

Levels of presence in the drama text: Between close and distant reading¹

Ulla Kallenbach¹  | Anna Lawaetz² 

¹University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway

²The Royal Danish Library, Copenhagen, Denmark

Correspondence

Ulla Kallenbach, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway.
Email: ulla.kallenbach@uib.no

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Abstract

Digital studies of drama have tended to emphasise the written text and network analyses. As theatre scholars, we have approached the field from a different perspective by focusing on levels of presence. This includes the embodied presence of not only the speaking characters, but also the non-speaking characters and the imagined characters mentioned by characters present on stage. This in turn includes another embodied presence, namely that of the audience, which actively engages with the text in performance and gives presence to these imagined characters. We also emphasise the implicit performance, the spatiality of the play and the maintenance of the temporal dramaturgical structure. The study is based on the 37 plays of the Danish-Norwegian playwright Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754), published during the period 1723–1754. Holberg's comedies were heavily influenced by Italian *commedia dell'arte* and stock characters, or masks, were central to his plays. In this article, we discuss the question of how we can analyse levels of presence in drama texts via digital drama analysis, both from a historical and dramaturgical point of view. Our article points to a number of potentials as well as shortcomings of digital drama analysis and to the necessary synergy of close and distant reading.

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KEYWORDS

characters, digital drama analysis, digital humanities, dramaturgy, Ludvig Holberg, presence

1 | INTRODUCTION

Digital archives, digital tools and digital performances have become increasingly important in the research and teaching of performing arts and drama.

Drama analysis has traditionally been a hermeneutical endeavour, often plot-oriented, stemming from Aristotelian poetics, with a structuralist tendency rooted in, for example, the constructivist actantial model developed by Algirdas Julien Greimas (1917–1992) or the pyramid model of Gustav Freytag (1816–1895) (see Freytag, 1863; Greimas, 1987). The study of drama also often includes a historical contextualisation, where not only the cultural circumstances but also the theatrical practices, conditions and conventions of performance are analysed.

What possibilities are opened up by digital methods, and how might distant, digital analysis integrate with traditional, hermeneutical, close analysis?

This article takes its point of departure in a pilot project, initiated in 2020, entitled *Danish Theatre Archives in the Age of Digitalization in Research and in Education*, instigated and convened by Annelis Kuhlmann, Aarhus University. The project aimed to test the use of digital analysis (using Rstudio) on materials related to Danish theatre history, taking as a case study the comedies of Danish-Norwegian playwright Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754).² Not only did Holberg introduce professional Danish-language drama to the stage in 1722, but his comedies continue to fill a key position in the Danish and Norwegian canon of drama to this very day. In this article, we will present a selection of results from our analyses of the theatricality of Holberg's plays. The article will focus on the principal problems faced when working with digital data and methods in drama analysis. The work is still in progress, and our ongoing studies will lead to a full comparative digital study of Holberg's comedies.

This article poses the questions: How can we analyse levels of presence in drama texts in computational analysis? How can we integrate the theatrical potential into the digital analysis of drama?

Specifically, we wish to discuss how to account for the embodied presence of the characters, including the mute characters, and the involvement and perception of the audience.

The overall ambition of our project is to offer a methodological foundation for the analysis of single drama texts and large corpora of plays alike, which is not only applicable in a scholarly context but also in dramaturgical, theatrical practice. In this article, we will be focusing specifically on the aspect of *character*: more precisely, stock character, which is a key trait in Holberg's comedies and, more generally, in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century comedies by, for example, Jean-Baptiste Molière (1622–1673), Pierre de Marivaux (1688–1763) and Carlo Goldoni (1707–1793).

We will explore how computational analysis can help us to understand narrative structures from a dramaturgical point of view that includes seen, unseen and also the imaginary presence of characters who only 'appear' through the speech of on-stage characters. We accordingly make a distinction between character, role and mask, to account for variations of performative presence, and will propose a distinction between physical/verbal, physical/mute and imaginary presence.³

2 | THE DRAMA AS TEXT: THE BODY IN THE TEXT

As dramaturgically-minded readers of drama, we focus on the physical bodies performing in the text, as well as the text in performance.

Close analysis of drama focuses on the hermeneutical, qualitative interpretation of meanings of the parts and wholes of one or more texts, whereas distant reading, according to Franco Moretti, 'is a condition of knowledge: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems' (Moretti, 2000, 55). Distant analysis offers a quantitative, statistical perspective, which may reveal or visualise hitherto undiscovered patterns, also across large corpora of plays.

We take our point of departure in the contention that playwrighting aims at performance, including an implied spatial, material context and an embodied presence of actors, conditioned by specific, historical performance practices (Kallenbach & Kuhlmann, 2018), and that playwrighting is aimed at a group of implicit, equally present spectators, who react with their bodies and minds during the performance (Kallenbach, 2016, 2018). We thus follow theatre scholar Josette Féral's definition of theatricality as:

the result of a perceptual dynamics linking the onlooker with someone or something that is looked at. This relationship can be initiated either by the actor who declares his intention to act, or by the spectator who, of his own initiative, transforms the other into a spectacular object. By watching, the spectator creates an 'other' space, no longer subject to the laws of the quotidian, and in this space he inscribes what he observes, perceiving it as belonging to a space where he has no place except as external observer. Without this gaze, indispensable for the emergence of theatricality and for its recognition as such, the other would share the spectator's space and remain part of his daily reality.

(Féral, 2002, 105)

Dramaturgical analysis typically investigates overall structures and ruptures, and it is specifically attentive to the temporality of the play in performance, including scene-by-scene development.

Furthermore, the dramaturgical strategy of close reading involves an attentiveness to the development of the composition of the play, where multiple 'instruments' (voice, costume, movement, colour, scenography, interaction with the audience, etc.) may be simultaneously involved in different constellations.

As theatre scholars Jacqueline Martin and Willmar Sauter have argued, theatrical communication involves three basic, simultaneous levels of action—sensory, artistic and fictional—which in turn communicate with the spectators' perceptive reactions. This explains how, when watching a play in performance, we are able to perceive the body of the actor, the artistic skill and the fictional identification at one and the same time (Martin & Sauter, 1995, 78–92).

In our dramaturgical perspective on character, we make a basic distinction between:

- *character*: refers to the particular, named individual fictional character and his/her personal traits, behaviour, etc.
- *role*: refers to the dramaturgical function of character in the play in constellation with other characters; for example, as protagonist/antagonist. The role can also be dramaturgically representational; for example, in terms of gender and social status.
- *mask*: the concept of the mask also refers to the dramaturgical function of character, but refers specifically to the conventions of theatrical practice. Deriving from the Italian *commedia dell'arte* with roots reaching back to the ancient Greek and Roman comedies, a mask, also called 'stock character', consists of a set of theatrical conventions, which includes a certain embodied behaviour, voice, costume, etc.

We are thus mindful of the distinction made by performance studies scholar Diana Taylor between the *archive* of written text and the performative *repertoire* of modes of embodied memory (Taylor, 2003). In the context of theatre arts, such embodied memory may, for example, be transmitted from actor to actor as part of the actors' training, or from spectator to spectator in terms of the conventions of theatrical practice and spectatorship.

We are, furthermore, also particularly attentive to how characters are present to the spectators in performance. We will accordingly be making a distinction between three levels of presence:

- *physical*: denoting the presence of the body of the actor on stage. Physical presence may, or may not, be gleaned from stage directions or implicitly from the dialogue. Characters might be present on stage as listeners or eavesdroppers, they might be hiding from or spying on the other characters while visible to the audience, or they might be otherwise physically active on stage.
- *verbal*: denoting the words spoken by the actors, as indicated in the drama text. Verbal presence can include words spoken by actors on-stage, or by unseen actors off-stage.
- *imagined*: denoting what occurs in performance by means of the interplay between actors and audience. Characters might be physically absent from the stage, but gain presence via direct or indirect references made by characters physically or verbally present.

We clarify these distinctions in more detail in our analyses and methodological discussion.

3 | THE STUDY OF DRAMA IN THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES

The study of drama has attracted a great deal of interest in the Digital Humanities from scholars working in this field, including medieval studies, computational linguistics and literary studies; Shakespearean studies, and studies of other corpora in English, have been largely dominant. However, as Miguel Varela has pointed out, the results from these studies are relatively unknown more broadly in the field of theatre research (Varela, 2021, 19). It is our objective to contribute to bridging the gap between theatre studies and the Digital Humanities.

In the 1970s, Romanian mathematician and computational linguist Solomon Marcus had already published his first early work on the relationship between mathematical analysis and the study of drama. In 1977, he edited a special issue of *Poetics* entitled 'The Formal Study of Drama' (Marcus, 1977) in which he makes a distinction between present and non-present characters on-stage (Marcus, 1977, 204). This special issue was followed up in 1984 with a study involving the complexity of the play and performative aspect of the text (Marcus, 1984).

The current popularity of drama in the Digital Humanities might be understood via Schmidt, Burghardt, Dennerlein and Wolff when reporting on their development of the analytical tool *Katharsis*:

In addition to the actual dialogs, dramatic texts contain other structural elements that can be easily quantified, such as the characters of the play as well as an explicit act and scene structure. Keeping these features in mind, it is hardly surprising that we find a number of recent studies dedicated to the quantitative analysis of drama.

(Schmidt et al., 2019, 1)

The most prominent literary scholars to have conducted digital analyses of plays are Franco Moretti, who introduced the concept of close and distant reading, Peer Trilcke, Frank Fisher and Mark Algee-Hewitt (Algee-Hewitt, 2017; Moretti, 2005, 2011; Trilcke et al., 2015). Through network analyses, they have tried to quantify the narrative in a play by measuring the presence of characters on-stage based on a quantified analysis of spoken lines. However, as theatre scholar Clarisse Bardiot has pointed out, the analyses often 'remain at the stage of observation and description' (Bardiot, 2021, 139) and omit the temporality in the analysis. Also omitted is the inclusion and interaction of mute characters, as a result of the 'speaking-in-turn principle', which means that a relationship between two characters is counted when one character speaks immediately after another character (see e.g. Ladegaard & Kristensen-McLachlan, 2021, 5). In their article on Shakespeare's tragedies, Lee and Lee point to the problem concerning

'misattributed interactions' in the digital network analysis; for example, when too many characters respond or are spoken to, or when mute characters are eavesdropping or spying on speaking characters. However, they find that such misattributed interactions only occur in 2.56% of instances in their dataset (Lee & Lee, 2017, 10). Other subsequent studies of early modern tragedies have, in accordance with the findings of Lee and Lee, continued the focus on speaking characters (as in the study by Ladegaard & Kristensen-McLachlan, 2021).

Nevertheless, we insist that mute, on-stage characters are of equal importance as speaking characters, and that the neglect of mute characters has largely been due to the genre and period of the datasets used by earlier studies. Comedies, in particular, feature eavesdropping, spying and mime as prominent dramaturgical devices, and several plays feature mute or non-speaking main or major characters. Such characters were also popular in nineteenth-century melodrama; prominent examples include August Strindberg's *Den starkare* (1888; *The Stronger*), Bertolt Brecht's *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* (1939; *Mother Courage and Her Children*) and François Auber's opera *La muette de Portici* (1828; *The Mute Young Woman of Portici*).

Another challenge in existing network analyses, from a dramaturgical perspective, is the temporality of the plot. In order to maintain dramatic structure in a play, Lee and Lee (2017) divided their network analysis of Shakespeare's tragedies into acts and scenes, which is more helpful from a dramaturgical point of view than the distant reading of an entire play in one visualisation. The IntNetViz project developed by Aris Xanthos, Isaac Pante, Yannick Rochat and Martin Grandjean (2016)⁴ focuses on maintaining the temporal evolution of a character in network analysis, having developed a code that offers a visualisation of how interaction among individual characters in a play develops over time, including the presence of non-speaking characters. By clicking on a timeline, the network analysis is generated. This approach sheds light on the understanding of dynamics in a play, but is hard to use as a comparative tool. The ambition is nevertheless dramaturgical, and the authors of the IntNetViz study highlight its potential applicability for playwrights during their creative process (Xanthos et al., 2016, 5).

Another approach to digital drama analysis is by means of the measurement of speech length, a method employed by Hartmut Ilseman. In his study of Shakespeare's plays, he demonstrates how the opening of the Globe Theatre and the use of the spatial dimension of the stage changed the style from rhetorical speech to dramatic action (Ilseman, 2008, 397). This leads to dramatic profiling of plays and genre (pp. 400 ff.).

Previous studies of drama texts have attempted to visualise levels of presence, theatricality and spatial relations by means of, for example, network analyses; our mode of analysis, however, differs methodologically in comparison to the existing digital analyses of plays. Some studies have included mute characters, some include the temporal development of the plot, but so far there has been no inclusion of the imagined presence of characters. Our project is aimed specifically at theatrical, scenic practices and conventions also including the embodied presence of actors as well as spectators. One of the major challenges when working with drama is, simply put, that the computer lacks the spatial, performative imagination that is crucial to the dramaturgical reader.

In a pre-digital, analogue, quantitative study, Egil Törnqvist pointed out that Holberg's comedies have rarely been analysed from a structural point of view (Törnqvist, 2004, 340). Accordingly, his contribution to the anthology *Holberg i Norden*, 'Holbergska dramastrukturer' (Holberg in the North, 'Holbergian Drama Structures'), analyses *Den Vægelsindede* (1723, rev. 1731; *The Waverer*) and *Jeppe på Bjerget* (1722; *Jeppe of the Hill*), to demonstrate the value of such a structural analysis with the objective of considering these texts as potentials for performance (p. 341).

While Holberg apparently adheres to the contemporary ideals of unity of time and place, Törnqvist demonstrates that the unity of action is significantly looser—we might even call it unruly. The sequence of the scenes is not always logical, nor is the divisions of scenes and acts (Törnqvist, 2004, 344–345). Instead, Törnqvist focuses on what he calls 'configurations' of characters, which he presents in charts that allow us to see the frequency of characters appearing on stage and their constellations with other characters. From these charts, it is clear that the protagonist is not necessarily the most frequently or dominantly present character. Törnqvist thus points at the discrepancy between the two main characters of the plays, the almost omnipresent Jeppe versus the largely absent Lucretia the Waverer, but who is mentioned repeatedly throughout the play and thus gains what we would call imagined presence.

According to Törnqvist, the configuration charts allow us to 'focus on a single character and follow him/her through the drama' or to glean 'when it comes to minor characters, what function does he/she have in the drama?' (Törnqvist, 2004, 352–353). The configuration charts consequently give an indication of the function and the development of characters.

4 | LUDVIG HOLBERG'S COMEDIES

As stated above, our interest has been in exploring how we could develop analytical approaches that take into account the theatrical, performative and participatory strategies embedded in the texts. Would such an objective be possible within the field of Digital Humanities, applied to plays from the early Enlightenment period in Danish culture?

The dataset we have worked with in our pilot project is the corpus of 37 comedies written by the Danish-Norwegian playwright, professor of history, essayist, novelist, satirist and baron, Ludvig Holberg.⁵ Holberg drew particular inspiration from the Italian *commedia dell'arte* mask characters, physical and satirical comedy (for example, Jean-Baptiste Molière), which he tailored to the Danish stage.

The history of Holberg's comedies falls into two parts. His first play, *Den politiske Kandestøber* (The Political Tinker), was performed on 25 September 1722; it was the first public, professional and commercial staging of a play written and performed in the Danish language at the newly opened Lille Grønnegade Theatre in Copenhagen. The majority of the comedies were written during a remarkably short period, 1722–1728, during what Holberg himself called his 'poetic raptus'. His first volume of plays was published as early as 1723, under the pseudonym of Hans Mikkelsen.

In 1728, Lille Grønnegade Theatre closed for good due to poor economy and the great Copenhagen fire, and then the pietist King Christian VI (1699–1747) banned theatre performances altogether, a prohibition that lasted until 1747. After an intermission of 14 years, Holberg's final seven comedies were written between 1745 and 1754 for performance at the theatre that would go on to become the the Royal Danish Theatre (Det Kongelige Teater), which opened in 1748 and was initially known as the Danish Comedy House (Det danske Komediehus).

Although strongly influenced by and influential himself in the eighteenth-century European cosmopolitan, cultural landscape (Rossel, 1994), today Holberg is relatively unknown internationally, although quite a few of his comedies have been translated into English and French and more (Holberg, 2003, 2020; Holberg et al., 1955; Holberg et al., 2003). Holberg's comedies are considered part of the Danish and Norwegian cultural and educational canon and many theatre-goers will have encountered his works in performance as Holberg is often performed as 'the classical play' in Danish and Norwegian repertoires.

Holberg wrote his plays in the tradition of French classicist dramaturgy, meaning that he—mostly—adhered to the rules of unity of action, time and place. That is, the play presents a single plot, which occurs during a limited time span in a single location. Holberg also follows the so-called French tradition of starting a new scene every time the constellation of characters changes. Holberg's comedies are typically 'character comedies', which magnify unflattering aspects of human nature; this in turn is mirrored through a satirical analysis of society's faults.

4.1 | Holberg's masks

One of the most defining traits in Holberg's plays is his adaptation and frequent deployment of masked stock characters from the Italian *commedia dell'arte*. These stock characters are also integral to the comedies of, for example, Molière and Carlo Goldoni; in similar vein, Holberg's stock characters are no longer literally masked, but carry a set of recognisable traits and functions—scenic behaviour, gesture, voice and costume—generating a distinct tempo/rhythm of scenic presence, which also includes particular ways of interacting with the audience.

Given the central position of these *commedia dell'arte* stock characters in Holberg's comedies, we have paid particular attention to ways of exploring their presence, physicality or embodiedness in the data.

Holberg's six most consistent masks, organised in pairs with a male and a female role, are:

- *Gli innamorati*, the lovers—typically named Leander and Leonora.
- *I vecchi*, the parents—typically named Jeronimus and Magdelone, often the parents of Leander; historically, Magdelone has occasionally been performed by a male actor.
- And *gli zanni*, the servants—typically named Henrik (an Arlecchino-type character) and Pernille; both are clever and cunning characters.

Additionally, Leonora's father, named Leonard, would often feature, as would another *zanni*, Arv, a dullard. The names of these masks have been integral to Danish drama to the degree that they were used when translating foreign *commedia dell'arte*-inspired drama into Danish (see e.g. Holm, 2018, 205–206; Nielsen, 1984). Henrik became a Danish stock character featured in translations such as Carlo Goldoni's *Il servitore di due padroni* (1746; *The Servant of Two Masters*), which became *Henric som tjener to herrer* (Henrik Who Serves Two Masters) in Jens Windtmølle's translation performed at the Royal Danish Theatre in 1761 (Goldoni & Windtmølle, 1761; see also Holm, 2018, 205), and he is also present in Johan Ludvig Heiberg's *Kong Salomon og Jørgen Hattemager* (1825; King Solomon and George the Hatmaker) (Heiberg, 1825).

An actor would typically play one particular type of role or mask throughout his/her career, and playwrights, in consequence, would often write with particular actors in mind. This is well known from, for example, Shakespeare's plays, in which types of characters develop with the troupe members and their ages.

5 | METHODOLOGY AND CORPUS: CLOSE AND DISTANT CHALLENGES

5.1 | Corpus, data

The entire collection of Holberg's writings was originally digitized and published online at www.holbergsskrifter.dk by the Society for Danish Language and Literature in collaboration with the University of Bergen and the Royal Danish Library, a collaboration initiated in 2009. This digital edition was the first new version of Holberg's collected works since Carl S. Petersen's 18-volume *Ludvig Holbergs Samlede Skrifter* (Copenhagen, 1913–1963). The website is abundant in the sense that it not only covers the plays in various versions, but also Holberg's entire production of written works and selected writings about him. Furthermore, the database includes a Holberg dictionary.⁶ The online version is based on Holberg's first editions, which can be seen in accompanying facsimiles. Holberg's writings, which include the plays, philosophical essays, a utopian novel, autobiography and historical biographies, are published in the original spelling and in a modern spelling, along with introductions, critical comments and notes.

In our pilot project, we have worked exclusively with the 37 comedies in modern spelling. The decision to use the modern editions of the comedies was taken in order to make best use of the data, since the original spelling—is often the case with older drama (cf. Shakespeare)—is inconsistent; in Holberg's case, it is even somewhat anarchic. This points to the fact that Danish drama was at the time in embryo and undergoing swift development. This anarchic tendency would continue to haunt our experiments, as will be evident below. As visualised in [Figure 1](#) (see p. 408), the length of the plays differs from fewer than 2,500 to more than 20,000 words in total. A digital count of the number of characters in Holberg's plays amounts to a total of 668.⁷

The comedies are coded in TEI (Text Encoding Initiative) mark-up indicating, for example, speakers (<speaker>Henrik</speaker>), stage directions (noting characters present on-stage, for example, as in <stage>Arv, Henrik</stage>), paragraphs of words spoken (marked <p>), and so on.

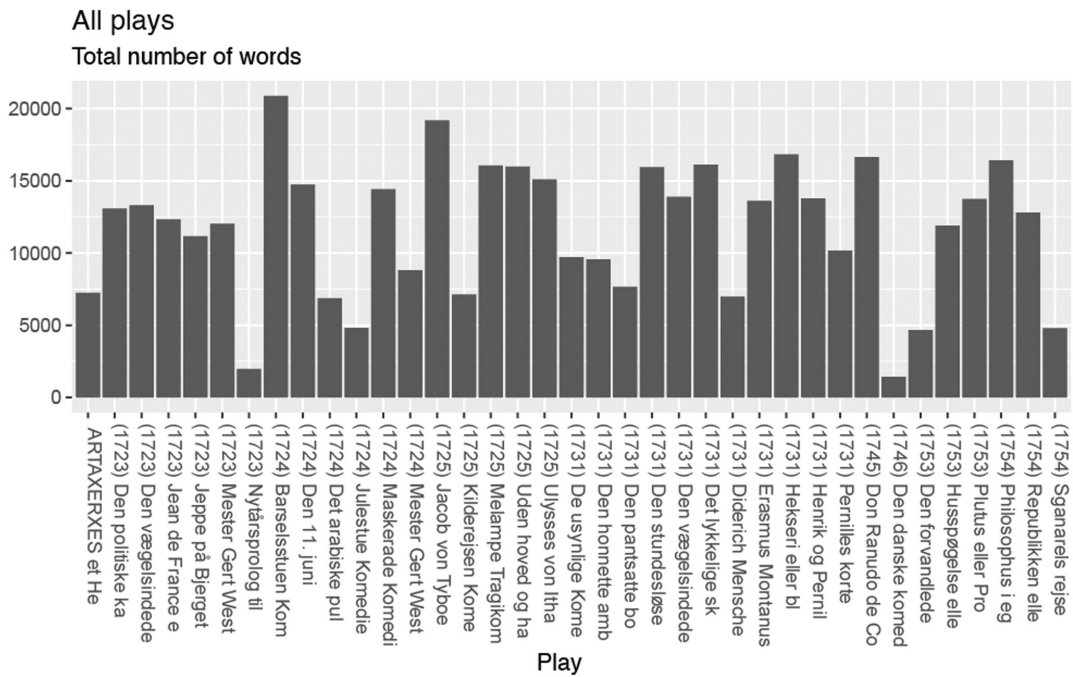


FIGURE 1 All plays, number of words spoken.

5.2 | Cleaning data: Who is present?

A precondition for working statistically with drama is that the data is coded consistently in order to ensure valid results. The comedies and the accompanying mark-up of Holberg's comedies posed several challenges. At the early stage of cleaning the data, it had already become apparent that dialogue between computational and manual analysis was a necessity. Some problems concerning the presence of characters were immediately obvious, and could quickly be solved digitally. Others required close readings of each play.

Problems of the first kind surfaced when we in an early code aimed to detect all speaking characters. Not all monologues and dialogues had an indicated speaker, and thus returned an N/A indication. Often, but not always, this would occur if a speech was interrupted by a stage direction. In one case, in the play *11 Juni* (1723; *The Eleventh of June*), one speaker was indicated as 'Indenfor' (lit. 'Inside'), which of course designated from *where*, in this case, the multiple characters were speaking, rather than *who* was speaking. This posed a problem when we then attempted to count the words spoken per character, since the amount of dialogue with no indicated speaker could be substantial. The results would thus not give a correct indication of the presence of the speaking character. This was a problem that needed to be solved manually in the TEI encoding.⁸

Furthermore, even in the modern spelling version, the dataset had inconsistent and flawed spellings; this meant that one character with various name spellings would be counted as various separate speakers. In *Barselstuen* (1723; *The Lying-in Room*), one character, a woman who has just given birth, has five different spellings of her name (Barselskvinde, Barselsquinde, Barselskvinden, Barselsqvinde, Barselskonen). As a problem particular to drama analysis, the TEI mark-up would not make a separate distinction between character and stage direction; for example, <Leander> and <Leander på knæ> [Leander on his knees] in *Mascarade* (1724; *Masquerade*). Again, these were problems that could be solved fairly easily, either by correcting the variations in the data manually or by merging them in the script.

However, the data posed several other problems that required close readings of the plays. For example, Holberg's inconsistency when presenting characters with either definite or indefinite articles ('a girl', 'the girl', '1.

girl', or just 'girl'), or with variations of the characters' social titles (wife, madame, dame), required a manual reading of the play to ascertain whether this was in fact one and the same character.

Not least, there were extra-complicated cases that necessitated a close reading in order to conduct the distant, digital reading. For example, in *Den pantsatte bondedreng* (1731; The Pawned Peasant Boy), the main character, the peasant boy Per Nielsen, unwittingly poses as a noble Count. As a speaker, he is accordingly called both Bondedrengen (the Peasant Boy), Paltsgreven (the Palatinate Count), Paltsgreve (Palatinate Count), Per Nielsen, Bonden (the Peasant). The latter, to add to the confusion, is also occasionally a reference to the boy's father. Conversely, in the one-acter *Sganarels rejse til det filosofiske land* (1754; Sganarel's Journey to the Land of Philosophy), the list of characters reads:

Sganarel
Leander
Philosophi can be cast with any of the actors in the company
As can the female roles, who must be clad in the same costumes as those worn by The Three Graces
have

(Sganarel
Leander
Philosophi kan tages i flæng
I lige måde kvinderne, hvilke må være i sådan dragt som de tre gratier har.)

Here, the number of women is in practice three, while the number of *philosophi* is unclear. Furthermore, each stage direction introduces philosophers of different schools (a Heraclitic *philosophus*, a Democritic *philosophus*, or just a new *philosophus*), but in the digital TEI coding, following Holberg's printed text, <speaker>s were only indicated as 'The philosopher' in the dialogue of each scene.

Digital analysis involves a statistical necessity for merging the variations of the roles. Variations in spelling and added stage directions were obvious, but a close reading of each play was required in order to certify whether an assortment of character labels was actually referring to the same character.

We solved these issues by creating an Excel table of character (speaker) names and aliases in each play, which we identified through a manual and close reading of the text. We then created a script in Rstudio that sorted through the speakers and returned only one result per character. This would be the first of several instances where a 'manual' and a 'digital' analysis had to converge.

Without manually correcting the dataset, the results of a distant analysis will thus be incorrect.

Later on, as it became necessary to distinguish between main and minor characters, we also found that Holberg's manner of indicating these characters was inconsistent. Some plays included all the characters in an initial cast list; others, such as *Hexerie eller Blind Alarm* (1723; Witchcraft, or False Alarm), had no cast list. An early play, *Den Politiske Kandestøber* (1723; The Political Tinker), has only six named characters in the list of characters, but 42 in the text. There seems to be no apparent logic as to who made it onto the cast list and who did not, although typically the main characters—often being the masks—would be included. In order to distinguish systematically between main and other characters, we nevertheless decided to use Holberg's cast lists as an indicator.

6 | ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In our analysis of presence in Holberg's comedies, we have continually moved between close and distant reading, both on the level of the entire dramatic oeuvre and of the individual plays.

In order to render data as patterns across the plays, we have worked with the character, role and masks of stock characters; we have included social status and gender as markers to identify the role, or function, of the characters.

6.1 | Verbal presence of masks

As part of our digital enquiry into Holberg's comedies, we were particularly interested in which of the plays featured masks, or stock characters, how these were represented, and how they developed over time. This is important from a historical perspective as well as from a performative perspective, since the masks of the characters gradually became familiar, also as a referential code, to the Danish audience.

We achieved this by tracking the total number of words spoken by each character in each play, visualised in stacked column charts showing the verbal appearance of the characters in each comedy. We have produced these charts for each separate stock character (see [Figures 2 and 3](#)), measuring the percentage of words spoken by each stock character in each comedy. Dates in the dataset refer to the year of the first publication, and not the year of writing or first performance of the play. This poses a significant uncertainty as to how we can interpret the data, since plays might be published long before or after the first performance.⁹

In [Figures 2 and 3](#), it is apparent that both the Magdelone character and the Leander character peak in plays published by Holberg in 1731. This might nevertheless be due to an irregularity of naming conventions, although both characters already feature in the first publication of plays in 1723.

We have also produced charts for the characters organised by gender; [Figure 4](#), for example, which presents distribution of three pairs of male and female stock characters grouped by gender. This shows that the three male stock characters often speak more than the three female main characters; although this is not always the case: see *Julestue* (1724; The Christmas Party) and *Den Stundesløse* (1731; The Restless One), for example. Our code also allows us to visualise the relationships between characters by selecting different groups of characters. [Figure 5](#) (see p. 412) visualises male and female stock characters, including Arv and Leonard.

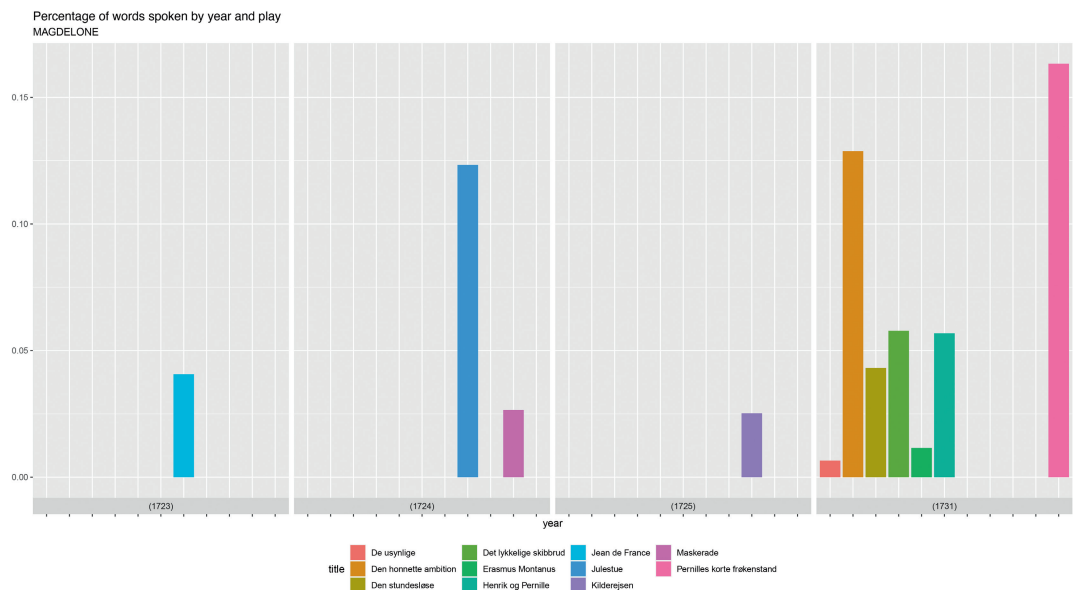


FIGURE 2 Words spoken by Magdelone, typically the mother of Leander. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

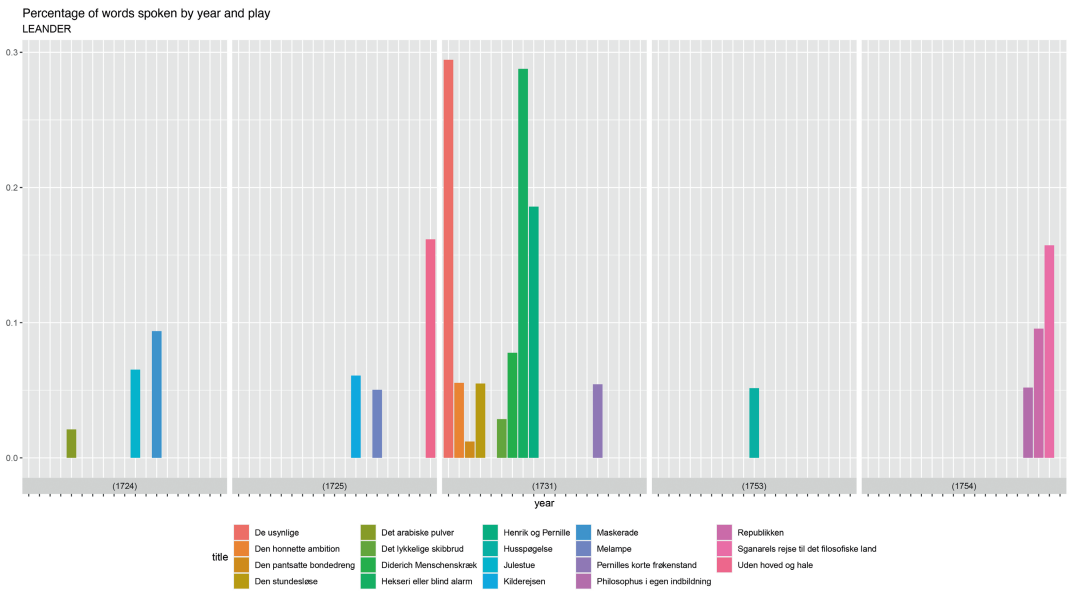


FIGURE 3 Words spoken by Leander, a young male lover. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

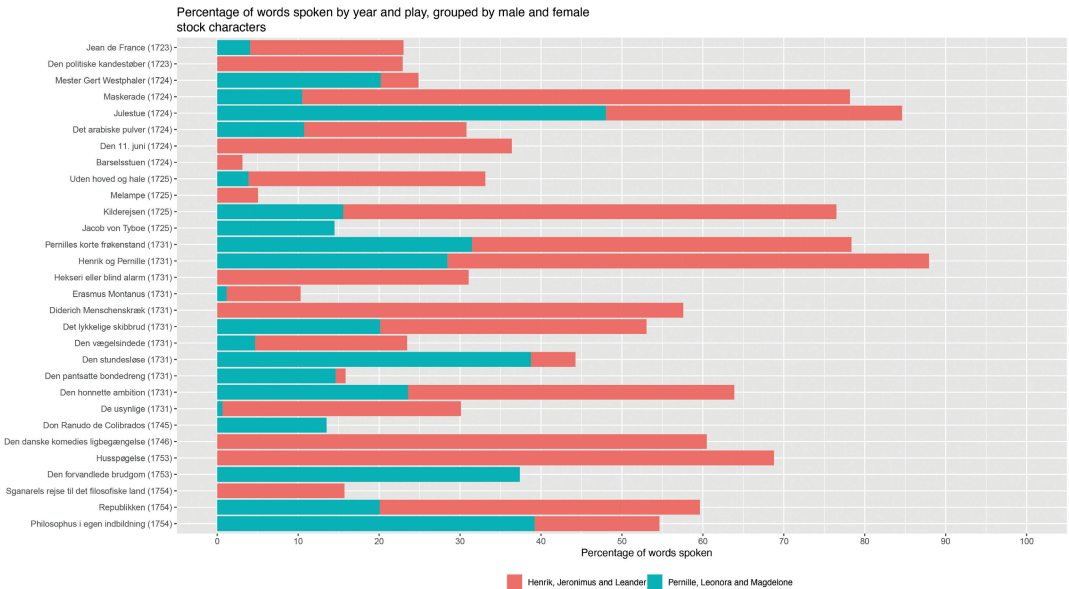


FIGURE 4 Stock characters grouped by gender. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

As Figure 4 with all six stock characters shows, the greatest concentration of plays in which these characters appear is represented by those published in 1731, suggesting that at this point Holberg had developed his *commedia dell'arte*-inspired comedy. In our output, we can see that not all characters necessarily appear together in a play, and that their appearances in the comedies are quite unevenly distributed; for example, Magdelone disappears completely after 1731, while the character of Leander appears as a prominent character in 1731 and then reappears in 1754. The reasons behind these developments can only be speculated upon,

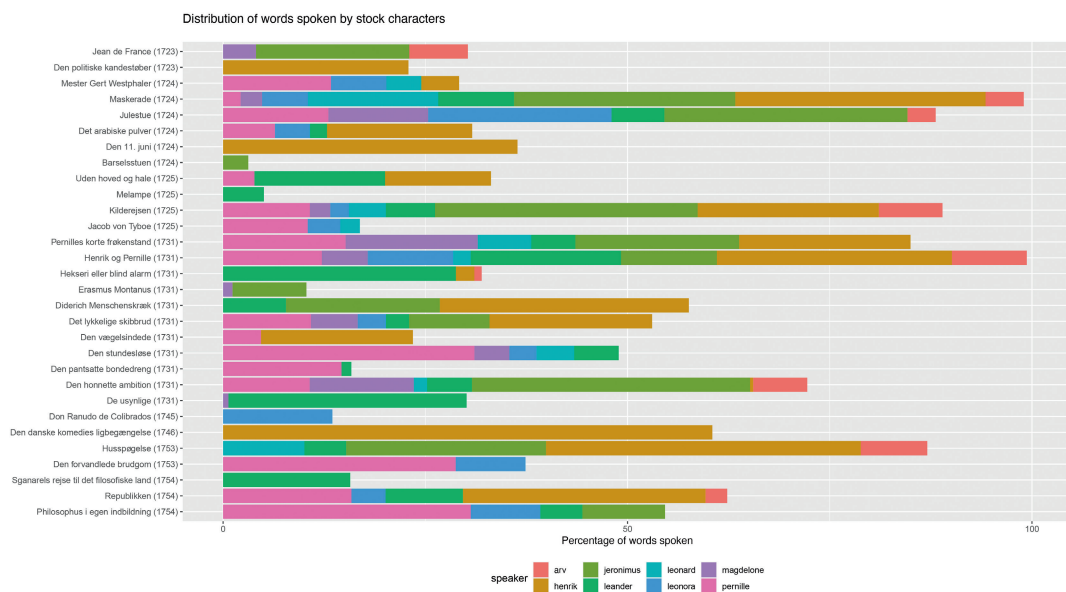


FIGURE 5 Distribution of words spoken by both male and female stock characters. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ol.12399)]

TABLE 1 Total count of words spoken by principal masks in the comedies.

Speaker	words_spoken
Henrik	42,073
Pernille	28,088
Jeronimus	26,346
Leander	22,149
Leonora	13,678
Magdelone	7,114

but might suggest the availability of suitable actors in the troupes at Lille Grønnegade and the Royal Danish Theatre.

Looking at single characters and plays, in terms of words spoken, Jeppe in *Jeppe på bjerget* (Jeppe of the Hill) is the 'largest' character with 5,634 words. Counting the total number of words overall spoken by a mask in the comedies, Henrik is by far the most verbally present (see Table 1).

However, surprisingly, Pernille is the mask with most lines (see Table 2, she also comes second to Henrik when looking at the word count as visualised in Table 1). Even when including Harlekin and Torben, two of the alter egos of the Henrik stock character, this mask does not add up to that of Pernille in terms of lines. This points to two different forms of verbal, rhythmic presence: one sustained in longer speaking patterns, and one that implies a sustained physical presence and interaction with other characters. This might emphasise the point made by Anne E. Jensen: Holberg was inspired the division of soul and body as conceived by Descartes, and he perceived the soul as being without gender. The soul has been endowed with reason, will and emotions common to all humankind. This gave rise to the idea of equality between the sexes, which is reflected in Holberg's comedies (Jensen, 1984, 70–71).

The charts allow us to explore the presence of the characters/masks in terms of words spoken, that is, the verbal presence of characters over time. They do not, however, show us the extent of their physical presence. We thus make a distinction between *verbal* and *physical* presence, and the latter will have to be analysed through

TABLE 2 Count of the principal masks and their total number of lines in all comedies; count of how many plays they appear in.

Speaker	count_speaker	count_plays
Pernille	3,634	17
Leander	2,120	19
Henrik	2,068	17
Jeronimus	1,399	13
Leonora	562	13
Magdelone	418	11

other means. This kind of presence is invisible in these charts; for example, in *Maskerade*, act III, scene 2, Henrik is silently wooing Pernille while Leander and Leonora are speaking.

6.2 | From mask to social status

However, digitally searching for stock character names and their respective word counts can also be misleading: while Holberg's use of these character types appears throughout his oeuvre, his consistency in naming them is not. Henrik, the servant, appears under the name of Torben in the first version of *Den Vægelsindede* (The Waverer), and later appears as a similar character named Harlekin (Arlecchino) in *De usynlige* (1731; The Invisible Ones) and Chilian in *Ulysses von Ithacia* (1725; Ulysses of Ithacia). Another example is the stock character Leonora, who also appears as Hyacinthe in *Diderich Menschenskræk* (1731; Diderich the Terrible). The character (E)Leonora usually appears as Leander's love interest (in *Uden hoved og hale*/Without Head or Tail, *Den forvandlede brudgom*/The Changed Bridegroom, *Den stundesløse*/The Restless One, *Det arabiske pulver*/The Arabian Powder, *Henrik og Pernille*/Henrik and Pernille, *Julestue*/The Christmas Party, *Kilderejsen*/The Journey to the Source, *Maskerade*/Masquerade, *Mester Gert Westphaler*/Gert Westphaler, *Philosophus i egen indbildning*/Philosopher in One's Mind, *Republikken*/The Republic). However, Leonora also features as the name of the mask of the mother (*Jacob von Tyboe*), Leander's sister (*Det lykkelige skibbrud*/The Happy Capsize), and as a lady's maid (*Don Ranudo*)—the mask changes, so to speak. In the latter play, which takes place in Spain, the mask of *la serva*/the soubrette is thus no longer called Pernille, but the more appropriately Spanish name of Leonora. Holberg's inconsistency in use of character names is interesting in that it points to an unstable conceptualisation of a dramatic character that he develops throughout his oeuvre.

Tracking the masks of the stock characters across the oeuvre is thus difficult, if not impossible, if based solely on tracking character names. Digital analysis allows us to track characters by their name; tracking the character by their stock character, however, would require a close reading and our manual recording of type for each character, which could then be integrated into the digital coding. Being unable fully to track Holberg's stock characters digitally poses a critical limitation to our study and highlights the necessity of combining the close and distant reading of plays.

6.3 | Social roles of characters

We instead decided to conduct a study of the characters' social roles by tracking their social status: although this required some degree of manual analysis, the data was more readily gleaned from Holberg's cast lists. We divided the characters into bourgeoisie (where we find the *vecchi* and *innamorati*), servants (the *zanni*), artisans, merchants, academics, peasantry, performers/artists, strangers, military/law enforcement, riding bailiff/proprietor, fraudster, ghost, church officials and children. The introduction of absolute monarchy in Denmark and Norway

in 1660 led to a change in the hierarchical division of society (Henningsen, 2006, 1, 303). In Holberg's day, a new form of social mobility was evolving, although not for the peasants, who were unable to climb the social ladder (Henningsen, 2006, 1, 318). It could be argued that the fraudsters, strangers, children and ghosts are not social groups, but roles with certain dramaturgical functions attached. Nevertheless, it is interesting that the peasantry are just as present as the nobility: the extremities of the social hierarchy.

Figures 6 and 7 show us, respectively, the distribution of the social status of male and female characters (subdivided by main and minor characters), as well as a count of the lines spoken, visualising both the physical and verbal presence. The charts show correspondence between the number of characters and the lines spoken. Not surprisingly, the charts show domination by the bourgeoisie and their servants, with academics and artisans

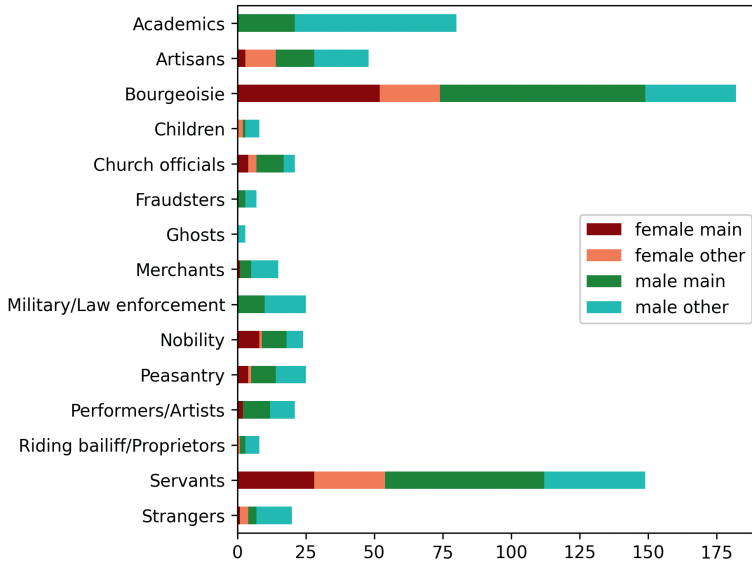


FIGURE 6 Number of characters across the 37 plays, counted by social status and gender. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ol.12999)]

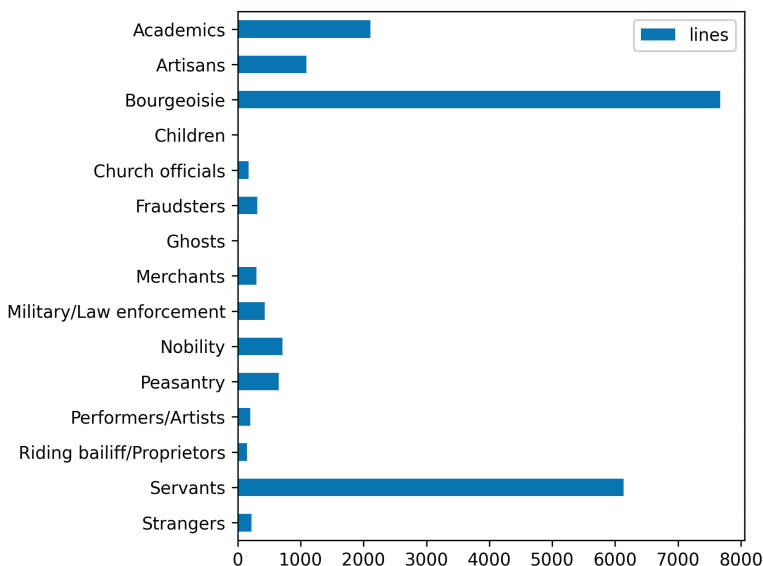


FIGURE 7 Number of lines spoken by characters across the 37 plays, subdivided by social status. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ol.12999)]

forming a second-level group of medium representation, while the other groups are fairly evenly distributed with minor representation. The distribution of social roles might mirror Holberg's actual audience (and his own academic background).

6.4 | Dramaturgical presence and absence: Two approaches

So far, we have analysed the verbal presence of individual characters, the roles of characters based on social status, and the representation of male and female masks. These analyses represent an 'intra-fictional' point of view (i.e. how characters are present to one another). However, the audience in the theatre represents an external gaze, which may perceive presence in a radically different way from the characters. Accordingly, it has been our objective to analyse verbal, physical and imagined presence from such an 'external' point of view.

In our analysis of these layers of presence, we have specifically taken on the task that Törnqvist, in the above-mentioned study, describes when noting the prevalence of mute characters:

The configuration chart can be refined if a distinction is made between speaking and mute roles by e.g. marking the latter with an o. It is striking, for example, that Erich does not have a single line in the almost five-page-long II.3, which raises the question of what he is doing in the scene at all. Similarly, one might wonder why the Secretary appears in the three-page-long III.2, where he does not utter a word. The configuration chart can also be developed by specifying the number of pages, rows and/or lines for each configuration. One then quickly discovers that the length of the configuration varies considerably, which is often a sign of varying function and significance. In this way, a distinction can be made between main configurations and bi-configurations.

(Törnqvist, 2004, 352)

We have developed three versions of configuration charts, this being a tool commonly developed manually by practising dramaturges, directors and producers, both as a tool for dramaturgical analysis and for the practical planning of rehearsals. The first tracks speaking characters present in each scene, the second tracks speaking and mute characters, and the third tracks speaking and mute characters as well as characters spoken about. This indicates three different, overlapping levels of presence: physical presence, verbal presence and implied imagined presence, the latter being instances when the character is not present on stage, but nevertheless gains imaginary presence through the verbal references made by other characters. The first two kinds of presence have previously been analysed by means of statistical modelling (Marcus, 1977; Xanthos et al., 2016); as far as we are aware, imaginary presence has not hitherto been included in this kind of plot chart.

Throughout his article, Törnqvist is concerned with the distribution of knowledge, especially the discrepancy between what the characters know versus what the spectators know:

If we compare *The Waverer* and *Jeppe of the Hill* from a structural, holistic point of view, it is easy to see that the latter drama, with its dominant protagonist and its accomplished circular composition despite the frequent changes of place, has a far firmer structure than the former, with its protagonist often absent from the stage and its various plotlines. [...] To sum up, during the short time that elapsed between the writing of *The Waverer* and of *Jeppe of the Hill*, Holberg had thoroughly learned the art of constructing an effective drama.

(Törnqvist, 2004, 356)

As we can see from the example in Figure 8 (see p. 416), the imagined presence where characters are not physically present on stage, but are spoken about and thus made part of the performance, is significant.



FIGURE 9 Number of words spoken by characters, divided by acts and scenes in *Barselstuen* (The Lying-in Room). [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

In our pilot project, we have been working on a small, but still inconsistent oeuvre, from a period where the dramatic form as such was still undergoing development—especially in the Danish context.

Drawbacks of digital analysis are the time-consuming processes of cleaning the data and of developing a new analytical method through coding. Crucially, there is also the question of the availability of TEI encoded drama, not least in small language areas such as the Danish. Moreover, the quality of the TEI encoding and its applicability to the original text poses challenges. In short, there is no way around the manual labour of standardising the digital output, as we did with the Excel sheet when merging different labels for the same character, or when manually distinguishing between main and minor characters when the corpus was inconsistent. Studies of masks/stock characters or role function required manual, close reading. This entails a marked risk of misinterpretation or mistakes in the process—for example, omitting the close analysis of the unstable stock characters, such as the variations of Leonora's character, produces an insufficient result. Our project is still a work in progress, and we have yet to make the transition from the tracking of social role functions to *commedia dell'arte* masks, which requires the synergy of close and distant reading.

Our work with digital drama analysis highlights where the computational analysis falls short. Central dramaturgical devices such as the discrepancy of knowledge between characters and spectators, characters in disguise, or mistaken identities, for example, are impossible for the computer to detect.

Digital analysis also locks binary genders; moreover, it does not take into account the discrepancies between the gender of characters and the gender of performers (such as the historical stage convention of male actors playing older women, for example in *Den Politiske Kandestøber* (The Political Tinker).

So what can be gained from digital analysis?

In our work, we have distinguished between three levels of presence: physical, verbal and imagined. Each of our different types of digitally generated output offers distinct ways of approaching drama digitally.

The digital analysis of the appearance of specific characters over the entire oeuvre—even keeping the as-yet unresolved issue of merging differently named mask characters in mind—is enlightening both for understanding Holberg's development as a playwright and the configuration of the characters and their genders, and may even indicate how Holberg's oeuvre followed the composition of the available groups of actors.

Our tracking of characters' physical/verbal presence within single plays via the column charts also offers a hitherto unavailable quantifiable overview of the characters' development and configuration over time. We can observe where the characters have the most or least to say, to whom they speak and, more generally, we gain a sense of the rhythm during the play. In a way, these charts offer us a closer digital reading of the works. Notably, this overview still needs the close reading to develop its potential fully, since non-speaking characters may still be markedly present by means of their physical visibility and performative actions.

The modified plot chart, which allows us to include all three levels of presence, seems to be particularly potent in that it implies the presence of the spectators.

Both the column charts and the plot charts demonstrate the significance of the temporal structure of drama, and hence the need to be conscious of act and scene structures, also in the digital analysis of plays. The column charts and the plot charts both indicate how the configurations of characters develop, and the plot charts also show how characters are anticipated by the audience or (in the case of Lucretia in *The Waverer*, for example) feature as main characters, even though they are not physically present on stage. The column charts and the plot charts may be tools both for practical dramaturgical work and theatre productions as more plays become available in TEI encoding. Not only will they ease the time-consuming task of developing the charts manually, but they now also offer the additional dramaturgical aspect of implied spectatorship.

As with previous studies in the field, our research has been conducted on older drama—in our case, from the eighteenth century, crafted by a writer with a very significant dramaturgical DNA. This has been determining for the development of our method of combining dramaturgical and digital analysis. If our ambition of developing a genuine method for analysing (1) three levels of presence, (2) the tracking of (stock) character, and (3) the dramaturgical, temporal structure is to be fully realised, further studies on different—and newer—datasets need to be conducted.

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ORCID

Ulla Kallenbach  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3045-6298>

Anna Lawaetz  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0305-8534>

ENDNOTES

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- ² All references to Holberg's comedies refer to the modern spelling editions available on http://holbergsskrifter.dk/holberg-public/view?docId=adm/HolbergsWritings.xml&sort=category&lang.set=dk#class_skue. Translations are our own.
- ³ The former two comparable to the explicit and implicit presence as discussed by Lee and Lee (2017).
- ⁴ <https://maladesimaginaires.github.io/intnetviz/>.
- ⁵ This corpus includes all of Holberg's comedies (including the substantial revisions of *The Waverer* and *Master Gert Westphaler*), and his posthumously published *Artaxerxes*, a translation based on Pietro Metastasio's libretto *Artaserse* (1729). For an introduction to Holberg in English, see Holm (2018).
- ⁶ The Holberg dictionary, also published online by the Society for Danish Language and Literature, is based on the five-volume Holberg dictionary published by Aage Hansen and Sv. Eegholm-Pedersen (1981–1988).
- ⁷ Not including the above-mentioned spelling label variations. When a character appears under the same name in several different comedies, they are counted as separate characters.
- ⁸ The problems above are linked to the fact that we did not ourselves make the TEI mark-up but inherited it from another project.
- ⁹ For a survey of an approximate chronology, see https://teaterleksikon.lex.dk/Ludvig_Holberg.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Ulla Kallenbach (ulla.kallenbach@uib.no), b. 1978, PhD, associate professor in Theatre Studies at the University of Bergen and president of the Association of Nordic Theatre Scholars. Publications include *The Theatre of Imagining: Imagination in the Mind—Imagination on the Stage* (Palgrave, 2018) and 'The ethics of imagining and the dramaturgy of spectatorship', *Performing Ethos: International Journal of Ethics in Theatre & Performance*, 10(1), 41–55. She is the editor, with Anna Lawaetz, of *Stage/Page/Play—Interdisciplinary Approaches to Theatre and Theatricality* (Multivers, 2016).

Anna Lawaetz (alaw@kb.dk), b. 1979, PhD, responsible for the Performing Arts Collection at the Royal Danish Library (2017–). Developer of tutorials on Digital Humanities methods and Sound Studies for DARIAH Teach. Convenor of the WG *Digital Acquisitions of Personal and Institutional Performing Arts Archives*, the International Association of Libraries and Museums of Performing Arts (SIBMAS). She is the editor, with Ulla Kallenbach, of *Stage/Page/Play—Interdisciplinary Approaches to Theatre and Theatricality* (Multivers, 2016).

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