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The Dutch Enlightenment and the Creation of Popular Culture

Willem Th. M. Frijhoff

ACCORDING to a firmly established historiographic tradition, reason and revelation are the two key words of the Dutch Enlightenment. Thus, we have Simon Schama's definition of Dutch Enlightenment as "encyclopedism without polemic; reform without scepticism."¹ Yet such a definition is not entirely complete. It emphasizes formal characteristics and runs the risk of neglecting profoundly ethical and indeed religious aspects. In the 1790s, at the time of the Batavian Republic, the ethical and religious scope of the Dutch Enlightenment was closely bound up with the aspirations of the Dutch middle and upper-middle classes. Protestant ministers and Catholic priests, headmasters of grammar schools and university teachers, lawyers and physicians, gazetteers and other cultivated professionals formed the core of the intellectual elite that criticized the dominant values of the Dutch ancien régime and drafted the outlines of new social arrangements. The

1. S. Schama, "The Enlightenment in the Netherlands," in *The Enlightenment in National Context*, ed. R. Porter and M. Teich (Cambridge, 1981), p. 70. On the Dutch Enlightenment, see H. H. Zwager, *Nederland en de Verlichting* (Bussum, 1972); P. J. Buijsters, "Les Lumières hollandaises," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 77 (1972): 179-215; H. Bots and J. de Vet, "Les Provinces-Unies et les Lumières," *Dix-Huitième Siècle*, no. 10 (1978): 101-122; W. W. Mijnhardt, "De Nederlandse Verlichting: Een terreinverkenning," in *Figuren en figuraties. Acht opstellen aangeboden aan J. C. Boogman* (Groningen, 1979), pp. 1-25; G. J. Schutte and O. W. Dubois, "Rede en gezuiverde godsdienst: De Spectator 'De Denker' als spiegel van de Christelijke Verlichting," *Radix* 11 (1985): 14-22; L. H. M. Wessels, "Tussen ratio en revelatio: De Nederlandse Verlichting beoordeeld," in *De periferie in het centrum, opstellen door collegae aangeboden aan M. G. Spiertz*, ed. P. J. A. N. Rietbergen (Nijmegen, 1986), pp. 135-161.

social and cultural roots of these groups of spokesmen,² whose main representatives found each other from 1784 onward in the *Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* (Society for Public Welfare)³ gave the Dutch Enlightenment in the revolutionary era three main characteristics: (1) a basic acceptance of the society of orders, which had to remain the framework for a redistribution of social and cultural responsibilities, no longer along the lines of birth or rank, but according to merit; (2) the creation and diffusion of a strongly negative image of both the aristocracy (including the urban patriciate) and the poor; and (3) the conviction that a rational religion, respectful of a well-ordered society, would be the best transmission channel for enlightened virtue and the most convenient legitimation of the new societal order.

In the tradition of London's spectatorial journalism, inaugurated in Holland by the gazetteer Justus van Effen, such writers as the publisher and gazetteer Elie Luzac (himself the son of a French refugee), the physician Simon Stijl, and the minister and theologian Ysbrand van Hamelsveld blamed the rich for having forgotten the ancient Batavian virtues and for following the luxurious, depraved, and indeed ridiculous lifestyle of the French court aristocracy. Equally, the poor incurred reproach for still living in the savage, childish age of civilization. Hence the enlightened ideologies of the middle class, whether Patriot or Oran-

2. For the link between social aspirations and cultural developments, see the indications given by J. W. Oerlemans, "Carrièreisme en cultuur," *Hollands Maandblad*, no. 427/428 (1983): 41-50, and J. W. Oerlemans, *Sociale ongelijkheid als cultuurhistorisch thema*, Inaugural lecture, Erasmus University, Rotterdam, 1986 (Groningen, 1987).

3. See W. W. Mijnhardt and A. J. Wichers, *Om het algemeen volksgeluk: Twee eeuwen particulier initiatief, 1784-1984* (Edam, 1984). In an undated report to Louis Napoleon, king of Holland (1806-1810), the board of the *Nut* defined its scope as follows:

"But: Elle se propose de travailler à l'avancement de la vertu et des bonnes mœurs conformément aux principes fondamentaux du christianisme parmi les classes moins cultivées. Objet de ses travaux. Les objets des travaux de la Société sont: I. les adultes. II. la génération naissante.

I. Elle travaille pour les adultes en leur fournissant des livres qui réunissant l'utile à l'agréable tendent à leur donner des idées nettes de leurs devoirs, des notions claires de la nature, des arts et des sciences qui influent sur le bonheur des classes moins éclairées et moins favorisées de la fortune. . . . II. Elle s'occupe de la génération naissante, en introduisant un mode d'enseignement plus analogue à la vraie marche du développement des facultés intellectuelles: en enseignant aux instituteurs la manière d'inculquer, déjà de bonne heure, à la jeunesse les principes des vertus sociales: et en fournissant des livres élémentaires à l'usage des écoles. . . . Borne de ses travaux. Pour devenir d'autant plus utile aux classes moins cultivées, la Société a renoncé absolument à tout ce qui peut porter une empreinte scientifique: elle s'efforce à faire germer les vrais principes du christianisme, sans en toucher les dogmes; elle veut vaincre les préjugés; mais elle ne protège aucun système; elle veut former de bons citoyens, mais elle n'entre en aucune discussion sur des matières politiques, et s'attache uniquement à démontrer que le bonheur d'un Etat est fondé sur la vertu des individus qui le composent." Paris, Archives Nationales, AF IV 1816, pièce 12.

gist, agreed on the need to regenerate Dutch society by focusing on a historical standard of national virtues, legitimated by religion in its enlightened form, that is, void of all superstition. To realize a nation-directed kind of responsible virtue, it was necessary to restrain the internationalizing tendency of the rich while educating the poor out of their uncivilized, prenatal savagery of mind and manners.

The Dutch Enlightenment generated a two-pronged educational approach. A negative strategy opposed "depraved French taste," marked, it was claimed, by a luxurious, effeminate, and immoral way of life. French society was depicted as being imbued with an idle sense of honor, not the sound search for profit that was presumed to have been one of the major virtues of the ancient Dutch natives.⁴ The positive strategy was a "civilizing offensive" toward the lower classes, which were considered to be living in an almost animal-like condition. As Van Hamelsveld put it, "entirely destitute of any skills, completely thoughtless and unconscious of their origin, duties, and destiny, ignorant of God and his commandments, a considerable part of these unfortunates live only for the passions; their human shape is the unique feature that distinguishes them from the brutes of creation. Their amusements are excessive, their behavior is savage."⁵

In a study about the notion of "the people," G. Bollème has shown that in eighteenth-century France the approach to "popular culture" in the anthropological sense of the word—that is, the lifestyle of the lower classes—leaned heavily on very old connotations of the term, most of which users of the word were normally unaware of.⁶ From ancient times, "the people" were imagined to possess certain stereo-

4. C. J. Nieuwenhuys, *Proeve eener geneeskundige plaatsbeschrijving der stad Amsterdam*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam, 1816), pp. 222–234. E. Luzac, *Hollands rijkdom*, vol. 4 (Leiden, 1783), pp. 272–273; see also W. Frijhoff, "Modèles éducatifs et circulation des hommes: Les ambiguïtés du second Refuge," in *The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the Dutch Republic: International Congress of the Tricentennial, Leyde 1–3 April 1985* (Amsterdam-Maarssen, 1986), pp. 72–74; W. Frijhoff, "l'Usage du français en Hollande, XVIIe–XIXe siècles: Propositions pour une modèle d'interprétation," *Etudes du Linguistique Appliquée* 78 (1990): 17–26.

5. Y. van Hamelsveld, *De zedelijke toestand der Nederlandsche natie op het einde der 18e eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1791), pp. 117–146. I am indebted to J. Lenders, whose Ph.D. thesis "De burger en de volksschool" (Nijmegen, 1988) includes a fine compilation of enlightened Dutch utterances about the lower classes. For the notion of "civilizing offensive," related to the theoretical perspectives of Norbert Elias, see B. Kruithof, "De deugdzame natie: Het burgerlijke beschavingsoffensief van de Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen tussen 1784 en 1860," *Symposium Tijdschrift voor Maatschappijwetenschap* 1 (1980): 22–37; A. Mitzman, "Het beschavingsoffensief: mentaliteit, cultuur en psyche," *Sociologisch Tijdschrift* 13 (1986): 179–222; A. Pouw, "'Waare verlichting' van de vrouw: Vrouwen en gezin binnen het burgerlijk beschavingsideaal van de Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen, 1784–ca. 1840," *Comenius*, no. 23 (1986): 292–317.

6. G. Bollème, *Le peuple par écrit* (Paris, 1986), pp. 22–37.

typical features: uncontrolled strength, vital force, endless noise, gathering crowds, inconstant and passionate behavior, but also spontaneity and creativeness. Out of these stereotypes, came the ambiguous attitude of the enlightened middle classes toward their "people": the need to restrain and control the preindustrial crowd for the benefit of a well-ordered society clashed with the desire to use the unspoiled qualities and virtues of the uncivilized for the regeneration of the whole nation.

Such a semantic analysis of the Dutch term for the "people" does not yet exist for the northern Netherlands, but the basic lines of its linguistic evolution do not seem very different from French usage. As early as the Middle Ages, the Middle Dutch word *volc* (*populus*) acquired two different meanings: it indicated either the whole body of a city, region, or country (*gens, natio*) or the (socially speaking) lesser part of it (*plebs, vulgus* [*in populo*]; in Dutch *'t gemeyn* or, later, *'t grauw*).⁷ A closer look at contemporary accounts of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century disturbances in Holland reveals the primacy of the second meaning under the pen of the middle-class eyewitnesses: *volk* or *volkje* indicates the uneducated and even riotous mob, as opposed to the hard-headed *burgerij* (the citizens) and the ruling classes.⁸ Significantly, Anthoni van der Helm, one of the few witnesses of lower, artisan origin, did not use the word *volk* at all but referred only to the citizenship as a whole. Nevertheless, several decades later the nobleman Joan Derk van der Capellen addressed his famous pamphlet *Aan het volk van Nederland* to the whole of the people of the Netherlands, excluding, however implicitly, the unbridled mob, which both the Orangists and the Patriots feared.

The ambiguity of the notion of "the people" accounts for two divergent approaches to "popular culture" on the part of eighteenth-century elites and for a twofold form of "popular politics." Both approaches introduced a new element: they acknowledged the autonomous existence of the "people" as a particular, socially relevant category with a definite place and even task in the history of humankind and related it to the equally new concept of "nation," imprisoned in a unitary state.⁹ Both approaches "discovered" the people as an *object* of

7. E. Verwijs and J. Verdam, *Middelnederlandsch woordenboek*, vol. 9 (The Hague, 1929), pp. 842–845, s.v. 'Volc'.

8. See the documents edited by R. M. Dekker, *Oproeren in Holland gezien door tijdgenoten: Ooggetuigeverlagen van oproeren in de provincie Holland ten tijde van de Republiek (1690–1750)* (Assen, 1979).

9. Compare the following statement taken from a booklet about the rights of man and citizen, probably issued on behalf of the *Nut* in 1795: "Remember, children, true liberty is obedience to the Law, founded upon welfare of the people"; *De regten van den mensch en*

cultural or historical interest, set apart either in space or in time, and both made them the *subject* of historical action, each in its own manner.¹⁰ Each approach can be seen in an author who might be considered typical of the first generation of ethnologists—or, better, of proto-ethnologists—able to look at the cultural practices and beliefs of the people in their own country with an observer's eye, from a distant point of view.

The first approach, embedded in the mainstream of enlightened encyclopedism, constructed a typical people in the dimension of time. In contrast to the vices of the rich and mighty, it demonstrated how the virtues of the ancient Batavian "nation" still persisted in that part of the people that had not yet been spoiled by corrupting influences from outside. Its main representative in the eighteenth century was a physician and, after 1773, reader in natural history at Leiden University, Johannes Le Francq van Berkhey (1729–1813). In spite of his aristocratic name, Le Francq was the son of a Leiden woolen draper and the grandson of an art dealer who gave him a broad education including classical and modern languages, drawing, and commercial studies. This encyclopedic education endowed him with the habit of observation, and his family's fortune enabled him to travel around the country. These two advantages enabled him to write the comprehensive *Natuurlyke historie van Holland* (Natural History of Holland, 1769–1778; French trans. 1781). This opus magnum may qualify him as the founding father of Dutch cultural anthropology.¹¹

After describing the geography and geology of the province of Holland—which is the only one he dealt with—Le Francq offered a systematic description of the Dutch people and their life. First, following a

burger, en de pligten daaruit voortvloeiende, voor de vaderlandsche jeugd (Leiden, 1795), p. 27.

10. For a comparable evolution in Germany, see H. Moser, "Volk, Volksgeist, Volkskultur: Die Auffassungen J. G. Herders in heutiger Sicht," *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 53 (1956–1957): 127–140. The *vulgus* meaning of the term led Herder to the concept of "Volkssitte," but he made a clear distinction between the creative *vulgus* and the destructive mob. For bibliographic indications of the invention of "popular culture," see W. Frijhoff, "Literatuurwijzer," in *Religieuze volkscultuur: De spanning tussen de voorgeschreven orde en de geleefde praktijk*, ed. G. Rooijakkers and Th. van der Zee (Nijmegen, 1986), pp. 137–171. On the concept itself, see W. Frijhoff "Popular Culture, a Useful Notion?" in *Alledaagsleven: Vrije tijd en cultuur*, vol. 2, ed. E. Meijer (Tilburg, 1987), pp. 581–587.

11. J. J. Voskuil, "Geschiedenis van de volkskunde in Nederland: Portret van een discipline," *Volkskundig Bulletin* 10 (1984): 53–55, whose analysis I follow. On Le Francq van Berkhey, see P. J. Meertens, "Joannes le Francq van Berkhey, ein Holländischer Volkskundler aus der Zeit der Aufklärung," in *In Memoriam Antonio Jorge Dias*, vol. 2 (Lisbon, 1974), pp. 309–317.

long tradition in Dutch historiography going back to Grotius (1610) and his predecessors, he identified the Dutch with the descendants of the Batavians mentioned by the Roman writer Tacitus.¹² He derived the current Dutch mentality from the state of mind, qualities, and virtues of the ancient Batavians. In the direct continuity between the two, he found a normative implication: real Dutch manners were similar to those of the Batavian people. Hence, in describing the lifestyle of the people of Holland, Le Francq paid particular attention to what he called its *volkseigen* aspects, that is, those aspects "typical of the people as such," the concept of "people" being employed here in a broad sense.¹³ His book dealt extensively with four topics: the physical condition, dress, attitudes of mind, and temper of the Dutch inhabitants. Moved by a scholar's curiosity and rather detached interest, Le Francq described the morals, manners, and passions of the Dutch, the rituals of their life cycle, and the conditions of their education.¹⁴

A most interesting part of Le Francq's study is not just the utterly careful description, which is still delightful to read, but the cultural differences suggested for various groups of Dutch inhabitants. His explanation was essentially historical. On the borders of the province of Holland and in the Dutch cities, the original inhabitants had in the course of history mingled with immigrants and foreigners whose divergent customs and mentality spoiled the natives. Consequently, Batavian and indeed Dutch virtue in its most pure and original form might be found in the rural areas in the heart of the province of Holland, surrounded by the circle of corrupted cities and towns. Le Francq's rather sober and realistic description did not aim at a huge project of popular education. The material prosperity and the relatively high level of cultural achievements of the countryside of the province of Holland in his time contrasted strongly with the miserable physical, material, and cultural condition of the urban poor.¹⁵ Nor did the enlightened stereotype of the good, unspoiled peasant imply a considerable effort of rural education.

12. See I. Schöffner, "The Batavian Myth during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Britain and the Netherlands*, vol. 5, ed. J. S. Bromley and E. H. Kossmann (The Hague, 1975), pp. 78–101; H. Kampinga, *De opvattingen over onze oudere vaderlandsche geschiedenis bij de Hollandsche historici der XVIe en XVIIe eeuw* (The Hague, 1917).

13. J. le Francq van Berkhey, *Natuurlyke historie van Holland*, 6 vols. (Amsterdam, 1769–1778), part. 3, vol. 4 (1776), pp. 413–414, 775. As far as I know, this term first occurs in the work of Le Francq, who seems to have coined it.

14. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 1286–1326.

15. See L. F. van Loo, "De armenzorg in de noordelijke Nederlanden, 1770–1854," in *Algemene geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, vol. 11 (Bussum, 1981), pp. 417–435.

To be sure, Le Francq was not the first to describe features of Dutch popular life. Beginning with such scholars as Erasmus (in his *Laus stultitiae* and *Colloquia*) and other humanist opponents of superstition, a long chain of predecessors had analyzed selected aspects of popular beliefs and practices.¹⁶ One of the most interesting of these was the Calvinist minister and physician Johannes Picardt (1600–1670). His antiquarian work about the Drenthe territory—where he was appointed—discloses a historical method that tries to establish a meaningful relation between the results of the author's personal observations, his discussions with members of his flock and other inhabitants of his region, and his learned culture, based on his readings in classical and biblical antiquity.¹⁷

But there are some fundamental differences between the early modern tradition of erudite polyhistorism on the one side and enlightened encyclopedism on the other.¹⁸ In a spirit of *curiositas*, of criticism of the unusual and extraordinary, the polyhistorians picked up odd features of local popular life—fairy tales, uncommon rituals, or the existence of unexplained objects or artifacts such as the *monticuli* in the flat Dutch landscape noted by Picardt—and tried to make some sense of them. They combined bits of learned culture, almost haphazardly and in any case at a local level, or at best they sought to establish formal or verbal analogies between old and new names or ancient and recent customs. What was new with enlightened encyclopedism was its focus on a *traditio*, its regional and ethnic fixation, and, within these limits, its distinctly universal pretensions. Le Francq did not describe particular customs of the popular classes, either strange or familiar; he described the people as a whole, through its customs, no matter how strange or fa-

16. See, for example, H. Trümpy, "Theorie und Praxis des volkstümlichen Erzählens bei Erasmus von Rotterdam," *Fabula* 20 (1979): 239–248; R. van Nahl, *Zauberglaube und Hexenwahn im Gebiet von Rhein und Maas: Spätmittelalterlicher Volksglaube im Werk Johan Weyers (1515–1588)* (Bonn, 1983); Chr. Daxelmüller, *Disputationes curiosae: Zum 'volkskundlichen' Polyhistorismus an den Universitäten des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Würzburg, 1979). In Holland, a famous and influential work was the compilation of food customs by C. van Alkemade and P. van der Schelling, *Nederlands displegtigheden*, 3 vols. (Rotterdam, 1732–1735).

17. J. Picardt, *Korte beschryvinge van eenige vergetene en verborgene Antiquiteiten der Provintie en Landen gelegen tusschen de Noord-Zee, de Yssel, Emse en Lippe* (Amsterdam, 1660). See also W. Frijhoff, *Cultuur, mentaliteit: Illusies van elites?* (Nijmegen, 1984), pp. 24–25.

18. On learned polyhistorism in the Netherlands, see J. Roelevink, *Gedicteerd verleden: Het onderwijs in de algemene geschiedenis aan de universiteit te Utrecht, 1735–1839* (Amsterdam-Maarssen, 1986).

miliar they might be.¹⁹ Phenomena ascribed formerly to the transcendent world were now reintegrated into the ordinary, immanent world and interpreted as mere disorder, a disturbance of the normal order that could be reestablished. Among the people, in their uniqueness, he distinguished between groups or sectors of inhabitants according to which of them had remained more or less true to the ancient universe of beliefs and practices. In doing so, he delimited areas for possible intervention by less neutral observers, who did not subdivide the Dutch cultural universe into a succession of historical layers or sediments. Instead, they employed a synchronic and spatial dichotomy: the contemporary culture of the rural "people" against that of the urban civilized elites.

In a certain sense, Le Francq looked at the people from within, as a participant observer. The people he discovered were fundamentally his own; his historical discourse about them served merely to define degrees of group loyalty to the common national identity. His warning was directed toward those who went beyond the continuity and solidarity of the people as a whole, who marched quicker than the natural rhythm of evolution of the commonwealth, the natural rhythm of an idealized countryside. That is why his description of Dutch culture was included in his natural history, the two terms of the title being of equal importance.

The other approach to the "people" by Dutch Enlightenment observers deliberately operated from without. It applied a radically different discourse to the observed reality, and it may be linked with another type of natural history, the one David Hume proclaimed in the middle of the eighteenth century. In his *Natural History of Religion*, Hume drew a sharp line between the religious experience of the intellectual elite and that of the "vulgar." Human beings, he insisted, are not natural monotheists who, through sin (therefore historically), have lost their original simplicity of vision. On the contrary, theism depends on achieving a coherent and rational view of the universe from which the enlightened mind might then deduce the existence of a supreme being. The history of humankind is not a simple history of decline from an

19. For the general trend of this evolution, see H. Bausinger, "Aufklärung und Aberglaube," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 37 (1963): 345-362; K. D. Sievers, "Aberglaube in der Sicht der protestantischen Orthodoxie und der Aufklärung: Entwicklungsgeschichtliche Betrachtungen," *Kieler Blätter zur Volkskunde* 13 (1981): 27-54.

original monotheism; it is marked by a constant tension between theistic and polytheistic ways of thinking. "It is remarkable," Hume noted, "that the principles of religion have had a flux and reflux in the human mind, and that men have a natural tendency to rise from idolatry to theism and to sink again from theism to idolatry."²⁰ So the diachronic approach of Le Francq was replaced by a synchronic explanation which, for the benefit of the whole commonwealth, authorized a cultural and religious policy from the educated toward the uneducated. It inaugurated what Henry May has called the "didactic" phase of the Enlightenment.

In itself, this was not a new attitude. Several decades of research in religious history have taught us that both the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic (Counter-)Reformation had a similar goal: the creation of a new community of Christians, whose common mark and spiritual warrant was knowledge about their faith.²¹ Anthropologically, the difference between the churches was not a greater or lesser tendency to superstition or to purity of faith but mainly a divergence of cultural tools used for attaining an identical scope. Puritan religion aimed at minimizing the semantic field of reality in order to achieve an almost naturally compelling movement toward God, whereas Catholic religion in its baroque alternative tried to maximize the universe of meaningful signs and symbols in order to pervade the whole society with God's theatrical ubiquity.

Both extremes were present in Dutch eighteenth-century society, although the Catholic alternative had to keep quiet within the gilt walls of richly decorated semiclandestine churches. As for the Puritan temptation, during the later seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries it permeated Dutch Calvinist mentality and imperceptibly changed its attitude toward the material aspects of life and religion, which it tried to remove from the field of perception. The monotheistic need for abstraction, as recorded by Hume, legitimated this long purifying effort, until in the beginning of the nineteenth century all the Protestant churches were turned into pure, whitewashed spaces, where the only relevant semantic feature was abstraction. We hear an unmistakable

20. D. Hume, "The Natural History of Religion," in *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, vol. 2 (London, 1875), p. 334sq.; quoted in P. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (New York, 1982), pp. 8-9.

21. This "acculturation" thesis of popular religion has been eloquently discussed and defended by J. Delumeau and R. Muchembled. Rather critical words have been uttered by J. Wirth, "Against the Acculturation Thesis," in *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800*, ed. K. von Greierz (London, 1984), pp. 66-78, followed by other scholars.

echo of this great design in the sermon preached at the Zeeland town of Veere in 1772 by the Reverend Josua van Iperen, at the occasion of the bicentennial of the Reformation: "Oh! what a metamorphosis! Wherever we go, wherever we turn, we find no images, no altars, nothing whatever that might give occasion for superstition. Everything tastes of the original Apostolic simplicity."²²

This traditional strategy of purifying interventionism in religious life received a new impetus during the Enlightenment. The synchronic approach that emphasized cultural differences defined new areas for intervention, areas in both religion and society. It linked religious ideals and civic virtues to form a single and compelling justification for intervention. Social reform, not encyclopedism, drove the movement. And social reform determined the limits of interventionism. Therefore, the "people" as defined by these reformers were no longer constituted along structural or functional lines (for example, clergy versus laity) but on the sociocultural lines of approach traced by the new reformers.

In tracing these lines, the reformers benefited from new achievements of the Enlightenment era, more precisely its great design of a new social morality involving all social classes. They also had available to them increasing medical knowledge and the new preventionist attitude of the medical professionals. When the medical world discussed society, in treatises presented before learned societies or in the new genre of "topographic descriptions," it defined sectors of susceptibility for physical and social disease, the two being closely linked in the current miasmatic paradigm.²³ This approach drew up parameters and prescribed material and social remedies. Parameters of the social and religious disease called "popular culture" or "superstition" were a credulous mentality, the emotional tyranny of noisy and passionate behavior, a dissoluteness of manners, a constant overexcitement, a fixation on colors and outer appearances—in brief, all the characteristics of childhood. Popular culture was the childish phase of civilization and its remedy was education.²⁴ Is it surprising that medical care, national

22. Original cited in C. A. van Swigchem, T. Brouwer, and W. van Os, *Een huis voor het woord: Het Protestantse kerkinterieur in Nederland tot 1900* (The Hague, 1984), p. 5.

23. See, for example, the *Verhandelingen van de Natuur- en Geneeskundige Correspondentie-Societeit* (1779 et. sq.); H. F. J. M. van den Eerenbeemt, "Arts en sociaal besef in Nederland in historisch perspectief," *Sociale Wetenschappen* 12 (1969): 1–50.

24. As late as 1859, this is still the basic perspective of a socially progressive physician like S. Coronel, *Middelburg voorheen en thans* (Middelburg, 1859), pp. 226–227. On the other hand, it is quite striking to recognize this "infantilizing" view in the interpretations of present-day authors, such as the historian Eugen Weber in his *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (London, 1972), especially chap. 1, and more

morals, and public education together formed the threefold subject of the new national "agent" (minister) Van Kooten, appointed according to Article 92 of the new constitution, the *staatsregeling* of 1798?

Defining areas of intervention required a search for the socio-cultural symptoms of disease. According to enlightened medical and sociohygienic convictions, the popular classes lived in a bestial state of ignorance and ferocity, far from the knowledge and self-restraint that marked civilization. Not every symptom of disease, however, called for immediate intervention. Mere superstitious errors might be harmless. In his inaugural lecture, *Oratio de prudenti Christi apostolorumque et evangelistarum consilio sermones et scripta ad captum atque intellectum vulgi quantum illud fieri potuit accomodantium*,²⁵ the newly appointed professor of divinity at the Remonstrant seminary, Paulus van Hemert (1756–1825), upheld the theory that Jesus Christ and his apostles had deliberately conformed themselves to the harmless superstitious errors of their time, although they knew better, and that they had even been able to take advantage of those superstitions and use them in their preaching to the vulgar.

It is important to realize that popular culture was not the only form of "social disease." The diagnosis did not simply follow the divisions of the current social stratification. Reflecting on what he called the nervous period (*zenuw-periode*) of the eighteenth century, the Amsterdam physician H. F. Thijssen (1787–1830) offered a diagnosis of the revolutionary disorder. Writing in 1824, he asserted that it was the disturbance of the equilibrium between reason and sentiment that had caused fanaticism (a fertile soil for revolution) and magnetism. He blamed, not the popular classes in particular, but the citizens as a whole. The real revolution was another one: "It is a good thing that now the seeds of the revolution germinate, that the hazes of prejudice, dissolved in the higher regions of society, will soon be equally removed in its lower regions by the sun of the civilization; and that the citizen, put on the road to civilization by all the schools of the city and the numerous institutions for public welfare, will follow the more distinguished on the path of morality."²⁶

implicitly in the work of many advocates of the "civilizing offensive" hypothesis. See also J. Devlin, *The Superstitious Mind* (New Haven–London, 1986), p. 218.

25. (Amsterdam, 1791), with a Dutch translation.

26. H. F. Thijssen, *Geschiedkundige beschouwing der ziekten in de Nederlanden: In verband met de gesteldheid des lands en de leefwijze der inwoners* (Amsterdam, 1824), pp. 70–71.

Therefore, when the enlightened elites stigmatized social groups for cultural backwardness, they did not do so merely because of their socioeconomic position and perspective. The definition the elite employed may also have been influenced by other factors, such as discrimination inflicted by some groups on others. As a matter of fact, the social reformers singled out three social sectors, each the target of a specific elite group. One sector was the mass of unemployed urban poor, which became the object of reform by local elites, who criticized their immoral way of life. A second sector was the superstitious peasantry of the inner provinces, who were to be civilized in a common offensive led by school teachers, clerics, and other representatives of those professions which, through their movement from one locality to another, were carriers and propagators of the supralocal patterns of culture called "civilization." A third sector was defined less along socioeconomic than religious lines; it concerned those people who lived in the darkness of Popery (Catholicism), who needed to be brought to civilized enlightenment. This concern led a broad group of interventionists to stigmatize all dissenting forms of belief and practice.²⁷

One author in particular exemplifies the second and synchronic approach to cultural differences commonly proposed by the Enlightenment. Stephanus Hanewinkel (1776–1856) was the son of a Calvinist minister of Nuenen in the predominantly Catholic province of Brabant—the same village where, nearly a century later, Van Gogh, the son of one of his successors, painted his famous *Potato Eaters*. Hanewinkel was himself from 1790 onward a minister in several little parishes of the same province, a Calvinist rarity in a sky of Catholics. He used his leisure to make short trips around the province, observing all sorts of customs, speaking and sometimes debating with local people, but apparently always without revealing his identity; otherwise, the answers would have been too hostile to permit frank discussion about local beliefs. The account of his travels across the province, dated fictitiously to 1798–1799 (when he was a minister in Holland) and written as a series of letters to a friend in Holland, qualifies him as another protoethnologist in the northern Netherlands, but one of a rather dif-

27. See W. Frijhoff, "Problèmes d'une approche de la 'religion populaire' dans un pays de confession mixte: Le cas des Provinces-Unies," in *La Religion populaire: Colloques internationaux du CNRS*, no. 576 (Paris, 1979); W. Frijhoff, "Katholieke toekomstverwachting ten tijde van de Republiek: Structuur, en grondlijnen tot een interpretatie," *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 98 (1983): 430–459; A. W. F. M. van de Sande, "Beeldvorming over Noord-Brabant en antipapisme in het begin van de negentiende eeuw," in *De periferie in het centrum*, ed. Rietbergen, pp. 95–108.

ferent kind from Le Francq.²⁸ Nothing escaped his attention: popular religious or magical practices, birth or funeral rituals, pilgrimages to holy shrines or sacred trees, living traditions about buildings, historical events or local heroes, forms of magic or witchcraft, prophecies about coming times.

Instead of trying systematically to recreate the social and cultural universe of the people observed, Hanewinkel employed another unifying principle. From the priests, teachers, and burgomasters to the simple faithful, he saw all Catholics and the whole range of their activities, beliefs, and practices under the common denominator of superstition, defined in another anonymous treatise, apparently written by the same author, as "the adoption as infallible truths of matters contrary to sound reason."²⁹ For Hanewinkel, the Catholic faith as a whole was simply an obscurantist superstition, and its priests, who willingly manipulated their flock, deserved no more respect than their faithful. On the contrary, the Brabant case was living proof of the need for enlightened instruction. Only after such instruction could toleration toward other (Protestant) opinions arise and a responsible people shape an adult nation. As long as the obscurantist Catholic clergy, educated at that hotbed of spiritual depravation, the University of Louvain (and similar Catholic institutions), remained in charge of the people's instruction, the enlightened Protestant elite would have to keep exclusive responsibility for the nation's destiny, planning at the same time an efficient fight against the darkness of all the Catholic beliefs.

Consequently, in the Enlightenment period and into the early nineteenth century, two approaches toward popular culture may be distinguished in the northern Netherlands: a more explanatory, anthropological approach, using a historical, or at least diachronic, method, and a more normative approach, using a synchronic method. Both approaches shared many characteristics but started from a fundamentally different preoccupation and led to even more different attitudes toward popular culture. The diachronic approach, rooted in encyclopedism, may be considered the starting point of what would soon be called folklore research.³⁰ Dutch folklorists of the early nineteenth century,

28. [S. Hanewinkel], *Reize door de Majorij van 's Hertogenbosch in den jaare 1798–1799*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1799–1800). Of course, this whole travel account may be fictitious.

29. [S. Hanewinkel], *Gedachten over de Meiërij van 's Hertogenbosch en derzelver inwoners bij het begin der negentiende eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1801), p. 18.

30. For simultaneous evolutions abroad, see H. Bausinger, *Volkskunde: Von der Altertumswissenschaft zur Kulturanalyse* (Berlin, 1972); R. M. Dorson, *The British Folklorists: A History* (Chicago, 1968); J. Copans and J. Jamin, eds., *Aux origines de l'anthropologie française: Les Mémoires de la Société des Observateurs de l'Homme en l'an VIII* (Paris, 1978);

such as Nicolaas Westendorp (who in 1819 founded the first Dutch folklore periodical under the eloquent title *Antiquiteiten*), the landed proprietor and poet Anthony C. W. Staring, or the librarian L. Ph. C. van den Bergh, had an essentially antiquarian interest in the matter of popular culture. They constructed, invented, and discovered it, departing from the perceived difference of cultural forms, values, and beliefs produced by social groups they identified as popular from their educated point of view. They sought mainly to find a scientific explanation of existing cultural differences, with the help of all the resources of the historical method, including archaeology and ancient, classical, or Germanic mythology. For the folklorists, popular customs were historical customs, "survivals," deemed to disappear as time went on. Superstitions and popular beliefs were a consequence of unequal rhythms in the cultural evolution of social groups.³¹ The advancing unification of society would resolve the problem.

The folklorists were not unaware of the problem posed to the cultural identity of their society by the very existence of something like popular culture. The most important folklorist of the first half of the nineteenth century, the Frisian Mennonite minister Joost Hiddes Halbertsma, wrote in 1837:

Once and for all it should be said that, speaking of popular ideas, popular superstition, popular customs, the character or the idiom of the people, we always talk about the so-called common man. In a

M. de Certeau, D. Julia, and J. Revel, "La Beauté du mort: le Concept de culture populaire," *Politique Aujourd'hui* (December 1970): 3-23; M. Ozouf, "L'invention de l'ethnographie française: Le Questionnaire de l'Académie celtique," *Annales E.S.C.* 36 (1981): 210-230; H. Senn, "Folklore Beginnings in France: The Académie celtique, 1804-1813," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 18 (1981): 23-33; B. Kilborn, "Anthropological Thought in the Wake of the French Revolution: La Société des Observateurs de l'Homme," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 23 (1982): 73-91; N. Belmont, *Paroles païennes: Mythe et folklore* (Paris, 1986).

31. Literally, *superstitio* means "what survives." The terminological change implies a rationalization and a secularization of the perspective; see P. Saintyves, "Les Origines de la méthode comparative et la naissance du folklore: Des superstitions aux survivances," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 105 (1932): 44-70. The "survival" hypothesis has long remained a basic tool of folklore research. It was still an identifying instrument for P. J. Meertens, "Vorreformatische Relikte in den reformatischen Niederlanden," in *Festschrift Matthias Zender: Studien zu Volkskultur, Sprache und Landesgeschichte*, vol. 1, ed. F. Ennen and G. Wiegmann (Bonn, 1972), pp. 395-411. I discuss some methodological implications in W. Frijhoff, "Vraagtekens bij het vroegmoderne kersteningsoffensief," in *Religieuze volkscultuur*, ed. Rooijakkers and Van der Zee, pp. 71-98. J. W. Buisman, "Secularisering en maatschappij in Nederland in de tweede helft van de achttiende eeuw," in *Rede, sentiment en ervaring: Sociale wetenschap in de achttiende eeuw*, ed. W. Arts and J. K. M. Gevers (Deventer, 1983), pp. 36-50, makes clear that the disenchantment of the world had to travel far before reaching the bulk of the Protestant ministers, who were obsessed by an interpretation of society and history in terms of guilt and punishment. That is why Balthasar Bekker, the late seven-

moral and a linguistic, and partly in a civic sense, the common people are properly speaking the people. Language, lifestyle, manners, and customs are a subject of agreement among the affluent people; there is not and cannot be anything national in it, because they conform to a standard that lies beyond the nation. The higher they climb, the more accurate they follow that standard and the more all the affluent people of Europe resemble each other.³²

In this passage, Halbertsma constructed an opposition between the freely chosen standard of elite behavior (civilization) and the traditional culture of the people, imprisoned in space and time.

The representatives of the second approach directed their main effort at narrowing this gap, by liberating the people from their passions and their uncontrolled social condition and imposing on them the free choice of a strict system of social codes and cultural norms: a new, more rigid prison for the benefit of society. The individual would gain self-consciousness and the self-respect resulting from a free sacrifice on the altar of the societal edifice. During the whole nineteenth century, social hygienics departed from the synchronic approach of the "people" in order to intervene actively in the structuring of social and cultural ideals, practices, and relationships, in brief, to reform popular culture. Beginning with the *Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* and its obstinate struggle against magical practices and superstitious convictions, the inadmissibility of the existence of popular beliefs and practices in a well-ordered society legitimized unremitting intervention in the lower social classes.³³ This interventionism covered the reality of those beliefs and practices with a thick, intellectual and normative dis-

teenth-century minister and fighter against a certain theological conception of demonology, can be praised by his enlightened colleague Jacobus Scheltema as a forerunner in his battle with superstition; see J. Scheltema, "Het leeven, de leer en lotgevallen van Balthasar Bekker," in *Algemeene vaderlandsche letteroefeningen* (1804), pt. 2, pp. 49-67, 97-111, 145-157.

32. J. H. Halbertsma, "De witte wiven," *Overijsselsche Volksalmanak* 2 (1837): 246-247. In his introduction to J. van Lennep, *Proeve van het Plat-Amsterdamsch* (Deventer, 1845), p. 37, the same Halbertsma gave a similar definition. See also M. F. Schatz, *Plat Amsterdams in Its Social Context: A Sociolinguistic Study of the Dialect of Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 1986), p. 29.

33. See, for example, H. W. van der Ploeg, *Het belang der waare Volkverlichting* (Amsterdam, 1800); G. Bakker, *Betoog van het ongegronde, onzedelijke en schadelijke der vooroordeelen omtrend de waarzeggerijen, toverijen, spookerijen, enz.* (Amsterdam, 1802). On the concept of popular Enlightenment, see J. Voss, "Der gemeine Mann und die Volksaufklärung im späten 18. Jahrhundert," in *Vom Elend der Handarbeit*, ed. H. Mommsen and W. Schulze (Stuttgart, 1981), pp. 258-283; J. Voss, "Zur deutschen Aufklärungsdiskussion im späten 18. Jahrhundert," *Innsbrucker Historische Studien* 7/8 (1985): 263-283; R. Vierhaus, "'Aufklärung' et monde populaire," in *Histoire sociale, sensibilités collectives et*

course that makes it extremely difficult for us to reconstruct it from within. It would be exaggerated to deny the mere existence of elements and expressions of early modern or even modern popular culture. To what extent and at what moment that culture possessed its own autonomy and a proper, inner cohesion, one that was not derived from elite and hence unifying discourse about it—that of the folklorists and that of the interventionists—remains a subject of research. But that is quite another story.

mentalités. *Mélanges Robert Mandrou* (Paris, 1985), pp. 495–505. For the Netherlands, see the brief survey, beginning with the *Nut*, by H. Nijenhuis, *Volksopvoeding tussen elite en massa: Een geschiedenis van volwasseneneducatie in Nederland* (Meppel, 1981).