Literary Hispanophobia and Hispanophilia in Britain and the Low Countries (1550-1850)

Published by Amsterdam University Press

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/76710

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2653941
Abstract
The celebration of the revolt against the Spaniards during the Eighty Years’ War (1568-1648) was central to the rise of Dutch nationalism. Authors depicted triumphant scenes, exaggerating the wicked nature of the Spanish, while reinforcing a positive self-image. This chapter shows that at least two ruptures can be witnessed in the Dutch perception of the Spanish. The first took place during the Napoleonic era, in particular after the successful uprising of the Spanish against Napoleon in 1808. This led to an ambiguous representation of the Spanish in Dutch resistance literature. A second shift occurred when Catholics started to emancipate themselves from 1840 onwards. In their literary and historiographical writings, Catholic authors presented an alternative view of the revolt and the Reformation.

Keywords: Nationalism, Napoleon, Peninsular War, Catholic emancipation, Floris of Montmorency (Baron of Montigny)

In the nineteenth century the cultivation of national sentiment reached a high point: everywhere in Europe nations emphasized their superiority by celebrating their founding myths and fathers. Narratives about the heroic past were pivotal in constructing a positive self-image of the nation. As is shown in Mythen der Nationen: ein Europaïsches Panorama (1998), European nations largely followed the same patterns in selecting their Gründungmythen, or founding myths. They all showed a preference for stories of revolt and liberation, which proved their strength and supremacy.
over other nations. The English, for instance, celebrated the victory over the Spanish Armada (1588), the Spanish in the liberation of Granada (1492), and the Belgians in the Battle of the Golden Spurs (1302). These narratives were based upon historical sources, but mythical and fictional elements played an important role as well: the stories were told in a spectacular and convincing way, appealing to the emotions of the audience. Historical accuracy was often considered less important than the storytelling power of miraculous events that had happened in the past. These ‘founding myths’, disseminated through poems, novels, historiographies, treatises, and paintings, were to demonstrate the invincibility of the nation and its inhabitants.

The celebration of the revolt against the Spaniards during the Eighty Years’ War (1568-1648) was central to the rise of nineteenth-century Dutch nationalism. Authors depicted triumphant scenes from this period, exaggerating the wicked nature of the Spanish, while reinforcing a positive self-image. Episodes like the Siege and Relief of Leiden (1573-1574) or the Capture of Breda (1590), circulated in many versions through poems, novels, theatre plays and children’s books. Visual imagery, such as paintings, engravings and illustrations, stimulated the imagination of the audience. The way authors and artists represented the course of events could vary, but one thing remained stable: the characterization of the Catholic Spanish as the evil enemy in contrast with the morally superior Dutch. A telling example is a children’s book about the Relief of Leiden from 1873, where ample attention is given to the cruelties committed by the Spanish soldiers and characterized by the narrator as ‘the most screaming barbarity’.

However, it has hardly been recognized that the Dutch perception of the Spanish changed under the influence of actual political and religious developments, and that positive images, alternative representations, or even counter-narratives circulated as well. In this chapter I will argue that at least two ruptures or ‘paradigm shifts’ took place during the nineteenth century. The first shift occurred after the successful uprising of the Spanish against Napoleon in 1808. This led to an ambiguous representation of the Spanish in Dutch resistance literature. A second shift can be witnessed when Catholics started to emancipate themselves from 1840 onwards. In

---

1 Flacke, *Mythen der Nationen*. I would like to thank Johan Joor and Bart Verheijen for providing me with useful information.
3 Jensen, *De verheerlijking van het verleden*, pp. 18-19.
4 For a discussion of the five founding myths of the Dutch nation, including the Siege and Relief of Leiden, see Slechte, ‘Nederlande’.
5 ‘Schreeuwendste onmenselijkheid’. Cited in Meijer, *De vrijbuiters van Leiden*, p. 88.
their historiographical and literary writings, Catholic authors presented an alternative view of the revolt and the Reformation which suited their own religious emancipatory cause. These counter-images of the Spanish demonstrate that one should be careful in speaking in terms of the Dutch perception of the Spanish in the nineteenth century: although there was a dominant discourse in which Spanish evilness was instrumental in shaping a positive Dutch self-image, counter-narratives circulated as well.

**The Napoleonic era and the Dutch**

The first moment in the nineteenth century in which another, more positive, image of the Spanish appeared was the Napoleonic era. At the same time the negative image of the Spanish, who were represented as the oppressors of the Dutch in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, flourished as never before. This seeming paradox can be explained by the Dutch political situation. The regime of Napoleon Bonaparte played an important role in the emergence of national sentiments in the Netherlands (and elsewhere in Europe). His rise to power in 1799 was initially met by many with great enthusiasm, in particular when he ended the war with Great Britain with the Peace of Amiens in 1802. A new period of prosperity seemed to commence after the lifting of all trade embargos. Dutch authors cheered the ending of hostilities and predicted the dawning of a new Golden Age. However, things rapidly changed, when Britain declared war on France on 18 May 1803. This marked the start of a long series of bloody wars and battles, within and beyond Europe. During the next years, Napoleon managed to extend both his military and dynastic power over large parts of Europe. He, for example, appointed his brother Joseph as king of Naples and Spain (respectively in 1806 and 1808), his brother Jérôme as king of Westphalia (in 1807) and his sister Elisa as grand duchess of Tuscany (in 1809).

In the case of the Dutch nation, the Napoleonic rule went through several stages. Napoleon considered the Batavian Commonwealth (as it was officially called after 1801) to be nothing more than ‘a satellite’ of the French ‘planet’ and a ‘rocket that would be carried along by the whirlwind of France’. Napoleon suited his actions to these words by first appointing the Dutch diplomat Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck as pensionary of the Batavian

---

6 The popular reactions to the Peace of Amiens are discussed in Jensen, *Celebrating Peace*, pp. 146-161, and Verheijen, *Nederland onder Napoleon*, pp. 41-56.

7 Cited in Hagen, *President van Nederland*, p. 165.
Commonwealth in 1805. Only one year later he was replaced by Napoleon's brother Louis, who was made king of Holland. Being unsatisfied with the way his brother fulfilled his duties, Napoleon forced him to abdicate in 1810, and annexed the country to the French Empire. In November 1813 the country was gradually liberated from the French, a process that took several months and was accompanied by violent outbursts and local revolts.8

The years of the kingdom of Holland and the French annexation belong among the darkest in Dutch history. Napoleon not only imposed huge taxes, which sucked the economic life out of the country, but also forced the local authorities to supply his army. Furthermore, he established strict censorship, which meant that publishers and authors had to seek illegal ways to spread printed material that criticized French rule. The severe French regime aroused national sentiments, which, on the one hand, were directed against Napoleon's tyranny and, on the other hand, led to the articulation of the nation's unique qualities, which had to be protected from foreign oppression. The search for the nation's cultural roots now became part of the political agenda of authors, poets and intellectuals as well, who, by showing their nation's particular culture, resisted French influences.9

A key element of the protest publications and resistance literature was the celebration of the Dutch national past.10 Episodes of the Dutch revolt against the Spaniards were particularly popular. The idea behind describing these victorious moments was threefold: first, the audience was encouraged to draw parallels with their current situation. Just as the Dutch had been able to conquer a superpower in the past, they would be able to do that in the present situation as well. Second, by sketching events from the past, authors could escape censorship. Strictly speaking, they were not engaging with contemporary politics but with past events only. Finally, the negative characterization of the Spaniards was functional in painting a positive image of the Dutch. The behaviour of the Spaniards contrasted in all respects with that of the virtuous Dutch, who outclassed their enemy in military and virtuous acts.

Negative images of the Spanish during the Napoleonic era

Illustrative examples of the negative characterization of the Spaniards include the theatre plays Het ontzet der stad Leiden (The relief of the city of

---

8 See Uitterhoeve, Haagse bluf.
9 See Leerssen, National Thought, pp. 105-126.
10 On Dutch resistance literature in the years 1806-1813, see Jensen, 'The Dutch against Napoleon'.
Leiden, 1808) by Marten Westerman and *Het turfschip van Breda* (The peat barge of Breda, 1812) by Cornelis van der Vijver. The first play contrasted the cruelties of the Spaniards with the bravery of the honest Dutch, who were willing to sacrifice their lives for the cause of justice. The ultimate example of bravery was Mayor Van de Werff, who was prepared to offer his arm for the starving people of Leiden. Another heroic episode about the capture of Breda was staged a few years later. The troops of Prince Maurice of Nassau staged a surprise attack on the Spanish soldiers by hiding themselves in a peat barge, and entering the city. Words like these could hardly be misunderstood by the audience: ‘Courage, and you will triumph. [...] The enemy will pay for his hubris.’\(^{11}\) It remains remarkable that the play could be published and that local authorities gave permission for its performance.\(^ {12}\) In a later version, several concluding songs were added to the text, which emphasized the patriotic message: ‘We triumphed on this day, for the Dutch nation with the Orange flag, may this be a lesson to Spain.’\(^ {13}\)

Another well-known example of resistance literature in which the Spanish were portrayed as the evil party in order to render a positive self-image of the Dutch is *De Hollandsche natie* (The Dutch nation) by the Amsterdam poet Jan Frederik Helmers. He started writing the poem around 1802, but it was first published only in 1812. Helmers had to make several changes before the authorities approved publication. The uncensored version was published after the liberation from the French, which makes it possible to compare the two versions. One of the forbidden fragments dealt with the Spanish king Philip II, who dared to challenge the people of the Netherlands and who uttered extremely violent threats. Even for the censors it must have been obvious that Philip II in fact represented Napoleon Bonaparte, which explains why the fragment had to be deleted before publication:

The Spanish tyrant Philip, proud of his gigantic powers,
Dares to challenge and despise the people of the Netherlands.
What! Will a poor bunch resist my omnipotence?
Me? Who sees the East and West bending at my knees?

---

\(^{11}\) ‘Moed, en gij zult de zegge halen [...] Het uur is daar uw vijand zal / Zijn overmoed betalen’ (Van der Vijver, *Het turfschip van Breda* [1812], p. 90).

\(^{12}\) *Het turfschip van Breda* was performed in 1812 in The Hague and on 1 February 1813 in Leiden. See Ruitenbeek, *Kijkcijfers*, p. 375; Bordewijk, Roding and Veldheer, *Wat geeft die Comedie toch eene bemoeijing!*, p. 139.

\(^{13}\) ‘Wij zeggepraalden op deez’ dag / Voor Nêerland met de Oranjevlag; Dit zij een les voor Spanje.’ Cited in Van der Vijver, *Het turfschip van Breda* (1835), p. 100.
Do these despicable people rave about liberty, justice and law,
And stand up against me? Well, I will crush them.  

Many other examples, in which the Spanish are portrayed negatively, can be added to this list. Historical accuracy was less important than poetic imagination: it was all about arousing patriotic feelings amongst the Dutch. Just as in the early modern period, a narrative of a ‘united Dutch people’ was deployed. One of the most extreme examples is a patriotic romance by the resistance poet Hendrik Tollens, in which Philip II personally addresses a Dutch woman, Kenau Hasselaar. She defended the city of Haarlem in 1572-1573 with an armed group of women, by throwing oil on the Spanish soldiers. Tollens’s romance is a concatenation of hyperboles, which culminates in these words spoken by Philip II to Kenau: ‘My empire is about to fall; A woman raised from the Dutch swamp / Embarrasses world leaders!’ The heroic deeds of Kenau were also celebrated and contrasted with the cowardice of the Spaniards in a theatre play by Adriaan Loosjes in 1808, which was meant to demonstrate that Dutch women could also act as heroines, when the nation was endangered. The comparison between the current French and former Spanish oppression was so common, that the lawyer Jacobus Scheltema on the occasion of the liberation from the French in 1813 published a treatise in which he compared the rule of Philip II during the summer of 1572 with Napoleon's tyranny in 1813. Thus, the Black Spanish Legend was used as a model for describing contemporary French atrocities. We find the same mechanism at the end of the seventeenth century, when successful anti-Hispanic works such as The Mirror of Spanish Tyranny and New Mirror for the Young were remoulded into The Mirror of French Tyranny.

14 ‘De Spaansche dwingland Philips, trotsch op zijn reuzenkrachten, / Dorst zich vermeten ’t volk van Neêrland te verachten. / ’Hoe! zal een schaamle hoop mijn almagt weêrstand biën! / Mij! die het Oost’ en West’ gebukt zie aan mijn kniên? / Deweept dat verachtlijk volk van vrijheid, regt en wetten, / En zet zich tegen mij? Welaan, ik zal ’t verpletten’ (Helmers, De Hollandsche natie, p. 142).
15 ‘Daar neigt mijn rijk ten val: / Een vrouw, uit Hollands dras geteeld, / Zet wereldheersers pal!’ (Tollens, Gedichten, p. 28).
16 ‘Dat Hollands Vrouwen, hoe bedaard heure aard ook schijn’, / Is ’t lieve Vaderland in nood, Heldinnen zijn’ (Loosjes, Kenau Hasselaar, p. 90).
17 Scheltema, Vergelijking van de afschudding.
18 The use of memories of the Dutch Revolt in 1812 is discussed in Lok, ‘Een geheel nieuw tijdvak van ons bestaan’.
19 Original titles: Den Spiegel de Spaensche Tyrannye gheschiet in West-Indien [...] (Amsterdam, 1596, based on Las Casas’s Brevissima relació de la destrucción de las Indias [1552]) and its
Positive images of the Spanish during the Napoleonic era

However, notably in these years, the Spanish nation could also function as a positive example. This new image emerged when the former allies, France and Spain, got entangled in armed conflicts in 1808. It resulted in the Peninsular War, referred to by the Spaniards as ‘La Guerra de la Independencia Española’ (The Spanish War of Independence), which started with the uprising of 2 May 1808. Hundreds of Spaniards rebelled against French oppression in the streets of Madrid. They were slaughtered or taken prisoner, and executed the next day. Napoleon reinforced his grip by placing his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne in June 1808, which aggravated the protests against French rule.20 Napoleon also sent a large army, the ‘Armée d’Espagne’, with recruits from the allied powers (including Dutch soldiers) to the area to take control over the situation; the Spanish, in the meantime, vigorously resisted French rule by using guerilla tactics.21 It would take more than five years before the French were defeated, and Spanish independence was restored. These events did not go unnoticed in the rest of Europe.

In Dutch resistance circles the Spanish uprising was referred to as a source of inspiration. The clandestine writings that refer to the Spanish events can be divided into two groups: those with a general message of resistance, and those with an Orangist political statement. The writings of three authors, Willem Cornelis van Campen, Joan Melchior Kemper, and Maria Aletta Hulshoff belong to the first group. They have in common that they acknowledge the former negative image of the Spanish, but emphasize the need for a more positive image. Their arguments to prove this point seem rather artificial to the present-day reader, but were instrumental to their message of political resistance.22

sequel Spieghel der Spaensche Tyrannye (Amsterdam, 1625), and Nieuwe Spieghel der Jeught, of Fransche Tyrannie (Amsterdam, 1674). These books and similar publications and prints were reprinted many times. On the Spanish and French ‘mirror books’, see Breen, ‘Gereformeerde populaire historiographie’, pp. 272-273; Meijer Drees, Andere landen, andere mensen, pp. 87-95. On the recycling of the Spanish Black Legend in different contexts, see Nocentelli, ‘The Dutch Black Legend’ (on English perceptions of the Dutch) and Schmidt, Innocence Abroad (on Dutch adoption of indigenous Americans’ position towards the Spanish in the sixteenth century). See also the introduction of this volume.

20 On the Peninsular War, see Esdaile, The Peninsular War.
22 Another interesting poem was published by the minister Gebrand Bruining, who reflected upon the second siege of Zaragoza, which took place from 20 December 1808 to 20 February 1809.
Van Campen studied in Leiden until 1809 and was very well informed about the revolt in Spain. During the period of French rule he wrote several resistance poems, which he published after the liberation from the French.23 One poem discusses the beginning of the war of the French against Spain in 1808. He explicitly addresses his altered view of the Spanish. Once, he states, he despised the proud nature of the Spanish people, but now he can only admire their bravery. He is even willing to applaud their former atrocities against the Dutch, to that extent that they have contributed to strengthening their national character. The last strophe consists of a celebration of the Spanish:

Carry on, o brave Spain, your attempt might seem to have failed
Perhaps your courage might load all the irreconcilable wrath
Of the taunted executioner on your persistent head!

[...]
And if you cannot (o regret!) liberate your neck from his beam,
Then you will bow: but still great and satisfied with this glory:

*Europe bent down; but Spain dared to resist.*

The last verse can be read as fierce criticism of those who willingly submit to Napoleon. A handwritten version of the poem – slightly different from the original – is kept in a collection of satirical poems and writings that belonged to Diderik van Leyden Gael, who fulfilled several executive functions in the administration of Leiden during the French regime. This suggests that this clandestine poem circulated amongst citizens in Leiden.25

He advised the Spanish people to capitulate as quickly as possible in order to avoid further losses. His poem is filled with negative references to the earlier atrocities of the Duke of Alba and King Philip II. He claims that Napoleon would have conquered Zaragoza much quicker had he behaved more like these Spanish rulers. Bruining also states that the Spanish should not count on any help from the English side because they are even more barbarous, given their behaviour in the colonies. Bruining praises Louis Napoleon for having protected the Dutch people from such misery. See Bruining, *Dichterlijke uitweiding.*

23 Van Campen, *Mijne verontwaardiging.*
25 Verheijen, *Nederland onder Napoleon*, p. 126 assumed the handwritten poems in the collection were written by Van Leyden Gael himself, but the published version proves that Van Campen was the author.
A second example can be found in the work of Joan Melchior Kemper, a professor of law at Leiden University. He was a member of the Friday Society (they met on Fridays), where the members exchanged ideas about the future of their nation. Having heard about the latest losses of the French in the war against the Spanish in 1812, he wrote the following verses: “The courage of our forefathers broke the Spanish slavery / Now you bend your knee as a slave for foreign opponents / While France is trembling for Spanish courage.” Again, the former Spanish oppression and their current bravery are mentioned in one breath, turning a negative image into a positive one.

A final proof of positive reference to the Spanish uprising is offered by Maria Aletta Hulshoff, one of the few female authors who publicly protested against the French regime. She became known for her *Call to the Batavian People* (*Oproeping aan het Bataafsche volk*), published in 1806, in which she encouraged her fellow countrymen to join forces to resist French rule non-violently. She was arrested, and spent two years in prison. When she was released, she immediately continued her illegal activities. In April 1809 she published *Warning against the Requisition* (*Waarschouwing tegen de Requisitie*), in which she strongly criticized the conscription imposed by the French. She suggested all sorts of ways to escape conscription, and hoped things would not escalate. According to her, Napoleon did not want a revolt in the Netherlands, because he needed all his troops in Spain, where the revolt had reached a new peak. His prospects looked very bad.

Hulshoff wrote from a republican perspective: she despised not only the idea of a foreign regime, but also the fact that the former Dutch Republic had been transformed into a monarchy. Her republican view was certainly not shared by all resistance authors. In the second group of writings, the Spanish uprising was explicitly linked with the efforts to restore the House of Orange. Since 1795, when Stadtholder Willem V fled the country, Orangists had worked for his return. After his death in 1806, they put their hopes on his son, whom they referred to as ‘Willem VI’. They saw him as somebody who could replace King Louis Napoleon, either as stadtholder or as monarch. This was, for instance, the case in an anonymous lampoon, which was found in the stable of the cabman Benjamins in The Hague in September 1808.

---

26 ‘Der Vadren moed verbrak de Spaansche slavernij / Nu buigt hij slaafs de knie voor vreemde tegenstanders / En voor der Spaanschen moed beeft Frankrijks dwinglandij.’ Quoted in Verheijen, *Nederland onder Napoleon*, p. 218.

27 ‘Bonaparte begeert hier geen opstand. Hij heeft de handen steeds rijkelijk vol, en komt troepen te kort. Spanje is weder op nieuw in vollen opstand, en het gaat Bonaparte daar ten uitersten slecht.’ Quoted in *Monitor* (1809), p. 3. For more information about the illegal writings of Maria Aletta Hulshoff, see Joor, *De Adelaar en het Lam*, pp. 291-294.
The text celebrates Willem VI (‘Live long, Willem VI!’) and criticizes those who bow to the French king (‘slaves of the king’). It ends with a verse in which people are encouraged to follow the example of the Spanish people.28

A linkage between the Spanish uprising and Orangism can also be found in an anonymous pamphlet, found in Amsterdam and The Hague in August 1809.29 It was entitled To the People of the Netherlands and was very outspoken in encouraging the Dutch to take up weapons against French tyranny. They had to follow the examples of the Spanish and the Austrians: ‘Don’t hesitate to take up weapons, let us stand up as one man, just like the Spanish and Austrian people, and those blood thirsty who destroy our traitors.’30 The author emphasized the illegitimacy of Louis Napoleon’s rule, and saw only one solution to the current misery: the restoration of the House of Orange.

All the above-mentioned writings, whether they include Orangist statements or not, mention the Spanish uprising as an example to be followed. However, there was also a more indirect and subtle way of representing the Spanish in a positive way, as can be seen in an epic written by the Haarlem bookseller Adriaan Loosjes. He was one of the most productive Dutch authors during the Napoleonic era, and protested against the foreign rulers in a wide range of novels, poems, plays and letters. In many of his writings he celebrated heroic moments of the Dutch during the Eighty Years’ War, drawing a parallel between the evil French and the wicked Spanish. In his epic poem, De laatste zeetogt van admiral De Ruiter (The last voyage of Admiral De Ruyter), he represented the Spanish in a very different way. This poem, published in 1812, dealt with the last battle of the seventeenth-century Dutch sea hero Michiel de Ruyter. He was sent by the Dutch government to Sicily in 1676, where he had to assist the Spanish fleet against the French. Throughout the lengthy poem the Spanish are referred to as allies in a joint fight against the French oppressors. It must have been a deliberate choice on the part of Loosjes to pick out this particular scene from the Dutch past: against the background of the Spanish uprising against Napoleon, it made his appeal to Dutch compatriots to stand up against Napoleon even more convincing.31

28 For more information on this clandestine writing, see Verheijen, Nederland onder Napoleon, pp. 130-132.
29 On this pamphlet, see Joor, De Adelaar en het Lam, p. 480; Verheijen, Nederland onder Napoleon, pp. 171-173.
30 ‘Schroomt niet de wapens te vatten, laten wij als een man opkomen, gelijk de Spanjaard en de Oostenrijkers, en die bloedsuchtige ons verraders verdelge.’ Cited in Verheijen, Nederland onder Napoleon, p. 313.
Catholic emancipation and the image of the Spanish

A second shift in the perception of the Spanish can be witnessed around 1840, when Catholics started to emancipate themselves. Between 1815 and 1830, when the Northern and Southern parts of the Netherlands emerged in a united kingdom under King Willem I, Catholics were in the majority. After the Belgian Revolution (1830-1832), Catholics still formed one-third of the Dutch population. Nevertheless, this group was marginalized in political, social and cultural life. This is mirrored in the ‘founding stories’ that were told about the Dutch nation and the celebration of ‘founding fathers’. The Protestant voice was omnipresent. Protestantism found its national roots in the revolt against Spain, which was represented as a struggle of a young, Protestant nation against the evil Catholic Spanish oppressor. Nineteenth-century Protestants also emphasized the unbreakable bond with Orangist rule: in their historical view, a straight line could be drawn from ‘father of the fatherland’, William of Orange, to the kings of Orange, who ran the country from 1815 onwards.

For Catholics, this one-sided representation of Dutch history was problematic. They had difficulties identifying with the celebration of heroic episodes of the revolt against Spain with inherently negative imagery of the Catholics. They made this clear by protesting against festivities celebrating highlights from the Eighty Years’ War. Generally speaking, they used four strategies to make themselves more visible and liberate themselves from these oppressive images. Firstly, they criticized the one-sidedness of Dutch historiography with regard to the Eighty Years’ War. Authors like J. van der Horst, W.J.F. Nuyens, H.J.C. van Nouhuys and J.A. Alberdingk Thijm shed new light on the Dutch Revolt by re-interpreting historical sources from a Catholic perspective. They not only created a more positive view of the Spanish rulers, but also relativized the existing imagery of the courageous and virtuous Dutch. In their view Philip II could also be considered a kind-hearted monarch whose hard measures could be justified up to a certain extent. William of Orange and his rebellious troops, in particular the Geuzen (the confederacy of Calvinists who opposed Habsburg rule in the Netherlands from 1566), on the contrary showed loathsome behaviour in many respects. Nuyens published eight volumes on the Dutch Revolt in the years 1865-1870, which can be seen as a Catholic counter-narrative.

32 For a general outline of Catholic emancipation and their search for a Dutch national identity, see Raedts, ‘Katholieken op zoek’; Raedts, De ontdekking van de Middeleeuwen, pp. 227-276.
of the well-known *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* (1856) by the American author J.R. Motley, who upheld strongly anti-Hispanic views.\(^{34}\) In his book on the marriage between William of Orange and Anna van Saxen, the Amsterdam pastor Van der Horst elaborated on the less pleasant aspects of William's character. The poets Nouhuys and Alberdingk Thijm together edited the *Volks-almanak voor Nederlandsche Katholieken* (The people's almanac for Dutch Catholics), which was established in 1852 and explicitly promoted Catholic emancipation. In the first volume King Philip's reign was called fair and just, and his political advisor, Cardinal Granvelle, a noble man.\(^{35}\)

Secondly, Catholic intellectuals and teachers created their own versions of Dutch literary history.\(^{36}\) They produced anthologies and literary overviews, which included more Catholic authors and avoided anti-papist authors. In his dissertation, *Lezen door een Roomse bril* (Reading through Catholic eyes), Bram Noot describes which authors and texts Catholics taught at schools, and how they deliberately changed the Protestant canon.\(^{37}\) Thirdly, Catholic authors sought their roots in a different part of Dutch history, the Middle Ages. Alberdingk Thijm, in particular, contributed to the rehabilitation of the Middle Ages in his many novels, poems and treatises.\(^{38}\) Although the Catholics claimed particular ownership of the Middle Ages, Protestant writers also wrote about this period. Think only of the medieval poems and historical novels situated in the Middle Ages, written by acclaimed authors such as Willem Bilderdijk, Jacob van Lennep and Geertruid Bosboom-Toussaint. There was, however, one crucial difference: the latter consequently represented the Catholic characters as bad and full of vices, while Alberdingk Thijm created new Catholic heroes.\(^{39}\) A telling example is his story about the Catholic boy Dirck Dircxen Bommer, son of a rich merchant, who is about to be executed after the reconquering by the Geuzen of Gorinchem in 1572. Thijm contrasts the negative image of the cruel Geuzen with the noble character of the Catholic protagonist. The well-known story of the martyrs of Gorinchem (the nineteen clergymen, who were killed by the Geuzen and canonized in 1867) resonates in the background.\(^{40}\)

\(^{34}\) On Nuyens's historical works, see Van der Zeijden, *Katholieke identiteit*.

\(^{35}\) *Volks-almanak voor Nederlandsche katholieken*, p. 93.

\(^{36}\) See the chapter by Yolanda Rodríguez Pérez in this volume.


\(^{38}\) Leuker, *Künstler als Helden und Heilige*.

\(^{39}\) On the representation of Catholics in the historical novels of Van Lennep, see Jensen, *De verheerlijking van het verleden*, pp. 55-56.

Finally, Catholics celebrated their own heroes from the past, in particular, after the re-establishment of the episcopal hierarchy in the Netherlands in 1853. The Catholic Church in the Netherlands had produced a wide range of great saints, such as Lidwina of Schiedam, Geert Grote and Thomas à Kempis, and a pope: Adrian VI. Those were persons to be proud of, and true Dutchmen as well. Furthermore, they celebrated the Dutch seventeenth-century poet Joost van den Vondel, who converted to Catholicism in 1641. Thijm played an important role in the re-appraisal of Vondel as a Catholic author, both as an editor and organizer of the large festivities, held in 1867 to honour the poet.

A case study: Montigny

The Catholic emancipation brought about a more positive image of the Spanish, which also had its influence on literary works about the Dutch Revolt. An illustrative case study is the literary representation of Floris of Montmorency, Baron of Montigny (1528-1570). He was a convinced Catholic, but much opposed to the persecution of heretics. Remarkably enough, he was represented in the early nineteenth century as a Protestant hero, who stood up against Spanish tyranny. In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, Catholic authors adjusted this image, and emphasized his Catholicism. The representation of the Spanish was ambiguous: generally speaking, their bad sides were elucidated, but some characters were portrayed positively, in particular Don Carlos, son of Philip II and the crown prince of Spain. The story of Don Carlos, allegedly murdered by his father, had been very well-known in Europe since the end of the seventeenth century, and it constituted one of the pillars in the Black Legend around Philip II. Although little positive imagery of the Spanish is to be found in the play (except for the romanticized figure of Don Carlos), the reception of the play shows that the representation of the past led to heated debates. It reveals the tension between Protestant and Catholic views of the past, and a need for exposing ‘the truth’ about the Spanish rulers.

Montigny took part in the delegation of Dutch nobles that handed over a petition to Margaret of Parma, governess of the Netherlands, in which they asked for more benevolence towards the Dutch. He ended up in a Spanish prison, where he died under mysterious circumstances. According to some

42 Leuker, Künstler als Helden und Heilige, pp. 145-211.
historians, he was poisoned, while others asserted he was beheaded at the behest of Philip II. Montigny and his mysterious death reached the Spanish stage as early as the seventeenth century. In Dutch historiography, Montigny remained a marginal figure. Far more attention was paid to the counts of Egmont and Horne, who became symbols of resistant noblemen. However, Montigny became a hero in the nineteenth century, mainly due to a theatre play, published in 1821 by the Amsterdam poet H.H. Klijn: Montigni. The play focuses on the imprisonment of Montigny in Madrid. When Montigny hears that the counts of Egmont and Horne have been beheaded in Brussels, he becomes very angry towards Cardinal Granvelle and is sentenced to death. The noble-hearted Don Carlos proposes to Montigny that he will help him escape from prison, but he refuses. Montigny’s wife also tries to talk him into escaping, but he sticks to his principles. Before he is beheaded, Montigny hints at the future deeds of William of Orange, the ultimate saviour, and predicts a prosperous future for the Dutch nation. The play became a huge success, and was performed many times in Amsterdam and elsewhere in the country. In the 1860s it was still being performed by amateur groups. The patriotic message appealed to a wide audience that recognized a spirit of freedom and patriotism in the character of Montigny. This nobleman was prepared to die for his country, even though the crown prince of Spain was prepared to help him flee. His refusal symbolized his infinite love for his fatherland. He embodied all the characteristics of the virtuous hero of a French-classicist tragedy: by sacrificing himself and showing magnanimity, his honour remained intact.

With regard to the representation of the Spanish, it is noteworthy that not all Spanish people behave badly. While Granvelle and Philip II are driven only by their ambition for power, Margaret of Parma and Don Carlos show much understanding for the situation of the Dutch and Montigny, in particular. Don Carlos plays a key role as a mediator between the Spanish and the Dutch and is portrayed as a benevolent, wise man. He knows how rulers and princes should behave, and when rebellion is allowed: ‘He may only pursue the salvation of all people: the law, that is his will, the more the people loves him, and trust in his virtuousness, the more his freedom is restricted.’ Klijn might have been inspired by Don Carlos (1787), a well-
known play by the German author Friedrich Schiller about the supposed rebellion of an heroic and romantic Don Carlos against his tyrannical father, which was also translated into Dutch several times.

Klijn was not only praised for his play, but received fierce criticism as well. The most extensive critique came from the teacher Tielman Olivier Schilperoort, who in 1822 published a treatise of almost 200 pages in which he summed up the many flaws of the play. He in particular objected to the fact that such a marginal figure had been turned into a hero by abusing historical sources. By quoting many historical sources Tideman tried to show that this figure was not worth a play at all. His criticism was also directed against the representation of Montigny as a true Protestant. In reality, Montigny was a Catholic, who, in the last hours before he died, was assisted by a priest. In Klijn’s play, however, Montigny acted as a spokesman of a Protestant nation, which was not in keeping with the historical truth. Olivier Schilperoort was not the only one to reject Klijn’s version of the past: Alberdingk Thijm also ridiculed Klijn for casting his hero in a Protestant mould. Paradoxically enough, the massive critique only added to the long-lasting fame of the play and its author. In 1850 a critic noted that no other play in Dutch history had been as celebrated and despised as Montigni.

The play also caused a wave of historical publications on Montigny, in which his role in the nation’s history was re-assessed. The Catholic emancipation caused heated debates about how the behaviour of the Spanish rulers should be judged, in particularly after the revelations of the Belgian archivist Louis Prosper Gachard. His edition of the correspondence of Philip II, Correspondance de Phillipe II, revealed that Montigny was strangled to death at Philip’s behest, and that Philip II pretended that Montigny had died of natural causes.

The historical debates also led to new literary works about Montigny’s life and death, and consequently to new representations. In 1855, for instance, the Belgian author Frans van Geert published a theatre play in prose about Montigny. He turned him into a Flemish, deeply religious Catholic hero. The emphasis on Montigny’s love for Flanders and his Catholicism had no influence on the portrayal of the loathsome Spanish, who brutally kill Montigny in the last scene. Just as in Klijn’s play, Don Carlos is soft-hearted, while Philip II and Granvelle embody evil. In 1860, the Dutch poet Samuel van den Bergh published a play about Montigny, entitled In den kerker.

47 Jensen, De verheerlijking van het verleden, p. 79.
48 Ibid., p. 79.
49 Ibid., p. 80.
50 Van Geert, Montigny.
van Simancas (In the prison of Simancas) in which he also used the latest historical insights. Although he was a Protestant himself, he deliberately represented Montigny as a true-hearted Catholic, only to emphasize the evilness of the Spanish rulers, who direct their anger against people of their own faith. In contrast with the other works, Don Carlos does not play any part in the story: any positive references to the Spanish are erased in this way.51

A third literary representation came from a woman writer, Agatha (pseudonym of Reinoudina de Goeje), who wrote a youth novel about the two nephews of Montigny: De pages van den baron de Montigny (The pageboys of the Baron of Montigny, c. 1862). One of the boys accompanies Montigny to Spain, while the other remains in the Netherlands. After the death of Montigny, the boy in Spain returns to his fatherland, where he meets the Prince of Orange. The brothers are reunited on board a ship of the Geuzen, who are about to liberate Den Briel from the Spanish. As the summary indicates, the patriotic and Orangist message is dominant, and the Spanish characters stand in sharp contrast to the loyal character of Montigny and his nephews. Only Don Carlos is portrayed as a reasonable Spaniard, albeit too weak to stand up to his father.52

Conclusion

The portrayal of the Spanish as evil, unfaithful and imperious was commonplace in Dutch nineteenth-century patriotic texts. However, under the influence of political and religious societal changes, two ruptures can be witnessed in the Dutch perception of the Spanish. The first took place in 1808 after the Spanish uprising against Napoleon and the second around 1840, when Dutch Catholics started to emancipate themselves and offered alternative representations of the past.

On both occasions authors struggled with how to reconcile the new, positive imagery with the omnipresent negative view of the Spanish. Their juggling with arguments might seem artificial to the present-day reader; take, for example, the very unlikely suggestion that the bravery of the Spanish in 1808 was rooted in their fighting experience in the sixteenth century against the Dutch. This rationale, however, only reinforced the positive self-image of the Dutch, who could now claim to have contributed

51 Van den Bergh, In den kerker van Simancas.
52 Agatha, De pages van den baron de Montigny.
in an indirect way to the Spanish uprising as well. Similar patterns can be witnessed in the Catholic revision of the past, which led to a re-appraisal of the rule of King Philip II. This shift can, in particular, be seen in the works of Catholic historians, who re-adjusted the image of Philip II. The case of Montigny shows a more complicated attitude towards the Spanish. The reception of Klijn's tragedy was less about generating a more positive image of the Spanish than a vindication of the Catholics via Montigny. The representation of Montigny illustrates how authors constantly moulded the past according to their own needs: his character and the Spanish antagonists were used to pursue Protestant, Flemish and Catholic goals.

Both shifts in the nineteenth-century perception of the Spanish, around 1808 and 1840, illustrate show the process of rewriting the past is always marked by change and adaption, alteration and integration, and obliteration and reconciliation.53

Works Cited

Primary sources


Bruining, Gebrand, Dichterlijke uitweiding over den tegenwoordigen watervloed, en de verdere ongevallen, die het arme vaderland, gedurende de regering van zulken menschlievenden koning, elk voorjaar treffen (1809).

Helmers, Jan Frederik, De Hollandsche natie, ed. by Lotte Jensen and Marinus van Hattum (Nijmegen: Uitgeverij Vantilt, 2009).

Klijn, Hendrik Herman, Montigni (Amsterdam: Johannes van der Heij, 1821).

Loosjes, Adriaan, Kenau Hasselaar of de heldin van Haarlem, treurspel (Haarlem: A. Loosjes Pz, 1808).


Monitor, P. [M.A. Hulshoff], Waarschouwinge tegen de requisitie (Haarlem, 1809).

Scheltema, Jacobus, Vergelijking van de afschuudding van het Spaansche juk, in 1572, met die van het Fransche in 1813 (Amsterdam: Hendrik Gartman, 1813).


53 On rewriting as an act of memory, see Plate, Transforming Memories, pp. 3-35.


—, *Het turfschip van Breda, historisch tooneelspel. (uit de XVI eeuw)*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: J.C. van Kesteren, 1835).


**Secondary sources**


Lok, Matthijs, ‘“Een geheel nieuw tijdvak van ons bestaan”. De herinnering aan de Nederlandse Opstand en de temporaliteit van 1813’, *De negentiende eeuw* 38.2 (2014), pp. 67-82.


About the Author

Lotte Jensen is Professor of Dutch Cultural and Literary History at Radboud University Nijmegen. She is Principal Investigator of the research project ‘Dealing with Disasters in the Netherlands: The Shaping of Local and National Identities, 1421-1890’ (2017-2022), for which she received a VICI grant from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). Before that, she headed the NWO-VIDI project ‘Proud to be Dutch’. In this context she studied the role of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century war and peace literature in shaping the Dutch national identity. Her research focuses on the role of literature and historiography in processes of national identity formation, Napoleon, women writers and the history of the press. Her publications include The Roots of Nationalism: National Identity Formation in Europe, 1600-1815 (2016), and Celebrating Peace: The Emergence of Dutch Identity, 1648-1815 (2017).