becomes evident, the elite of Hamburg.

The plot of The Tinker is a version of the ancient “king for a day” motive that Holberg knew well (Foss 1946). He applied it even more clearly in Jeppe on the Hill (1723). The play’s proverb has a version in several European languages: Zapatero a tus zapatos. Schoenmaker blijf bij je leest. Schuster, bleib bei deinem Leisten. “Cobbler stick to your last.” The first known example of this small social theory derives from Pliny the Elder’s Naturalis Historia (which Holberg knew well, and refers to in several places): Sutor, ne ultra crepidam. The underlying question about social mobility became an important topic during the early Enlightenment. Suddenly Europe witnessed the emergence of thousands of small public spaces (Sennet 2003, Habermas 2002). People met in these spaces to discuss politics, poetry, and anything in between. Holberg stayed two years in Oxford in 1706–08; London, which he visited several times, already had 3,000 coffeehouses.²⁰ Richard Steele, who was at the epicenter of this movement, describes the coffeehouse discussions in the April 26, 1711, edition of Spectator:

I, who am at the coffee-house at six in the morning, know that my friend Beaver, the haberdasher, has a levee of more undissembled friends and admirers than most of the courtiers or generals of Great Britain. Every man about him, perhaps, a newspaper in his hand; but none can pretend to guess what step will be taken in any one court of Europe, till Mr. Beaver has thrown down his pipe,

16. “Jeg skal før vride halsen om på hende end hun skal få en politicus.” All original quotes are from the modern Danish version in The Writings of Ludvig Holberg (Ludvig Holbergs Skrifter) a critical online edition with facsimiles of Holberg’s first editions, published open access with comments (Holberg 1723).
17. “[...] er blevet curiosk [...]”
18. “[...] thi når han gor noget arbejde, som sjældent sker, så ser det så politisk ud at vi må stobe det igen;”
19. “Jeg tror nok min datter kunne være vel holden med ham. Men jeg ville gerne have en til svigersøn der har studeret sine politica.”
20. Holberg does not describe an actual coffee-house in his memoirs, but he and his traveling companion did spend a month in London feasting on borrowed money. In Oxford he visited the students’ public houses frequently (Holberg 1728, 28).
and declares what measures the allies must enter into upon this new posture of affairs. (Dobson 1885, 179)21

The setting is strikingly similar to that in the first act of The Tinker, in which the servant describes to Madam Geske what happened when the Collegium Politicum meet at Jens the tavernkeeper’s place. Let us from this point depart from the 1990 translation and read the 1914 edition by Oscar James Campbell and Frederic Schenck that, in this case, is more accurate: 22

I heard them depose emperors and kings and electors, and set up others in their places. Then they talked about excise and consumption, about the stupid people who were in the council, and about the development of Hamburg and the promotion of trade; they looked things up in books and traced things out on maps. Richard the brushmaker sat with a toothpick in his hand; so I think he must be the secretary of their council. 23 (Holberg 1914, I, 6)

At the end of the table sits Herman, unable to see his own employee: “As soon as people get into colleges they gather a sort of mist before their eyes, and they can’t see even their best friends.”24 (I, 6) A new type of public was arising (Tjønneland 2008). Historians like Øystein Rian (Rian 2014) have documented thoroughly that the degree of censorship had a great effect on public life. Nevertheless, scholars have shown that there are examples of actors negotiating with the censorship in the vast volumes of publications that appeared during most of, and especially in the later part of the eighteenth century (Evju 2015, Maliks 2011, Rian 2014, Tjønneland 2008).

The Tinker is an example of how, at the same time that a new and more open public sphere is created, some people start to make fun of other people who inhabit it with the delusion that their opinion matters. As the character Antonius exclaims, “Such fellows are only to be laughed at. What can a tinker, a painter, or a maker of brushes know about statecraft?” (I, 6). This sort of satire was common, and Holberg could have found inspiration in The Tatler, which also published satirical pieces about the very phenomenon they represented. Campbell and Schenck believe that “the play is probably founded upon the story of the political upholsterer which appears in an essay of The Tatler.” (1914, xiii) But according to Rossel, Holberg was not aware of The Tatler, such as the editions 155, 160, and 178, in which a saddlemaker is playing Herman’s part (1990, 3). We do know that Holberg read the Spectator, at least later in life, possibly in the French translation that he mentions in Moralske Tanker. (Holberg 2014b, 13)

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21. In the notes to Steele it says, “A real person was here referred to, Mr. James Heywoos, a wholesale linen-draper on Fish-Street Hill. He died in 1776, aged 90.” A “haberdasher” is not an early critic of Habermas but rather a traveling salesman of small articles, such as buttons and pins. In other words, he is not a statesman.

22. In some ways the 1914 translation is more accurate. The 1990 translation by Gerald Argetsinger and Sven H. Rossel is very well suited to a modern American reader, but loses some of the distinctions that Campbell and Schenck attend to. From this point I will use Campbell and Schenck in the article.

23. “Jeg hørte det nok; men jeg forstod kun lidt deraf. Jeg hørte nok at de satte kejsere, konger og kurfyrster af, og andre i deres sted igen. Nu talte de om told, nu om accise og konsumption, nu om udygtige folk som var i rådet, nu om Hamburgs opkomst og handelens forfremmelse, nu kastede de op i bøger, nu kiggede de i landkort. Richard Bøstenbinder sad med en tandstikker i hånden så jeg tror han må være sekretær i rådet.”

24. “Folk så snart de kommer i collegier, får ligesom en tåge for øjnene så de ikke kan se end deres bedste venner.” In the first edition by Holberg, this line belonged to the servant Peiter, but the actor playing Henrich might have played his part so successfully that he took it over (Jensen 1972, 59). In the second version (1724) Henrich has all of Peiter’s lines, as well as the innkeeper’s (Harshals 2015).
The mere act of reading a newspaper is connected to being “political”. As media scholars Gripsrud, Moe, Molander and Murdock observe, it is precisely the “features of absolutist monarchy” that “underline the radicalism of the changes that gathered momentum during the eighteenth century.” (Gripsrud et al. 2010, xiii) In a comedy like The Tinker, the very display of a political class – with a distinct set of interests and problems (such as the lack of ability to govern) – can be read as the prerequisite for an idea of a sovereign people.

According to this idea, people should no longer be the subjects of monarchs, emperors, and other unelected rulers, entitled to their protection but subjected to their arbitrary power. They should become citizens, with the right to participate. (Gripsrud et al., xiii)

The journals, in their very titles, took the role of the “spectator,” the “bystander,” or someone similar. They were not actors proper (like the king or government officials). Still, simply by representing, they became “actors” all the same. Making fun of someone in this context serves as the first step in acknowledging their existence as a political subject, like a tinker reading a newspaper in his own language.

The Tatler’s first motto was printed in Latin on the top of its page: “Whatever man do or say or think or dream, our motley paper seizes for its theme.”25 This creative (and political) force was a source for real concern in the government of Denmark-Norway, due to the abundance of “project makers” with wild ideas. The question thus becomes how to treat all these things that man “do or say or think or dream.” In The Tinker, the authorities of Hamburg find their solution in a second comical trope:

Sanderus: It would be a good thing to punish such fellows, for they sit over a jug of ale and criticize kings and princes and magistrates and generals in a way that is dreadful to listen to […]
Abrahams: That is so […] But I did not approve […] because to arrest such a man would only start an uproar among the populace and make a person of importance out of a mere fool. My idea, then, is to play a joke on him, instead, which might have a better effect.
Sanderus: How would you go about it?
Abrahams: Send him a deputation, supposedly from the council, to congratulate him on his election as burgomaster.26

(1914, III, 1)

As we see, the elite can take part in a cunning scheme; but, more importantly, when Herman suddenly has real responsibility, a number of problems arise, the first, and most pertinent being:

25. “Quicquid homines agunt, nostri farrago libelli.”
26. Sanderus: Det var at ønske sådanne karle engang kunne blive straffet; thi de sidder og kritiserer over et krus øl konger, fyrster, øvrighed og generaler så det er forskrækkeligt at høre på […]
Abrahams: Det er sandt […] Men mig behagede ikke samme rådherrers foretagende; thi at straffe eller arrestere sådan mand opvækker kun oprør iblandt almuen og gør sådan gæk mere anselig. Min mening var derfor at spille hellere en komedie med ham, som skulle have bedre virkning.
Sanderus: Hvori skulle den bestå?
Abrahams: At skikke ham deputerede som fra rådet for at gratulere ham med borgmesterskab […]”
Herman: Have you any coffee in the house?  
Geske: What nonsense! When did I use coffee last?  
Herman: You will need it from now on.27  
(1914, III, 3)

As a part of the charade, lawyers and citizens come to Herman with all sorts of dilemmas from civil life. In the fifth act, Herman is panicking. He is so desperate that he climbs a chair to hang himself, with the comment, “What burgomaster of Hamburg was ever more vigilant than Herman von Bremenfeld, who in his whole term of office never slept a wink?”28 When it is revealed to him that the whole thing was a joke, he feels relief, not anger. Order is restored. He beats his wife, then proclaims, “I expect to lead a different life from now on, to throw my books into the fire, and pay no attention to anything except my craft.”29 Antonius gets to marry Engelke. The play ends as Herman recites:

All Craftsmen who have seen my fate,  
Pay, profit by its ending:  
Though all's not sound within the state,  
That's not our kind of mending.  
And when we drop our humble tools  
And set us up as thinkers,  
We look the sorry lot of fools  
That statesmen would as tinkers.30  
(1914, V, 8)

Schematically, the world returns to order. But, like most of Holberg’s happy endings, this one is thick with irony. Order has been restored, but it comes at a price. This is the didactic element. Holberg was more concerned with the quality of public discourse than the freedom of it. As an early media critic, he shows the dangers of uninformed decisions. But does Holberg agree that the cobbler should stick to his last? Well, the answer is, not if we look at his own, unlikely, biography, nor if we read the second edition of his book *Introduction to the Science of Natural Law and the Law of Nations* (*Natur- og Folkeretten*), published in 1728, in which he clearly states that people should chose the way of study that “suits them best” (mest naturlig Beqvemhed). As Jakobsen has shown, the dialectic between the comedy and the book opens up for the reader’s own reflections (2013, 142). The Tinker can even be read as an ironic comment on a situation Holberg himself has contributed to with publishing a book on natural law in Danish.

Twenty-one years later he would write in his *Moral Reflections* (1744), “there is no more

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27. “Herman: Har du noget kaffe i huset?  
Geske: Hvad snak! Når brugte jeg kaffe sidst?  
Herman: Du kommer at bruge det herefter da.”

28. “Hvilken borgmester i Hamborg var mere årvågen end Herman von Bremenfeld, der i sit hele borgmesterskab ikke sov et øjeblik?”

29. “Jeg agter at føre et andet levned herefter, kaste mine bøger på ilden og tage alene vare på mit håndværk herefter.”

30. Af hvad som mig i dag er sked, hvor håndværkmænd kan lære/at den der retter øvrighed, just selv den ej kan være.//Thi når en kandestøber til/borgmesters embed’ løber/er som når statsmand blive vil/i hast en kandestøber.
powerful a writing method of moralizing” than the comedy. However, that statement should be interpreted in the context of the influential pietistic movement during the reign of Christian VI. In Just Justesens Betenkning over comeodier (1723), Holberg is less concerned with morality, and more interested in comedy’s ability for sharp observations and the understanding of what makes people laugh in the theater. The main point is that Holberg shows the potential of the new public sphere while stressing its dangers.

POLITICAL FICTION FROM HAMBURG

At the start of the eighteenth century, Hamburg was a remarkable northern metropolis. It had a population of 150,000, about twice the size of Copenhagen. In medieval times it had been under Danish rule, and was a city the Crone still held claim to. As historian Mary Lindeman (1990) notes:

[N]o one who visited Hamburg in the eighteenth century departed unimpressed. Even sober businessmen and worldly travelers marveled at an affluence and economic vigor still uncommon in Europe in the closing decades of the century. (Lindemann 1990, 3)

Altona, today the name of a western borough of Hamburg, was between 1640 and 1864 the southernmost city of the Danish kingdom. This aspect of connection and cultural mobility (Greenblatt 2011) was quite neglected in many earlier Holberg studies. Holm has made a convincing argument that it is necessary to understand The Tinker in the context of Hamburg in the decades preceding the play (Holm 2013, 139–205). It was a “free city”, part of the fragmented power system of the Holy Roman Empire but functioning as a state in its own right (Holm, 146). The Council, the burgomasters, and everyone referred to in the comedy, existed in Hamburg. The city was the scene for considerable conflict between the governing elites and the craftsmen who are represented in the Collegium Politicum. Furthermore, the action draws its inspiration from “the tumultuous period from 1680 to 1710 [when] Hamburg’s guilds exercised much political influence” (Lindemann 1990, 36). Holberg visited the city several times in 1708–09, during the unrest (Holm 2013, 177). To understand the social group we are talking about, we should be aware that most craftsmen in Hamburg belonged to one of three guilds, and that our hero, Herman, would have belonged to the oldest, the “Amter”, together with:

the barbers and barber-surgeons, glovers, wooden bucket makers, cooperers, bookbinders, furriers (two different Amter), lathe turners, fish salters, white-bread bakers, fishermen, goldsmiths, glaziers, knitters of coarse stockings, house carpenters, hatters, grocers, one sort of butchers, tin founders and pewterers, brass casters, candle makers, tanners, linen weavers, tinsmiths, confectioners, masons, clothiers producing Brandenburg cloth, house painters, needle makers, trimmers, harness markers, rope plaiters, tailors, shoemakers, bung and spigot makers, farriers and locksmiths,

31. “Hvad Comœdier angaaer next hit, da kand man sige, at ingen kraftigere Skrivemaade er opfunden at moralisere paa, og hvorudi Dyders og Lyders Character livagtigere kand gives.” Fra Moralske Tænkre, Forberedelse. (Holberg 1744, 16)
32. “Altona” supposedly derives from “All zu nahe” (all too near), the name of a tavern Hamburkers thought was too close to their border.
saddlers, ships’ carpenters, swordsmiths, potters, cabinetmakers or joiners, and cloth finishers. (Lindemann 1990, 36)33

We can imagine the considerable political dynamic in such a powerful entity being dissatisfied. At one point, more than two thousand people stormed the Raathaus in protest. This incident represented a power struggle for authorities in the city. In Hamburg, about three hundred men held government positions, while three thousand to four thousand were eligible. The situation was likely the same in the days of Herman (Lindemann 1990, 20), as in act II, 3 when he says:

I was thinking last night, as I lay awake, how the administration in Hamburg could best be arranged so that certain families whose members are born, as it were, to be burgomasters and councilors could be excluded from the highest positions of authority and complete freedom be introduced.

In 1708, the emperor Josef I (fearing a Danish intervention, among others) had to deploy troops in the city, and an imperial commission was established to mediate between the different factions of the Rat and the Bürgerschaft. It took four years of “wearisome negotiations to restore civic order” (Lindemann, 27–28). Underlying the power struggles in Hamburg, one could find

the Rat, the merchant-bankers, and the Chamber of Commerce all embraced the doctrine of free trade, which certainly benefited commerce and the industries that manufactured for export but also undoubtedly harmed the guilds and those who produced solely for domestic consumption. (Lindemann 1990, 36)

This conflict is first represented when Herman are in the happy state of Collegium Politicum, when the members discuss trade policies with India and Greenland and dismiss each other’s petitions for regarding “own advantage more than the welfare of the Republic”34 (II, 1).

Then, in Herman’s darkest hour, when angry sailors are knocking on his door in angry protest (which was highly realistic, because Hamburg had periods of riots due to unemployed sailors), he tells his servant to send his wife out to confront them, grotesquely claiming that she is too old to risk being raped.

Another example of the close connection to Hamburg for a Danish audience it that German was a common language in Denmark, particularly for the elite. The private correspondence between the royal family was written in German, and everybody who served in the military was given orders in German (Jespersen et al. 2010). The Great Nordic Wars were fought largely in and around territories in northern Germany, and the Danish king had in fact cooperated with some of the rioters as a way of intervening and claiming his interest in the city. Hamburg was an important part of international diplomatic and strategic power struggles that had real consequences for a large part of the population. It is not unlikely that members of the audience were veterans from the war. The play presents actual social and

33. Holberg seems to have allowed Richard Brushmakers, who would have been a member of another guild (freie Künstler) to be part of the group (the other two groups had an equally impressive list of professions as members).
34. “[…] mere til egen nytte end republikkens bedste […]”
political arguments, spiced with Holbergian dark humor and made under the constraints of the absolutist regime. Contrary to most earlier interpretations, using Hamburg as the setting was not a way of making the play politically more innocent. On the contrary, the stakes were high, and the setting gives the play a high degree of political realism. The negotiating element is obvious: it is a comedy. We laugh at something that is true; hence, we can display it.

NEGOGITIATING WITH AUTHORITY

Holberg pursued his career under three different regimes, from the vigorous Fredrik IV (1699–1730) to the pietistic Christian VI (1730–1746) to the drunk, sadomasochistic but strategic Frederik V (1746–1766). The conditions that determined how one could participate in public life changed substantially during the transition periods of both 1730 and 1746 (Maliks 2011, 15), but Fredrik IV was the personification of Danish absolutism. He had the strange ability to combine paranoid puppet mastery in the courts with being the de facto head of state, intervening in matters large and small (Lyngby, Olden-Jørgensen, and Mentz 2010, 84). He had been king for 23 years when *The Tinker* was first staged, and it was the authority of his regime that the audience at the Lille Grønnegade Theatre knew intimately. Sebastian Olden-Jørgensen writes, “Politics was de-facto abolished, and the general population had a clear understanding that all power was deposited at the King, who would administer it as he saw fit” (Lyngby, Olden-Jørgensen, and Mentz 2010, 71).

How are we to understand authority in this landscape? The regime had all three Weberian ideal types. Legally, it was based on the *King's Law* of 1665. It created a tradition of rulers with the goal of making inevitable the inheritance of the absolutist kingdom from father to son. And charismatically, it relied on the king's ability to rule being heavily displayed. As we know, the term from Max Weber's *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1922) about what "Macht bedeutet" (Weber 1922, 28) is understood and translated with a number of slightly different nuances (Uphoff 1989, Wallimann 1980). But attempting to find a “clean” sociological definition of authority might not be the most interesting task here. What sociology does provide is an understanding of how the brutality of the period influenced its mindset. As Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1996, 45) and Engelstad (Engelstad 1999, 126) have pointed out, authority, though symbolically represented, always has its roots in real physical power.

How could Holberg, himself striving to be a member of the elite, negotiate with this authority? How could he make these negotiations didactic? Here, a comparison is useful. Greenblatt (2010) elegantly shows how throughout Shakespeare's work “the ethics of authority are deeply compromised” (Greenblatt 2010, 79). In Shakespeare, “no character with a clear moral vision has a will to power, and conversely, no character with a strong desire to rule over others has an ethically adequate object” (2010, 78). In Holberg, however, authority is portrayed entirely differently. It is something with a clear purpose and based on wisdom. Still, both playwrights' works can be read as subversive. In Holberg’s case, the subversive

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35. *The Tinker* has a long and fascinating history of cultural mobility, played and translated into French, among other languages. F. J. Billeskov Jansen has written extensively on this (Billeskov Jansen 1969).

36. "Politik var i princiippet afskaffet og befolkningen i almindelighed havde ikke brug for at vide mere, end at al magt var deponeret hos kongen, og at han nok skulle tage sig af at forvalte den” (Lyngby, Olden-Jørgensen, and Mentz 2010, 71).
occurs in precisely the same spot as his strongest defense for the absolutist regime: the rhetoric of rational authority.

Shakespeare was not a significant influence on Holberg. Authority appeared different from the angle of the Elizabethan theater worker than the up-and-coming early Enlightenment professor. Nevertheless, a playwright of Holberg’s capacity and sensitivity could not neglect authority as an element, as indispensable in his fiction as in his historical and philosophical works. Therefore authority has, one could argue, an even more important role in Holberg than in Shakespeare. In the satirical play *Erasmus Montanus*, the pure strength of reason and physical force triumphs over fancy words. In *Jeppe of the Hill*, every act seems like an illustration of how it is to live under the strict authority of some outer force. Jeppe stumbles jestingly through the play, traumatized by war, cuckolded by the deacon, beaten by his wife, and a slave to brandy. In *The Journey of Niels Klim to the World Underground* (first translated 1742) every new society is described through the specter of authority, from the law and wisdom in the kingdom of Potu (Utopia) until Niels regards himself as an “under-ground Alexander.” In Holberg, we are constantly reminded that authority in the hands of an ordinary citizen is doomed to fail. Jeppe is a terrible baron, Niels a gruesome warlord. *Erasmus Montanus* is a failed scholar, and Herman a catastrophic burgermeister. The characters in Holberg who exercise real authority, however, have rational reasons for it. When Nille, again at the very opening of *Jeppe of the Hill*, explains her shrewdness, “If I let my husband rule this house for just one year, neither the baron would get his rent nor the parson his offerings...” Then, she asks rhetorically: “Should I let a man be master of the house when he’s ready to sell his furniture, wife, children, and even himself for brandy?” (1990, 1.1) In *The Tinker*, it is a member of the elite, Abrahams, who has a rational explanation for his plan: “to arrest such a man would only start an uproar among the populace and make a person of importance out of a mere fool” (III, 1).

The master trope of absolute kingdom is played out on the micro-kingdoms of family or free city. Order is restored – to Hamburg, to Jeppe’s family (with the help of the baron), and to the family of Herman, who shows how the world returns to order when a man beats his wife and she submits herself to her “dear husband” and his authority. It is only when Herman returns to rationality that he can be the master of the house. The king is both a structural metaphor and a concrete institutional power in the context of Holberg’s writings. Exercising authority, even that which is deceptive, always has a rational motivation. It is at this exact point that we, with a Greenblattian perspective, can say that the play paves the way for democratic thought. It shows a common burgher attempting to rule rationally, striving for it, and that is subversive.

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37. Holberg’s comedy *Don Ranudo de Colibrados* makes use of the character titles from *The Tempest*, but Rossel is probably correct when he writes that “it is certain that Holberg did not know any of Shakespeare’s plays” (Argetsinger 1990, 107). Most likely, Holberg knew John Dryden’s or William Davenant’s version of the play from 1670. Shakespeare’s form of drama did have an influence in Dutch-German traveling theater companies, and Holberg regarded these as competition. He used his play *Ulysses von Ithaca* as a way of making fun of them (Holm 2013, 170). One of the characteristics of Holberg is exactly to be influenced by a huge number of ideas, from Molière, to Cicero, to Pufendorf and Grotius. In this regard he is more similar to Shakespeare than influenced by him.

38. Obviously, the two lived in different periods and in different types of societies. Holberg even writes about the English “contempt for authority” in Epistle 7, which includes the authority of God: “Det synes, at den Afskye, som Engelænderne have for Eenevolds Magt udi verdslig Regiering, strekker sig og til Guds Herredom.”
Generally, Greenblatt uses sociological keywords like “force”, “authority”, and “power” quite kaleidoscopically. But it serves the purpose of making social energy into an eclectic tool for understanding both the power that lies in a work of art and a situation, like the ones created by the audience at the Lille Grønnegade Theatre, and the many other situations in which *The Tinker* was performed, in the inevitable friction between a regime and its society. All these forms of power are the opposite of pure. They have all manner of faults, contrasts, and forms of defiance. Social energy is intimately connected with rhetoric, an expression of the force that a cultural object can transmit, to its contemporary audience and throughout the times (Aristotle 3.11.2–4; Greenblatt 1988, 5–6).

Holberg does not challenge authority directly, but he puts authority into play. And the emerging political subject in this landscape is the rhetorical citizen.

**THE RHETORICAL CITIZEN**

One of the most hilarious moments in *The Tinker* occurs when the sobering reality of real power confronts Herman in the form of two respected citizens (oldermen) who quarrel about the rules for beaver hair. One man claims that

> […] it is an immoderate luxury to use such expensive hair for stockings and clothes, a practice at variance with all good order and usage, especially since there are so many expensive cloths imported from England, France and Holland that one might well be satisfied without depriving an honest man of his living.39 (V, 6)

But the other olderman shows the *cui bono* side of the argument:

> I understand well enough what they want: they want to have the business in beaver all to themselves and have beaver used for nothing but hats; […] It is idiotic to wear beaver hats: […] they are neither warm nor useful […]. On the other hand, beaver stockings and clothing are both warm and soft.40 (V, 6)

Faced with the decision-maker’s dilemma, Herman exclaims for the beaver hair people what has been many a politician’s silent prayer: “Stop, that’s enough; this man is right, too”41 (V, 3). What Herman experiences in a rough way is “citizenship as a discursive phenomenon in the sense that important civic functions take place in deliberation” (Kock and Villadsen 2012, 1). This comic display of what is often the case in actual politics, namely negotiations between parties that are both right, was displayed for an audience that in Copenhagen lived under the authority of someone who could never be wrong. The dis-

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39. “At det er en umådelig overdådighed at bruge så kostbare hår til strømper og klæder, som strider imod al god orden og skik, besynderlig siden der hidføres så mange kostbare fine klæder fra England, Frankrig og Holland at man vel derved kunne lade sig nøje uden at falde en ærlig mand i sin nærings.” (V, 3 in the Danish original)

40. “Jeg forstår nok hvad de vil, de vil have handel på kastor alene, og at man skal ikke bruge kastor til andet end til hatte;[…]. Det er tåbeligt at bære en kastors hat. [D]en hverken varmer eller nytter [...]. Kastorstrømper og -klæder derimod er både varme og bløde.” (V, 3)

41. “Hold op, det er nok, denne har jo ret også.”(V, 3)
cursive role of citizen is thus under negotiation – simply by displaying the insight that some questions are bound to remain debated. This is not only unavoidable but also legitimate because in politics most argumentation does not consider the truth of falseness but rather which actions to undertake.42 “Even while using our best tools for the sake of common understanding, we do not reach consensus . . . each of us may have played by the rules, yet there is no objective state of affairs as to the outcome of the game” (Kock 2007, 2). “Rhetorical citizen” is a modern term, part of the reinvention of rhetoric as a social science (Kock and Villadsen 2012). Nevertheless, it fits in describing how citizenship was at stake in 1722: one could be a citizen, mind one’s own business, and enjoy living under the laws of the land. However, to be a rhetorical citizen is to participate in debate and to have a meaning.

Holberg, for his part, would not dream of calling somebody he respected “rhetorical.” He was, on the contrary, an important part of the early Enlightenment rhetoric against rhetoric (Svensson 2016). The dismissal of rhetoric as false speech is one of his recurring themes. Holberg’s common heroes, whether the lieutenant in Erasmus Montanus, or Antonius in The Tinker, characteristically do not speak about anything about which they do not have deep knowledge (Antonius is named “Ehrlich” in the German translation of the play). The very first lines (from the first character, in the first Holberg comedy) illustrate the value of the ineloquent:

Antonius: I swear my heart is in my mouth, for I’ve got to talk to Master Herman and ask him for his daughter […] [and] This is the third start I have made, but each time I have turned back again.43
(I, 1)

When Antonius is met by the observer of the play, the servant Henrich, it is explained to him how impossible his task is (while Henrich eats a sandwich, which is another example of Holberg’s comic genius, playing with the art of conversation). Antonius needs to use “ziirlig tale” – “affected language” – one of Holberg’s code words for “pretentious gab.” When he declines on reason of being an “honest workman” without flattery, Henrich lectures him on how he should “tune up” his language, or at least should add fancy words like “Whereas” or “Inasmuch.” Antonius declines out of self-respect. In the short, transitional scene 3 (the real action, the proposal, is happening behind closed doors), Holberg shows us the futility of “affected language”: alone on stage, Henrich admits how wrong it went when he actually bought a speech from Jacob Schoolmaster to propose. He forgot the insanely unromantic and complex speech in the heat of the moment. It was a fiasco. Still, he tries to convince the audience that the speech was worth the money. This can be played as a funny attempt to persuade the audience or as a profoundly comic display of a character in self-denial. In both cases we see the ethos of rhetoric, like in Epistle 29, in which Holberg says he prefers to speak to peasants, who use simple words and never talk about anything of which they do not have a deep knowledge, or in Epistle 252, in which Holberg claims he is happy to live in a society where great oratory no longer has a place, and, in fact, the greatness of the spirit does not depend on oratory but rather the contrary. Holberg shows us the

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42. He suggests we classify them into the two Aristotelian domains of “episteme” and “praxis.”
43. “Jeg kan sværge på at mit hjerte sidder mig i min hals; thi jeg skal tale med mester Herman og begære hans datter […] Dette er den tredje gang jeg har været på vej, men er gået tilbage igen.”
futility of rhetoric at the same time as constantly illustrating its power. This is the epistemological and normative battlefield of his work.

Holberg’s rhetoric of rational rule corresponds with his view on humanity (Gilje 2005, 374). In the 1728 edition of his book on natural law, a paragraph on Thomas Hobbes is elaborated. Holberg here dismisses the Hobbesian view of “Stand Statum Lupinum” as “despicable.”44 It is against moral, natural law and fundamentally the Golden Rule found in the Books of Matthew and Luke: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. But not surprisingly, this being Holberg, his view includes an interesting paradox. Humans are social creatures, with a natural ability for rational thought. But at the same time, we are far worse than beasts, who only care about filling their stomach and copulating. Human desires cannot be tamed, and the list of desires is elaborate: opulence, ambition, infidelity, curiosity, and so on. We would be like “lions, wolves and bears” if it were not for natural law, given by God.45 One can find a great variety of perspectives on how societies should be organized in Holberg, from the wild explorations in Niels Klim to the sober discussions in his historical works in which he framed absolutism, with some credibility, as a rational progressive alternative to the feudalistic pre-1660 rule.

The Tinkers main character, Herman, is an early rhetorical citizen. He wants others to participate, as when he gives his potential son-in-law a chance to enter his political realm:

Herman: And now, if you will start in with The Political Dessert, I shall examine you every Saturday evening and see what progress you make.
Antonius: No, indeed, I will not. I am too old to go to school all over again.46
(I, 4)

When Antonius neglects to take this opportunity, Herman easily dismisses him. “Then you are not the sort to be my son-in-law. Adieu!”47 But he has tried! And as Jens Kruuse points out, there is something distinguished in the way Herman deals with his amateur council (Kruuse 1964, 63). He is – though it is an illusion – the true king of his fake realm. This is seen when he gently corrects Frantz in act 2, saying, “I perceive that you have a good head”48 and coaches Geske in her new role as the burgomaster’s wife. There is a deep sadness and honesty in this craving for influence. This craving can be played out as a despotic urge for power for power’s own sake. In his impressive work on how one can both play Holberg and research him, Holm describes Herman as an early warning of the brute populism of the early National Socialists. When Herman throws his books into the fire, the symbo-

44. “Hobbesius kalder den naturlige Stand Statum Lupinum eller Ulve-Stand, hvorudi ingen kand siges at gøre den anden uret, efterdi han synder hverken imod Lov, som ikke er given, ey heller imod Contract, som ikke er slutted, en fordervelig Mening, som kuldkaster all Moralitet, og det store Naturens Bud: nemlig; At du maa ikke giøre imod en anden det som du ikke vil skal vederfares dig selv.” This quote is from the 1734-edition. (Holberg 1741, 28)
45. “[D]ersom den Menneskelig Frihed ey var paalagt saadan en Tomme, da vilde de være verre end Lover, Ulve og Bjørne” (Holberg 1741, 30) According to Nils Gilje, there is a correspondence with Immanuel Kant’s concept of “ungesellige Geselligkeit” here. And as a prominent example of how the trope of kandestøperi has moved through the centuries, we might note that Kant himself used the term “Kannegiesserei” (Jakobsen 2013, 134).
46. Herman: Vil I nu begynde på Den politiske Nachtisch, så vil jeg eksaminere jer hver lørdag aften hvor vidt I er avanceret. Antonius: Nej, min tro vil jeg ikke! Jeg er for gammel til at gå i skole igen på ny.
47. “Ja, så er I og ikke skabt til at være min svinersøn. Adieu.”
48. “[D]u har et got Hovet [...]”
lism is obvious. I would suggest another contemporary interpretation of the play: to display Herman and his collegium as an online forum, of the sort that are dehumanized as “trolls” in Internet lingo. The underlying metaphor in most dealings with this phenomenon corresponds to those of the Hamburg elite: how should we handle this? (It is, for example, unwarranted and unwanted). But the driving force of Herman, though ridiculed, is the longing for participation and for being able to make rational decisions.

CONCLUSION: SHOWING THE INNER WORKINGS OF AUTHORITY

The subversive force of *The Tinker* is more didactic than inspiring and more revealing than revolutionary.

The one thing that seems stable in Holberg is how he consistently shows the difficulty of rational rule, the respect for those who manage it, and the warning against the consequences of power in combination with stupidity and inexperience. The struggle for rationality was being fought in language, and it is difficult to find a work by Holberg that does not comment on how people communicate. *The Tinker* is part of the Enlightenment philosopher’s showdown with the rhetoric of the eighteenth century, an anti-Ciceronian reaction. That is the most important didactic element. If people are to participate, they need to do so in a rational manner. They need to be aware of the dangers of rhetoric.

Authority, despite how well we can document its means, is difficult to situate exactly. *The Tinker* shines light on the mystique of authority. The play displays some of its inner workings. That, we must conclude, is the opposite of elitist. Authority in the early Enlightenment was strategically displayed by the king and the elite. Holberg’s answer was to display the structures of this society, thus formulating the social energies that were later to transform into real political change.

LITERATURE


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