

- ²⁵ La Génèse, chap. XVIII, v. 27, *La Sainte Bible*, éd. David Martin (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1839).
- ²⁶ Hugo, *Œuvres poétiques*, p. 7629.
- ²⁷ Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*, t. I, p. 27.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, t. II, p. 700.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 702.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, t. I, p. 39.
- ³¹ Gardner Davies, *Les Tombeaux de Mallarmé* (Paris: José Corti, 1950), p. 204.
- ³² Émilie Noulet, *Vingt Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* (Geneva: Droz, Textes Littéraires Français), p. 260.
- ³³ Verlaine, *Œuvres poétiques complètes*, éd. Y.-G. Le Dantec, Édition révisée par Jacques Borel (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1962), p. 73.
- ³⁴ Banville, *Œuvres poétiques complètes*, t. VIII, p. 99.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, t. VII, p. 293.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, t. IV, p. 131.

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LOUIS BONAPARTE'S *LE VRAI HOLLANDAIS*: A TOOL OF CULTURAL PROPAGANDA

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Between 1806 and 1810, Napoleon's younger brother Louis Bonaparte (1778–1846) reigned as King of Holland, a kingdom that encompassed the northern part of the present-day Netherlands.¹ Unhappy with the Dutch commitment to the French imperial cause, Napoleon established the Kingdom of Holland by appointing his brother Louis as king on 5 June 1806. This move shocked the revolutionary Batavian Republic (a *république sœur*), which had been formed by the Netherlands in the previous decade.

Apart from political-theoretical objections to hereditary power, no historical precedent existed for the Kingdom of Holland. Following his ascension to the throne, Louis was not instantly accepted by the Batavian Republic and would go on to face issues of legitimacy throughout his entire reign.² In this article, I will focus on an instrument of cultural propaganda which Louis used to assert his authority, namely the periodical *Le Vrai Hollandais*.

Louis Bonaparte's policies cannot be separated from his family history. When Corsica declared formal secession from France in 1793, forcing the Bonapartes to flee, Louis was only fourteen years old and barely educated. Napoleon decided to raise Louis himself and train him as a soldier. Although Louis studied the *philosophes* and learned French, mathematics and geography from his brother, he never completed his education as he had to accompany Napoleon on his military campaigns in Italy.

Louis, however, realized that he was not made for the army. Like Napoleon, he thought that he was a born writer. He had adored the arts and literature since his teenage years, and aspired to become an *homme de lettres*. Napoleon also intervened in Louis's personal life, arranging his marriage with Hortense de Beauharnais, a match intended to secure the family dynasty. In short, Louis had to play many roles he never asked for.³

Consequently, as king, Louis refused to follow Emperor Napoleon's orders without question. He never had monarchical aspirations and initially disliked Holland. However, once relieved of his brother's tutelage, he established himself as a prince who tried to

please his new subjects. In his royal position, Louis saw the opportunity to develop himself and his love for the arts and literature. He hoped to become a *majesté nationale*, strengthening the national unity of his kingdom, but Louis was irritated that his brother did not treat him as a sovereign monarch. Central to Louis's reign was his determination to be accepted as a national prince, and it aggrieved him that Napoleon denied him a coronation in Amsterdam. As the Emperor told Louis, 'quant à votre couronnement, il faut attendre la paix générale'.⁴ Peace never came.

The growing animosity between the brothers notwithstanding, Louis pursued a policy heavily influenced by the Emperor's own, especially concerning cultural propaganda. During his rise to power, Napoleon was well aware of the power of images and texts. Even before the coup of 1799, he began to use paintings and engravings to win over public opinion. It was not the veneration of abstract notions such as 'Freedom', 'Nation' or 'Republic' that were at the fore, but Napoleon Bonaparte himself as a person. Napoleon sought to present himself to contemporaries (and for posterity) as an indefatigable leader, and to transform himself from a regular republican general into a perfect and victorious hero with classical Roman traits. The establishment of the Empire saw new iconography emerge in which the sovereign was at the centre. Napoleon was, to quote Annie Jourdan, 'an Emperor in search of legitimacy'.⁵

Napoleon's efforts to create a certain image inspired Louis, who had witnessed first-hand how Napoleon promoted a cult around himself, employing numerous artists to support his cause. Although, unlike the French Emperor, Louis did not have large-scale purchasing or commissioning policies, a number of initiatives provide insight into the way he used the arts to depict his kingship. Well-known examples are the establishment of the Musée Royale in Amsterdam (the predecessor of the Rijksmuseum) and of the Dutch Prix de Rome.

Propaganda in word and image

A relatively unknown but telling example of Louis's cultural policy is the journal *Le Vrai Hollandais: journal de politique, de littérature, des sciences et des beaux-arts*. That this initiative has received little attention from scholars is partly due to H. T. Colenbrander, an historian who, in 1910, characterized *Le Vrai Hollandais* as 'a news and review journal of very insignificant content'. Its short lifespan, from 1 January to 27 March 1807, during which 74 issues appeared, was another factor. Lastly, inventories of literary journals have focused exclusively on Dutch-language publications, and this journal was published in French.⁶

Although *Le Vrai Hollandais* was short-lived, it is a telling source for the study of the King's cultural-political ideas. Louis, wanting the journal to be authoritative and to be taken as an example by other Dutch periodicals, wrote to its appointed editor, the Frenchman Alexandre Deferrière, that it should serve a cultural and political purpose. The Dutch had to be enlightened and convinced that monarchical rule was in their interest. The articles in *Le Vrai Hollandais* on the fine arts, literature and philosophy would have to underscore the superiority of monarchy. The journal's contents also had to have a distinctly literary character:

Le But de ce Journal est de donner le ton, par l'exemple, à tous les journaux du Royaume. [...] Qu'il [= Deferrière] cherche à rendre son journal intéressant et insérant des morceaux de littérature, mais toujours d'un ordre supérieur, rien de médiocre ne doit y entrer. [...] Il doit donc principalement

empêcher que tout ce que le Gouv[ernemen]t peut dire ou faire de bien, soit mal interprété ou bien oublié.⁷

That its editor took the king's recommendations to heart is evident from the announcement that appeared in the journal's first issue on 1 January 1807. In it, Deferrière underlined that he wanted to dismiss the notion that the Dutch were incapable of great achievements in the arts and sciences.

Although Dutch fine arts had been held in lower esteem since the mid-eighteenth century, *Le Vrai Hollandais* aimed to acquaint foreigners with cultural achievements in the Kingdom of Holland. One way of doing this was to review (in French) Dutch-language books. Conversely, the Dutch could benefit from being better informed about what was going on abroad by reviewing foreign literary, artistic and scientific publications, among other things.⁸ In short, the periodical had to emphasize the uniqueness of the Dutch (hence the name *Le Vrai Hollandais*) on the one hand, and embed Dutch culture into a broader European framework on the other.

Louis's propagandistic goal was apparent mainly in his instruction that contributing authors had to write about the Dutch government—particularly about the monarchical form of government—in a moderately positive manner. But not too exuberantly, the king urged Deferrière, because the readers themselves had to subtly realize that the king's policy was the best. As Louis wished, the journal served both implicitly and explicitly as a political platform. Several articles expounded the merits of the royal system, and men like Montesquieu and Rousseau were creatively cited to demonstrate that monarchy was the best form of government for all Europeans: '[Ce système] était le seul que [Montesquieu et Rousseau] croiaient propre aux peuples Européens.'⁹

An example of how *Le Vrai Hollandais* was used as a propaganda tool can be seen in the manner in which Louis and the Leiden gunpowder disaster were represented in the journal. When a ship carrying gunpowder exploded in the centre of Leiden on 12 January 1807, killing 151 and wounding over 2,000 citizens, the king was at the scene within hours to witness the enormous destruction and to contribute personally to the relief effort. This catastrophe was recounted in the journal over three months, and soon became a hot item in the national press, widely publicising the king's presence.

Because of Louis's actions in the following months, and similar actions during floods in the Rhine estuary (1809), his subjects were said to have given him the nickname 'father of the unfortunate'. Not long after the disaster, *Le Vrai Hollandais* published the following acrostic, on 31 January, written by an anonymous Leiden inhabitant, praising the fatherly actions of Louis.¹⁰

L e peuple consterné, dans ce désastre affreux,
O uvre encore son cœur à la douce espérance.
U n mortel bienfaisant apparaît à ses yeux:
I l affronte la mort, qui sous ses pas s'avance!
S ur son front est gravé: père des malheureux.

Whether this is the origin of Louis's nickname *père des malheureux* cannot be ascertained, but the periodical was unquestionably used to popularize Louis among a wider audience. His actions during the gunpowder disaster and the floods were also portrayed in images; numerous favourable engravings and prints circulated that depicted the king amidst the grief-stricken people.¹¹ The effectiveness of these propaganda tools is still evident today, as discussions about Louis still evoke associations with the smouldering remains of the inner city of Leiden—his Dutch *lieu de mémoire*.



J. W. Pieneman [Drawing], R. Vinckles and D. Vrijdag [Engraving], 'De Koning van Holland op de puinhopen van Leyden, in den eersten Nacht na het springen van het Buskruid' ('The King of Holland on the ruins of Leiden, In the first night after the gunpowder explosion'), 1807, from the collection of the Atlas Van Stolk, Rotterdam, inv. no. 32553.

After three months, the journal came to an untimely end. Although it has been suggested that the Emperor Napoleon personally advocated its discontinuance,¹² the journal's demise was probably due to a lack of funds. Another possibility is a minor scandal. Several issues of *Le Vrai Hollandais* published pungent letters from a certain 'K', who wrote numerous negative reviews of, among others, the actress Madame Grassini of the Italian Theatre in Amsterdam. One Mr. Le Sincère of this theatre company responded with a letter to the editor, objecting to the bad reviews and suggesting that the negative articles were written by the chief editor himself. In the next, and final, issue of *Le Vrai Hollandais*, Deferrière dismissed all accusations. It also carried the headline: 'A dater de demain, le Journal le Vrai Hollandais, cessera de paraître.'¹³

A few weeks later, Alexandre Deferrière was appointed 'Inspecteur des théâtres du Royaume' by the king. His time in this office, however, was marked by many problems, and in late 1809 Deferrière returned to France, disillusioned,¹⁴ and the discontinued periodical fell into obscurity.

Louis Napoleon and national remembrance

Napoleon grew dissatisfied with Louis's rule, particularly because of illegal trade practices between the Dutch and the British, and the very lenient implementation of conscription in Holland. When Louis proved unable to offer resistance to an English invasion in 1809, the Emperor was intent on annexing the Kingdom of Holland. In early July

1810, French troops seized Amsterdam and Louis left quietly. Holland was incorporated into the Napoleonic Empire a week later.¹⁵

From then on, Louis lived in exile, but he never forgot his former kingdom. He could, however, finally devote himself to literature, as he had always wanted to. Under the pseudonym 'L. de St. Leu', he wrote the moral novel *Marie ou les peines de l'amour* (1812), revised and reprinted in 1814 as *Marie ou les Hollandaises*. In this novel, he portrayed the Dutch as a virtuous people who fought bravely against the threat of the water, while the French were frivolous people without virtues.¹⁶ In his biographical *Documens historiques* (1820), Louis displayed nostalgia for the Dutch years. Sadly for him, however, few Dutch people longed to have Louis back; even as the 'father of the unfortunate', he remained an outsider.

Le Vrai Hollandais gives insight into cultural propaganda during the Napoleonic period. Like Napoleon, Louis employed the arts and literature to legitimize his authority. But unlike his brother, he relied less on the grandeur of paintings and sculptures, and more on the printing press, most probably because the Dutch Republic had been an international centre of printing. Well into the nineteenth century, prints regularly depicted Louis on the ruins in Leiden, or during floods. To this day, the *père des malheureux* myth lives on in collective memory, thanks, doubtless, to publications such as *Le Vrai Hollandais*.

¹ I thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions.

² Martijn van der Burg, 'Transforming the Dutch Republic into the Kingdom of Holland: The Netherlands between Republicanism and Monarchy (1795–1815)', *European Review of History*, 17 (2010), 151–70.

³ Annie Jourdan and Martijn van der Burg, 'Lodewijk Napoleon en het ontstaan van het Koninkrijk Holland', *Geschiedenis Magazine*, 41.2 (2006), 15–21.

⁴ Archives nationales, Paris, 400 AP (Archives Napoléon) 25, pièces 4, 13, 16.

⁵ Annie Jourdan, 'Images de Napoléon – un imperator en quête de légitimité', *Modern and Contemporary France*, 8 (2000), 433–44. See also the new, revised edition of her *Napoléon: Héros, Imperator, Mécène* (Paris: Flammarion, 2021).

⁶ H. T. Colenbrander, *Gedenkstukken der algemeene geschiedenis van Nederland van 1795 tot 1840*, Vol. 5 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1910), p. xli; Marita Mathijssen, 'Bibliografie literaire tijdschriften 1. 1800–1809', *De Negentiende Eeuw*, 1 (1977), 13–15.

⁷ Archives nationales (Paris), AF IV 1821, pièce 9: 'Note pour le rédacteur du Vrai Hollandais sur le but de ce journal, 24 décembre 1806'.

⁸ Only the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (Dutch Royal Library in The Hague) has all issues. *Le Vrai Hollandais: journal de politique, de littérature, des sciences et des beaux-arts* (1807), no. 1.

⁹ *Le Vrai Hollandais*, no. 13.

¹⁰ *Le Vrai Hollandais*, no. 27.

¹¹ Lotte Jensen, "'See our Succumbing Fatherland, Overwhelmed by Disaster, Woe and Strife': Coping with Crisis during the Reign of Louis Bonaparte", *Dutch Crossing*, 40 (2016) 151–64.

¹² Colenbrander, *Gedenkstukken*, Vol. 5, p. xli.

¹³ *Le Vrai Hollandais*, nos 58, 63, 66, 71, 73, 74.

¹⁴ L. Brummel, 'Het toneel onder Lodewijk Napoleon', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 88 (1973), 52–79.

¹⁵ Martijn van der Burg, *Napoleonic Governance in the Netherlands and Northwest Germany: Conquest, Incorporation, and Integration* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

¹⁶ W. van den Berg, 'Een royale kijk op Holland', *Literatuur*, 13 (1996), 66–71.

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