

and the Elite

THE MASSES AND THE ELITE

The Conception of Social Inequality in 1840s Scandinavian Literature

[ABSTRACT]

The opposition between the masses and the elite is the constituting formula by which the classic texts of elite theory justified social inequality around 1900. Nowadays, contemporary theorists of social inequality interpret this opposition primarily as a panic reaction to demographic developments that occurred towards the end of the 19th century. Uncovering the same mechanisms in fiction from that period is an obvious task for literary scholars. In the present article, however, it will be argued that the 'true' contemporaries of elite theories are already manifest in texts from around 1840 – texts that are usually regarded as belonging to the Romantic period. The argument is based on Johan Ludvig Heiberg's essay 'Folk og Publicum' (1842) [The People and the Audience] and the drama 'Den indiske Cholera' (1835) [The Indian Cholera] by Henrik Wergeland. Heiberg's and Wergeland's texts will not be read as anachronistic reflections of 1900 elite theories, but rather as complex analyses of precisely those bourgeois concerns that led to the emergence of elite theories toward the end of the century.¹

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The Anachronistic Relationship between Elite Theories from around 1900 and Romantic Literature of the 1840s

Among the persistent facts and tendencies of public life, one is particularly obvious: each society, from the most primitive at the dawn of civilisation to the most advanced and powerful, consists of two classes: the ruling and the ruled. The first one is always fewer in numbers; it is in charge of all political functions, monopolises power and enjoys its privileges, whereas the second class, though stronger in numbers, is under the command and leadership of the first one. (Mosca 53)

This quotation is taken from the second chapter of Gaetano Mosca's magnum opus *Elementi di Scienza Politica* (1896), which can be regarded as the founding text of elite theory. Mosca is the first in a series of authors from around 1900

who view the opposition between the masses and the elite as an inevitable starting point for reflections on society, and who – at the eve of Europe’s fascist era – endorse Machiavellian legitimations of leadership.² According to these writers, merely to have power sufficiently justifies wielding it. Today, just over a century later, contemporary elite theorists interpret the beginnings of their field primarily as a reaction to the demographic developments that took place during the late 19th century (cf. Hartmann 13-16). A rising birth rate coupled with a concurrent drop in the mortality rate led to an unprecedented and socially unmitigated population explosion in urban areas.³ The triumph of the mass media and industrial mass production resulted in an uncertain drive towards cultural unification and massification. The beginnings of elite theory presented a way of channelling the bourgeois fear of revolution by conceptualising the masses as a necessary counterpart to bourgeois superiority, thus rendering it acceptable. To repeat Mosca’s words, where there are masses, it is one of ‘the persistent facts’ that an elite will emerge. At the same time, elite theory ignored the very phenomenon to which it owed its existence – it dismissed the novelty of massification as ‘same old, same old’. ‘Each and every society’ is characterized by the opposition of the few against the many. Thus, elite theory around 1900 could be seen as a classic case of bourgeois repression, i.e. as a defence mechanism to exclude taboo and threatening issues from conscious perception, but also to ensure identity maintenance.

How relevant is this finding for literary studies? One suggestion would be to see the sociological discovery of the elite as a time-bound phenomenon and to look for an equivalent preoccupation in contemporary literature of the 1900s. Herfried Münkler, however, points out that Mosca and Pareto at least were reacting to an Italian phenomenon, that is, to a situation in which ‘a country which had been lagging behind its northern neighbours in terms of modernization was eventually developing from an agricultural to an industrial nation’ (Münkler 77). In other words, Mosca and Pareto based their observations on the obsolete model of a stratified class society. From Münkler’s argument, it can be concluded that Mosca’s and Pareto’s ‘true’ literary contemporaries are not to be found among the authors writing around 1900, but in an earlier period, among the authors of Romanticism, to whom the idea of a stratified society was still self-evident. This is the basic thesis of this paper. By comparing a factual and a fictional text from the middle of the 19th century within the framework of classic elite theory, I do not mean to imply that there is a truth to the Italian perspective on elites which had somehow been anticipated by Scandinavian authors of the mid-19th century. Rather, I intend to use these two texts to uncover the analogies in the construction of social hierarchies and thus to highlight aspects of Romantic literature which so far have not been sufficiently studied.

Johan Ludvig Heiberg’s *Folk og Publicum*

In his 1842 paper entitled ‘Folk og Publicum’ [The people and the audience],⁴ Heiberg’s intention is to analyse the relationship of the many to their elite, or rather: he is interested in finding out about the kind of structural change that

needs to take place within the group of 'the many' in order for it to start rebelling against political and aesthetic authority. His argument is based on two conceptually opposing pairs. First, Heiberg distinguishes between the people, which he sees as an internally consistent organism comprised of different, harmonic parts, and an amorphous mass which is only defined in quantitative terms, and which he grudgingly refers to as the audience. Heiberg treats this systematic opposition as an all-encompassing notion operating in every social sphere, especially the political, religious and artistic ones. In each of these spheres, social reality is dominated by the audience that Heiberg so despises.

The second opposition is a temporal one – between the past and the present – and puts the aforementioned opposition between the people and the masses into a chronological order. In the past, the people constituted an organism, whereas today it is dissolving into an amorphous mass. Nonetheless, Heiberg stresses that this state of the 'dull masses' is not permanent, but needs to be seen as a crisis phenomenon which from a Hegelian dialectic point of view merely indicates the transition of one organizational state to another:

Idet man paa den ene Side bør indrømme, at Folkets Opløsning til et Publicum, Organismens til en Masse, eller – med nærmest Hensyn til Litteratur og Kunst – at Publicums egen Overgang fra en organisk Representation til en atomistisk, Intet repræsenterende Mængde, er, som enhver Desorganisation, et Tilbageskridt: saa bør man igjen paa den anden Side indsee, at en saadan Gjæringstilstand er en nødvendig Følge af Tidsalderens retmæssige Emancipations-Idee, og vistnok Overgang til en ny og fuldkomnere Organisation.⁵ (Heiberg 267)

The systematic and temporal aspects of Heiberg's opposition are both intimately connected to elite theory. It could be claimed that the notion of 'the people' also includes the elite, while the notion of 'the audience' does not; here, the masses face the elite in much the same way as the audience faces the stage – maintaining a critical distance. Unlike the masses, the organism of 'the people' is defined precisely by its voluntary subordination to a representative elite; if we regard them as an organism, then church, nation and theatre cannot 'undvære Autoriteten, og nødvendig maa staae i et Superioritets-Forhold til Individene, som de Subordinerede' (269) [cannot shirk authority and necessarily stand in a relationship of superiority to the individuals as their subordinates]. Heiberg elaborates on this idea with reference to literature. Although true literature is national literature, this does not imply that everyone becomes an author as seems to be the case in the mass media: 'den journalistiske Litteratur ... har emanciperet de uberettigede Individuer, og gjort Publikum til Skribent' (273 f.) [journalistic literature ... has emancipated the unauthorized individuals and turned the audience into authors]. Instead, 'the people' write in an unconscious fashion 'ved Hjælp af sine bevidste Organer, Dem, som man i egenlig Forstand kalder Digtere og Skribenter' (273) [with the help of its conscious organs known as poets and authors in the true sense of the word]. The good audience, which resembles the people rather than the masses, behaves in a purely recipient manner and respects

‘Litteraturens Autoritet og Superioritet’ (273) [literature’s authority and superiority].

Though he concedes that the *zeitgeist* champions a legitimate interest in emancipation, Heiberg does not proclaim the end of the elite in favour of the masses. He writes that this state of crisis is not to be understood as a complete change in social power structures, but merely as a single step in an evolutionary circle in which one elite is supplanted by another. Heiberg’s ultimate concern is the advent of a new elite. This is remarkable insofar as he anticipates essential ideas of elite theory as early as 1842. After all, Heiberg allays the fear induced by the masses with a social model which in 1916 will come to be named ‘elite circulation’ in Pareto’s *Trattato di Sociologia generale* (§ 2042), another classic text. Pareto uses this model to describe a process in which an elite either constantly renews itself by incorporating and integrating elements from the ruled classes, or is completely supplanted by a new elite.

However, the most remarkable aspect is the role given to theatre in Heiberg’s interpretation of elite circulation. He states that it had only taken a few years to change theatre-goers from an audience which actually represented the people into an atomised mass:

Dengang var det almindeligt, at man i Litteratur, Kunst- og Theaterverdenen ... betragtede Publikum som identisk med Folket; idetmindste betragtede man det som Folkets Repræsentant, ja erkjendte endog denne Repræsentation i ganske ubetydelige og tilfældige Masser; thi for at vælge et eneste Exempel, hvor almindeligt var det ikke i den Tids Leilighedspoesie at give de faa hundrede Mennesker, som paa en enkelt Aften vare samlede i det kjøbenhavnske Theater, Navn af det danske Folk? Og ganske naivt kunde man overlade sig til den Tanke, at man ved at behage en saadan ringe Menneskemasse i et høist indskrænket rum og i et par Timers indskrænket Tid, have behaget sin Nation.⁶ (Heiberg, ‘Folk og Publicum’ 264-265)

Of course, what Heiberg describes in this passage is a feudal representation scheme in which the elite (with the king at the top) represents the nation during public acts (at court, in the royal theatre). Thus, the elitist theatre audience served as a medium through which the people became visible to itself.

In his essay ‘Om Vaudevillen’ (1826) [On Vaudeville], Heiberg replaces this obsolete model of elitist representation with a model of average-based representation. Only if every class is represented in its audience can the theatre regain its status as a place where the nation recognizes itself. However, Heiberg maintains that this requires a particular kind of aesthetics – Vaudeville aesthetics. For example, his piece ‘Kong Salomon’

behagede ikke blot Hoffet og de høiere Cirkler, men den blev sunget paa Gadehjørnerne og i Kjelderne, og skaffede Theaterkassen en Indtægt, selv fra den Klasse, som aldrig eller sjelden besøger Comedien, medens tillige en stor Mængde dannede Mennesker, som i mange Aar havde trukket sig tilbage fra Theatret og dets Interesser, forførtes ved dette Stykke til at komme tilbage⁷ (Heiberg, ‘Om Vaudevillen’ 71)

If the theatre audience is to once more become a place where the masses recognize themselves as the people, in other words, if it wants to once more become a founding theatre,⁸ then it has to become a medium of the masses that captivates all social strata. This is Heiberg's basic idea, although he himself did not verbalize it that way. It also means a shift in the masses' potentially dangerous perspective on the formerly feudal-elitist theatre audience: If the theatre becomes a mass medium, then the masses and the elite share the same view onto the stage. This shared view forms the foundation of national unity.

These few illustrations should suffice. Johan Ludvig Heiberg's text exemplifies how the fear of the masses provoked reflection on elites as early as the mid-19th century. In the following passages, I want to highlight the same connection by analysing a fictional text. However, this fictional text requires a substantially more complex analysis: at first glance, it is not obvious that it deals with the elite phenomenon, and nor is it immediately evident that it is actually the fear of the masses which acts as the driving force behind the message of the drama's inner and outer systems of communication.

The Discourse of Freedom in Henrik Wergeland's *Den indiske Cholera*

Henrik Wergeland regarded his political and literary commitment to the cause of Norway's national independence as a contribution to a global peace movement. Whether he was writing about the July Revolution in France ('Det befriede Europa'), the Polish uprising against Tsar Nikolaj I ('Cæsar's') or the South-American struggle for independence from Spain ('Bolivar'),⁹ Wergeland always took the side of the rebels striving to throw off the yoke of foreign rule. When the melodrama *Den indiske Cholera* [The Indian Cholera] was published on 24 June 1835, he had already established himself as a poet of revolutionary freedom – and it is with this reputation in mind that this play has been received so far.

But however closely this drama follows the much praised poetry of freedom, it has not received equal praise from the perspectives of literary history. For example, in the early 1930s, Fredrik Paasche argues in the vein of genre-essentialist Hegelianism that Wergeland had failed to cast his idealist content adequately into dramatic form. His 'drama is a poem about the price of freedom, peace and love, and rather lyrical than dramatic; the characters are neglected by the poet' (Paasche 229). Paasche reproaches Wergeland for having not properly considered, but rather slung out or 'extemporeret' [extemporized] his drama, as Wergeland himself puts it.¹⁰

This verdict assumes that Wergeland actually intended to revisit the subject matter of freedom without changing it. This might be possible, of course. Nonetheless, it is impossible to verify an author's intentions *post hoc*. In the following passage, I will show that the text goes beyond merely revisiting an old topic. For if it is read in the context of Mosca's and Pareto's elite theories, it becomes clear that the staple rhetoric of liberty is actually based on a second, opposing and much better-informed discourse that has obviously been overlooked by lite-

rary historians in their effort to canonize Wergeland as a poet of freedom. Thus, we need to establish the structures that the classical reading responds to before looking for alternative or contrasting structures. To this end, it is necessary to briefly summarize the drama's plot.

This time, the story of a just struggle for national freedom is situated in a colonial context. 'I *Den indiske Cholera* er farsotten de undertryktes forbundsfælle, Indiens vaaben mot det engelske voldsherredømme' (Paasche 229) [In *Den indiske Cholera*, the pandemic is the ally of the oppressed, India's weapon against English tyranny]. On one side is the corrupt and fraudulent governor of an English factory, supported by his equally villainous administrator, John. On the other is the venerable, old and deposed Raja who fights for India's freedom and places political above personal matters. When the governor offers to release his son Sewaji from death row if the Raja tells him a particular secret, the Raja defiantly and nobly refuses to cooperate. Only if the British leave his country is he willing to reveal the secret: 'Frigiv Indiens Millioner; / og paa det yderste af Indiens Forbjerg / skal jeg tilhvidske det den sidste Britte' (Wergeland 122) [Set India's millions free; / and on the outermost Indian outcrop / shall I whisper it into the ear of the last retreating Briton]. And when the governor offers him riches and freedom to boot, Raja dismisses the legitimacy of the offer, saying that freedom is a natural right and therefore not at the disposal of one individual: 'Engang af Gud, som Kjernen i Demanten / i Livets første tindrende Øjeblik / uskillelig indlagt, den [= Friheden] ham [= Mennesket] forærtes' (123) [Once by God, as the diamond's core / in life's first quivering moment / embedded inextricably, it [= freedom] was given to him [= man]].

The secret the governor is so eager to know, concerns an immeasurable treasure allegedly kept hidden by the Raja. When an English warship arrives in order to pronounce judgement on the infidel governor, he remembers the rumor. The gold could help him compensate for his embezzlements and thus avert his punishment. He finds out about the Raja's secret, and is led to a shaft sealed by a stone. But when the shaft is opened, he finds no treasure, but cholera in the shape of a demon. The disease is released, and it does not discriminate between Indian and British bodies. The future has been determined: Cholera will spread throughout Europe, thus avenging colonial rule. But the disease will also lay waste to India. Only two lovers escape the chaos: Sami, the Raja's daughter, and Francis, the son of the English governor, who have long been in love against their fathers' will. They represent the utopian counterbalance to their parents' hatred. On an island that has been spared by the pandemic, they found a new society: 'Derfra, / som Stenen Cirkler i det stille Vand, / vi atter sprede over uddød Jord / en voxende Velsignelse' (159) [Thence / like the stone forming rings in calm water / we will once again spread out across deserted earth / a growing blessing].

Elite Circulation in *Den indiske Cholera*

If we read the text as an extension of the aforementioned freedom poetry, then this reading needs to be constructed via the opposition between the governor

and the Raja, as previously hinted at. However, one must not overlook the fact that this dichotomic reading is predicated on the characters' statements, i.e. their interpretation is the starting point for all following interpretations of this drama. In other words, the Raja and the governor stage themselves as opposing forces of good and evil, the freedom fighter and the tyrant, by drawing amply on the dichotomy of servant and master in their ripostes. For example, the governor sees all Indians as slaves and teaches his son in Hegelian dialectics: 'Frygter Herren Slaven, da / er Slaven Herre' (93) [If the master fears the slave, then / the slave is the master]. And the Raja is convinced that '[d]en siste Seir paa Jorden bliver Slavens' (102) [the last victory on earth belongs to the slave], referring of course to the victory of the colonized over the colonial power. The dichotomy derives its persuasiveness from the fact that both figures belong to the same universe of discourse, that is, they support the same semantization of the concept of freedom, albeit from opposing angles.

There is yet another character in the play who defines himself via the dichotomy of slave and master: the Malay Vakiti. Vakiti is introduced as a character maniacally lusting for Sami, the Raja's daughter. The fact that she is in love with Francis, the governor's son, does not improve his situation. When he appears on stage for the first time, Vakiti delivers the following monologue:

Her gjemme Natten mig som dyndgraa Slange,
af Gift igjennembølget, til Han [= Francis] kommer,
som vovede at gribe efter
min Elskov, Trældoms ene Trøst og Glemsel
og Ret og Ejendom og sidste Levning
af Menneskenatur. Her kræver Slaven.
Og Sami af Naturen kræver jeg,
den ene Fryd den mig skal skjænke. Thi
jeg elsker Aaget, som har gjort os lige.
Høibaaren er hun lavest; ja høibaaren
hun er ei meer, da Trældom er en Fødsel,
fra Guds forskjellig, til et værre Tilvær.
Den Liighed er en Slaves Frihed. Mens
Fribaarnes Liighed er som Trærnes
og takkede Fjeldes, regelløse Bølgers,
som Straae ved Siden af hverandre paa
en maalløs Slette Trællene jo staae.¹¹ (88-89)

At this point an opportunity presents itself for him to reach the object of his desire. The old Raja's son has been dwelling abroad for a long time, and his father is afraid that he might die before he can pass on the family secret about the Cholera Demon, which is, after all, nothing less than the Indians' last weapon against the English intruders. Therefore, the Raja is looking for a suitable husband for his daughter Sami – an heir who can be trusted with the secret. His criterion: his son-in-law ought to share his ardent passion for India's freedom. Thus, Vakiti needs

to present himself accordingly and also to dispose of the newly returned natural son in order to 'trænge ind til [... Samis] Barm' (89) [to enter [... Sami's] bosom]. When he realizes towards the end of the drama that all of his schemes have failed and that he is facing his downfall, he decides to take as many people with him as possible; and so it is he who opens the shaft and releases the demon which will wipe out Indians and Britons alike.

The negative role assigned to Vakiti makes it easy to miss the fact that this character actually undermines the straightforward opposition between the governor and the Raja, between the villainous oppressor and his noble victim. For Vakiti rivals the governor for the role of the villain while at the same time being untouchable (a Pariah) and thus sharing the Raja's role of the unfree. As an incommensurable third party (cf. Esslinger et al.), he thwarts the interpretative structure established on reciprocal grounds by the governor and the Raja. In this function he sheds an entirely new light on the Raja's freedom rhetoric. Like the Raja, Vakiti considers himself oppressed, but unlike him, he does not interpret the dichotomy of the ruling and the ruled on a national level: For him it is a social distinction, as can be seen in his speech above. He welcomes British rule because it deposes the old elite and thus makes Sami socially attainable: 'Thi / jeg elsker Aaget, som har gjort os lige' [For / I love the yoke that has made us equal]. From the point of view of the socially out of place, colonization is not construed as slavery, but rather as just another step in elite circulation – a perspective which dovetails nicely with the aforementioned elite theories. Vakiti's credo could be reformulated with the help of Mosca's sentence cited in the introduction to this paper: 'Among the persistent facts and tendencies of public life, one is the most obvious: each society [...] consists of two classes: the ruling and the ruled.' From this perspective, the legitimization of power is of no consequence. Regardless of whether it is the Raja or the governor who wields political power, everything will stay the same for Vakiti unless he himself becomes a movable part in the process of elite circulation. This becomes feasible by way of marrying Sami (89).

This interpretation is by no means applicable to the villain alone (if this were the case, its validity for the drama would be very restricted); ultimately it is an (albeit hidden) component of the national discourse of freedom – a fact borne out by Raja's major monologue in which he tells his supposed new son Vakiti about the Cholera Demon's secret. He says that 'i Indiens Old' (134) [in ancient India] a tribe of Tsengari had subjugated the Hindus. One of the Tsengari sultans surpassed all of his predecessors in his cruelty and inhumanity.¹² Guided by Brahma, the forefather of the Raja manages to outwit him and pushes him into a shaft which is then sealed with a stone. There, his spirit lives on as a cholera demon. This founding myth legitimates the family's status as India's elite while at the same time justifying social hierarchy, since the Tsengari who survived the Hindu rebellion are either still roaming the nation 'foragtet, hjemløs og forhadet' (137) [despised, homeless and hated] – a description that clearly refers to the Sinti and Romani – or they belong to the untouchables, the Pariah (137). What is even more important is that the story also indirectly reveals that, before ascending to power, the Tsengari themselves had been oppressed by the Hindus (136). In order

to ingratiate himself with the Tsengari sultan, the forefather of the Raja depicts the Tsengari victory as an act of vengeance for their oppression: ‘til Seiersjubel gjort de Usles Klage, / i Hæder hyllet tusind Aars Foragt’ (136) [into victorious cheers the mourning of the wretched has been turned, / clad in honour a thousand years of disdain]. The Raja’s struggle for freedom is therefore only a small passage of a much longer narrative which in Pareto’s terms we would need to call elite circulation. The Raja’s story of legitimization alone recounts a succession of at least four elites: Hindu, Tsengari, Hindu, British. Against the background of Vakiti’s disruption of the master-slave dichotomy, the Raja’s monologue can be read as a story not of deliverance from oppression, but of elite circulation in which the only thing that changes is the distribution of power and oppression – a reading that strips the monologue of its pathos of freedom. In Pareto’s terms, the Raja’s rhetoric of national freedom can be decoded as a derivation, while Vakiti’s function is to expose the residuum behind that derivation with regard to the drama as a whole. A short explanatory note on these terms is necessary here. Pareto uses the term *derivations* to denote norms or rationalizations used by society as a means of motivating its actions (ch. IX and X). However, these derivations are *post-hoc* constructions disguising the actual, irrational motivation. In reality, the actions of both individuals and societies are steered by *residues* which in turn follow a timeless logic of instincts (ch. VI-VIII). ‘The derivations keep changing while the residues stay the same’ (§ 1454). In Pareto’s voluntarist theory of action, political action – and here one could also include the Raja’s narrative of legitimization – is seen as a ‘mere arsenal of masquerades and metamorphoses of man’s constant will for power’ according to Kurt Lenk (32). It is precisely this timeless aspect of the will for power that comes to bear in Raja’s founding myth, where history is understood as an unchanging circle of one elite replacing another (supplemented, of course, by a derivative legitimization of one particular elite, the Hindus). Or, to cite Pareto: ‘History’ – including the story told by the Raja – ‘is a cemetery of the elites’ (§ 2053). In her highly readable overview of elite theories, Beate Kraus also notes another common feature of theories from the 1900s: ‘[T]hey do not only state the power of the elites, but also the powerlessness of the masses. The elites rule over the “dull masses” which in turn do not make any effort to push for social change’ (13-14). And indeed, the victory of the Hindu hero of liberty over the Tsengari sultan has the Hindu refugees return immediately from their hideouts in the woods: ‘Fra Skogene brød Hindufolket frem; / og Hevnen førte, Sejren fulgte dem’ (Wergeland 137) [From the woods the Hindu people sallied forth; / and revenge led them, victory followed them].

The Masses

However, when the text (through Vakiti) unmasks the Raja’s motivation as derivative, and when the governor cannot fill in as an alternative since he is obviously motivated by the residue of mere preservation of power, then why is it necessary for Vakiti to act as the villain? Why isn’t he presented as the drama’s voice of truth?

Even in this regard, the Raja's monologue offers a telling hint as it comments on the utmost evil conceivable within the elitist frame of interpretation (i.e. that of the Raja and Pareto): the masses as an independent social variable that defies regulation. The only calamity that could justify the catastrophic release of the demon is not the foreign occupation of India, nor the oppressive power of the Tsengari, nor colonialism, but the dissolution of social differences within Indian society. If it comes to this, the time to open the demon's shaft will have come,

naar sammen reen och ureen Kaste slettes
som Sæd og Ukrud hvor en Strøm brød Vei;
naar Aag Brahmin og Paria sammenbinder;
naar Sletten bærer ingen fri Mahrat;
naar sidste Rajah mistet har sin Stat;
... naar Fyrster ikke og Nationer, men
kun Trælles lige Masse gaaer igjen [...] (139)

On the one hand, this quotation demonstrates the social narrow-mindedness of the Raja's elitist idea of freedom. The social state he favours is hierarchically structured and does not rule out the bondage of the lower classes ('reen och ureen Kaste', 'Sæd og Ukrud' [pure and impure caste, seed and weed]). On the other hand, this quotation also makes it clear that the actual fear fueling the Raja's rhetoric of freedom is that of the abolition of hierarchical differences ('naar Aag Brahmin og Paria sammenbinder' [when yokes bind together Brahman and Pariah]). It shows that the elitist discourse is driven by the elite's fear of an uncontrollable force ('en Strøm' [a torrent]) which will lead to indifferent massification ('Trælles lige Masse' [the uniform masses of the servants]), which in turn knows no hierarchy ('ingen fri Mahrat', 'sidste Raja mistet har sin Stat' [no free Maratha, the last Raja has lost his kingdom]). Or, reformulated within the drama's meaning structure: The indistinctness which characterizes the masses threatens the discourse universe shared by the Raja and the governor while at the same time making it plausible. The Raja's actual enemy is not the unscrupulous Briton, since he subscribes to the logic of the supposedly eternal legitimacy of the elite – rather, it is the advocate of massification: Vakiti. Even in his first appearance on the stage he presents himself in this function. Let me once more quote a part from the abovementioned passage:

... Mens
Fribaarnes Liighed er som Trærnes
og takkede Fjeldes, regelløse Bølgers,
som Straae ved Siden af hverandre paa
en maalløs Slette Trællene jo staae.¹⁴ (88-89)

If, in analogy to Pareto, the text were to be read as an analysis of elitist structures, it would not be surprising to find the paradoxical relationship between elite theory and the masses represented here as well. Thus, Wergeland distances

himself from his earlier freedom poetry by characterizing the discourse of freedom as a derivation, which is why Vakiti is allowed to puncture the rhetoric of freedom and get away with it. However, the fact that Vakiti still remains the villain indicates that Wergeland, like the rest of the bourgeoisie towards the end of the 19th century, lives in fear of the masses. Due to this, the drama contains the very connection I identified in 1900s elite theories in the introduction to this paper; although it was the amorphous threat posed by social massification that originally gave rise to a theory of derivations, residues and elite circulation, the actual purpose of this theory is to deny that very threat.

In the context of the drama, the character who embodies this paradoxical state of affairs is Vakiti. Unlike in elite theory, the fear of the masses is not banished from the foreground in Wergeland's drama, but rather spelt out as a massive showdown in which Vakiti's vision of a leveling massification becomes reality. The cholera pandemic is more than the Indian's way of making the British pay; it is the dreaded annihilation of social stratification, the end of the elite-based dichotomy between the Raja and the governor. Throughout the drama, there are usually no more than two or three characters present on stage. However, in the third and final act, that number rises. Soldiers and sailors enter the stage. Finally, all of the characters are assembled around the Cholera Demon's shaft. And then Vakiti

[I]øfter Stenen. Døden afbilder sig i fortrukne Træk i *Vakitis* Aasyn. Hans sidste Blik søger *Gouvernørens* Idet han styrter i Dybet speile alt samme Dødstrek sig i *Gouvernørens*, og derfra i *Johns*. Nogle flye. ... Døden udbreder sig fra Ansigt til Ansigt.¹⁵ (158)

The cholera, spreading from gaze to gaze, thus makes everyone equal; it spares neither the British nor the Indians, neither the elite (the Raja and the governor) nor the ruled (Vakiti and John, the governor's administrator). The pandemic's occurrence at the end of the drama has to be interpreted as the annihilation of all (national and social) differences, while the cholera itself can be seen as the most forceful figuration of massification.

From this, it can be concluded that *Den indiske Cholera* is a text based on an internal contradiction. The rhetoric of freedom is punctured, its elite-building function exposed. However, at the same time, the drama does not abandon the motivations that justify elitism. It is precisely because of this paradox that the drama acts as a seismograph of a contemporary upheaval which would eventually lead to the elite theories that appeared around 1900. In Sigrud Weigel's words, literary texts 'relate the prelude and the aftermath of terms, theories and concepts, the conflicted genesis of cultural interpretation paradigms as well as their implementation in social interaction' (64). From this perspective, Wergeland ceases to merely act as a freedom advocate of the tardy Norwegian Romantic movement – and what becomes obvious instead is the common ground he shares with Heiberg's conservative Hegelian position. Thus, the texts of both authors can be read as analyses of bourgeois fear and hence as anachronistic analyses of elite theories from the 1900s.

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Notes

- 1 For a more comprehensive German version of this article with a different focus cf. Schieder-mair.
- 2 Other authors in this group are Gustave Le Bon, Vilfredo Pareto and Robert Michels.
- 3 Statistics on the urbanization of the big Scandinavian cities Copenhagen, Stockholm and Kristiania can be found in Glienke 14-16.
- 4 In his paper 'Phantom Publikum', Klaus Müller-Wille sets this text in its context of the aesthetic innovation of the broad public (Müller-Wille 112-113).
- 5 'If one has to admit, on the one hand, that the people's dissolving into an audience, the organism's disintegration into a mass, or – especially with regard to literature and fine arts – that the audience's transition from an organic representation to an atomic, featureless mass is a retrogressive step, as is every kind of disorganisation, then one has to concede, on the other hand, that such a volatile state inevitably follows from the legitimate idea of emancipation entertained at that time, and thus can certainly be seen as the transition to a new and more complete organization.'
- 6 'At the time, it was common practice in literature, art and theatre to equate the audience with the people; at least, it was regarded as a representative of the people, its representing function was acknowledged even in the most insignificant and random masses; after all – just to pick one single example – wasn't it common practice in contemporary occasional poetry to address a few hundred people assembled at the theatre of Copenhagen as the Danish People? And one could naively entertain the idea of having pleased one's nation by pleasing such a small crowd in such a confined location during such a short time-span.'
- 7 '[Kong Salomon] did not only please at court or in higher circles, but was also sung on street corners and in basements, and saw money being spent at the box office by members of those classes who never or rarely went to see a comedy, while at the same time winning back a large number of educated but lapsed theatre-goers.'
- 8 On 'founding theatre', cf. Vogl, and also Wechsel on Heiberg's text.
- 9 All of these poems were published in 1834 in *Digte – Anden Ring*.
- 10 Similarly Edvard Beyer: 'Intrigen er innfløkt og menneskeskildringen enkel, personene er representanter mer enn enkeltmennesker'(149) ['The scheming is intricate and the character depiction simple, they are representatives rather than individuals']. Cf. also Aage Kabell: 'Som en sildig frugt af ungdommens fantasier og ideer lader *Den indiske Cholera* meget tilbage at ønske under dramatisk synsvinkel' (59) ['Like a late fruit of juvenile fantasies and ideas, *Den indiske Cholera* leaves a lot to be desired in dramatic terms'].
- 11 'May the night conceal me here like a mud-grey snake / heaving with venom, until He [=Francis] arrives / who dares to grasp for my love, / slavery's sole comfort and oblivion /and right and property and last remainder / of human nature. Here, it's the slave demanding. / And I demand from Nature Sami, / the only delight She ought to give me. For / I love the yoke that has made us equal. / High-born she is the lowest of all; yes high-born / she is no-more, for slavery is a birth / unlike God's, to a worse existence. / This equality is freedom to a slave. While / the free-borns' equality is like that of the trees / and that of the ragged mountains, that of the unruly waves, / like stalks side by side on / an endless plane the slaves do stand.'
- 12 Among other things, he is said to enjoy anthropophagy and sexual intercourse with crocodiles.

- 13 'when together pure and impure caste are leveled out / like seed and weed where a torrent forces its way; / when yokes bind together Brahman and Pariah; / when the plane no free Maratha bears; / when the last Raja hath lost his kingdom; / ... when neither princes nor nations, but / just the uniform masses of the servants return.'
- 14 '... while / the free-borns' equality is like that of the trees / and that of the ragged mountains, that of the unruly waves, / like stalks side by side on / an endless plane the slaves do stand.'
- 15 'lifts the stone. Death is mirrored in Vakiti's distorted features. His dying eyes seek those of the governor ... Even as he tumbles down, the same morbid rictus is reflected in the governor's eyes and from there in John's. Some flee. ... Death is spreading from face to face.'