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‘The very wound of this ill news’: Maximilien Morillon and the impact of bad news during the early years of the Dutch Revolt, 1566–74

ROSANNE M. BAARS 

In the autumn of 1566, the clergyman Maximilien Morillon noted that news about iconoclasm in the Netherlands had severely affected the health of his king.¹ Reportedly a violent reaction had shaken the Spanish ruler Philip II: ‘when the King heard about the sacking of the churches, he pulled his beard, swearing on the soul of his father that it would cost them, and he had a fever that lasted twenty-four hours.’² A year later, troops of the Duke of Alba arrived in the Low Countries, tasked with restoring peace and civil order. For decades, the Low Countries would be weighed down by civil war. Battles, sieges and plundering soldiers were the most immediate dangers, but the local inhabitants also had to deal, on an everyday basis, with the constant pressure of upsetting news.

This article studies the importance given by inhabitants of the sixteenth-century Netherlands, and in particular the elite, to the unpleasant effects of bad news: illness, feelings of uncertainty, and discouragement. Its case study is Maximilien Morillon (1517–1586), the Prévôt of Aire and vicar-general of Mechelen, one of this period’s most prolific letter writers. When his patron Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle had to leave the Low Countries in 1564, he became Granvelle’s main correspondent and informant: ‘the ears and eyes of Granvelle in the Low Countries’.³ Scholars of the troubles in the Low Countries

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¹ The quotation in the title is from Shakespeare, *King John*, V.vi.25. All Shakespeare quotations in this article are from *The Folger Shakespeare*, <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/> (accessed July 2022).

² ‘L’on dict que le Roy, entendant les saccagemens des églises, s’est tire la barbe, jurant par l’âme de son père qu’il coutera chier, et qu’il print la fiebre que luy dura xxiv heures.’ Edmond Pouillet and M. C. Piot (eds.), *Correspondance du Cardinal de Granvelle, 1565–1586*, 12 vols. (Bruxelles: Commission Royale d’Histoire, 1877–96) 1, 509; Geoffrey Parker, *Impudent King: A New Life of Philip II* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014) 149.

³ Raymond Fagel, ‘Cardinal Granvelle and the Revolt in the Low Countries: Long Distance Communication and Information 1567–1577’, forthcoming, 3. I would like to thank Raymond Fagel for sending me his article.

have almost exclusively focused on his descriptions of political developments.⁴ Yet, as Granvelle and Morillon shared many mutual friends, a great part of his letters was taken up with news and gossip about these members of the Netherlandish and international elite.⁵ Moreover, Morillon was a highly educated and perceptive man who knew how to express his sentiments well. This article will focus on various cultural aspects of dealing with bad news, such as his remarks about the negative effects of news on people in his extensive network, the difficulty of delivering bad news, and the strategies he adopted to cope with unsettling reports. It concentrates on the uncertain first years of the Dutch Revolt, bookended by the open-air preaching in 1566 on the one side and the sieges and warfare in the first half of the 1570s on the other.

Traditionally, historical scholarship has paid a great deal of attention to news and propaganda during the Dutch Revolt.⁶ Recent studies have underlined the various forms of communication and the spread of news, emphasizing the importance of oral accounts.⁷ The arrival of good news in a town has left more conspicuous traces than bad news has. Monica Stensland has demonstrated how the Habsburg authorities celebrated good news abundantly with festivities and thanksgiving masses.⁸ News pamphlets that celebrated victories were in demand.⁹ Bad news tended to be suppressed or ignored. Yet in understanding the mechanisms of early modern news and the effects of rumour, propaganda, and its reception, we also have to consider the hitherto understudied impact of bad news, and feelings of uncertainty as perceived by Morillon and his contemporaries. Thus, as I argue, a greater focus on the impact of bad news will broaden our understanding of the various cultural aspects of news consumption in the sixteenth-century Netherlands.

The emotional turn of the past decade has also influenced the study of conflicts in the sixteenth century. Susan Broomhall has studied the history of

⁴ Historians often refer to him as ‘Granvelle’s faithful correspondent’. See for instance Alastair Duke, *Reformation and Revolt in the Low Countries* (London: Hambledon and London, 2003); Peter Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots: The Political Culture of the Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

⁵ See Gustaaf Janssens, ‘De beginjaren van het aartsbisdom Mechelen. Kardinaal Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle en vicaris-generaal Maximilien Morillon, 1559–1583’, in: *Eigen Schoon & De Brabander*, 92 (2009), 41–66.

⁶ Alastair Duke, ‘Posters, Pamphlets and Prints: The Ways and Means of Disseminating Dissident Opinions on the Eve of the Dutch Revolt’, in Judith Pollmann and Andrew Spicer (eds.), *Dissident Identities in the Early Modern Low Countries* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 157–77; P.A.M. Geurts, *De Nederlandse Opstand in pamfletten, 1566–1584* (Nijmegen and Utrecht: Dekker & Van de Vegt, 1956); Craig E. Harline, *Pamphlets, Printing, and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic* (Dordrecht etc.: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987).

⁷ Femke Deen, ‘Handwritten Propaganda: Letters and Pamphlets in Amsterdam during the Dutch Revolt (1572–1578)’, in Femke Deen, David Onnekink, and Michel Reinders (eds.), *Pamphlets and Politics in the Dutch Republic* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 207–26; Femke Deen, *Publiek debat en propaganda in Amsterdam tijdens de Nederlandse Opstand: Amsterdam ‘Moorddam’ 1566–1578* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015); Henk van Nierop, ‘“And Ye Shall Hear of Wars and Rumours of Wars”. Rumour and the Revolt of the Netherlands’, in Judith Pollmann and Andrew Spicer (eds.), *Public Opinion and Changing Identities in the Early Modern Netherlands: Essays in Honour of Alastair Duke* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 69–86.

⁸ Monica Stensland, *Habsburg Communication in the Dutch Revolt* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 33–4.

⁹ Randall, *Credibility*, 109.

emotions in the wars of religion, demonstrating how violence affected individuals and communities beyond measure. For the Dutch Revolt, Erika Kuijpers has recently highlighted the various emotions, such as fear and indignation, that chroniclers experienced during the first stages of the Revolt.¹⁰ In a pioneering article based on the writings of chroniclers in Ghent, Amsterdam and Antwerp during the first dozen years of the Dutch Revolt, Henk van Nierop argued that rumour was a key source of information for the inhabitants of the Netherlands. He demonstrates how these stories exerted a ‘deep psychological impact’ on the population and were the source of fear, anxiety and despair.¹¹

In writing down reactions such as Philip II pulling his beard, Morillon shows himself to be a man of his age. The open and vehement expression of emotions and an adverse physical reaction upon hearing bad news were common amongst European elites, male and female alike, and these behaviours were socially accepted. Examples can be found in the works of many contemporary writers, poets and intellectuals, amongst them Carel van Mander, William Shakespeare and Michel de Montaigne.¹² Barbara Rosenwein has written about the existence of ‘emotional communities’ in various ages, weach community has its own particular norms of emotional valuation and expression.¹³ This raises some fundamental methodological questions. Are we able to access Morillon’s and his contemporaries’ emotions through his letters? Did he follow the specific rhetorical conventions of his ‘emotional community’? To what extent did he and his contemporaries express their emotions in a way that was fashionable in their milieu?¹⁴ These questions can probably never be answered conclusively. In this article, I aim to stress the importance of his noting down these emotions in his letters. Reactions to bad news had an important place in the correspondence of Morillon: they were considered to be a topic of interest for his patron Granvelle.

In the years after Granvelle’s departure to Rome, Morillon, then in Brussels, sent him weekly letters of at least several pages each, mostly using the tried and tested European courier service of the Tassis family.¹⁵ The library of Besançon

¹⁰ Erika Kuijpers, ‘Fear, Indignation, Grief and Relief: Emotional Narratives in War Chronicles from the Netherlands (1568–1648)’, in: J. Spinks and C. Zika (eds.), *Disaster, Death and the Emotions in the Shadow of the Apocalypse, 1400–1700* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 93–111. Cf. Susan Broomhall, ‘Disturbing Memories: Narrating Experiences and Emotions of Distressing Events in the French Wars of Religion’, in Erika Kuijpers et al. (eds.), *Memory before Modernity: Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 253–67.

¹¹ Van Nierop, “‘And Ye Shall Hear’”, 81.

¹² I will discuss this in more detail below.

¹³ Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006). See also her other works on the history of emotions, especially her recent *Anger. The Conflicted History of an Emotion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).

¹⁴ See for instance medieval rules and rituals of communication between churchmen, kings and nobles: Gerd Althoff, *Rules and Rituals in Medieval Power Games: A German Perspective* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2020).

¹⁵ On de Tassis (or Taxis) see: Paul Arblaster, *From Ghent to Aix: How They Brought the News in the Habsburg Netherlands, 1550–1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 35–40.

holds the letters he sent to Granvelle. For this article, I have studied the reports sent from 1566 to 1574, which amount to at least 634 letters.¹⁶ These first years of the Dutch Revolt, with its iconoclasm, the arrival of the troops of Alba and the offensives of the rebel armies were particularly uncertain and trying times for Morillon. In his reports he told Granvelle of political developments, church affairs, and the well-being of their mutual acquaintances, often using code. A large part of his letters deals with the mood of the members of his network and of the ‘common people’ during the Dutch Revolt’s early stages.

This article begins with an inventory of reactions to bad news during this time, based on the letters of Morillon and other contemporary letters and chronicles. The various examples stress the ubiquity of the phenomenon, the most commonly described responses being fever and melancholy. I will discuss how Morillon and his contemporaries comprehended these reactions. The article’s second section examines how contemporaries dealt with the negative effects of uncertainty and the wavering credibility of news. Although news recipients were used to waiting a long time for corroboration and were accustomed to keeping all options open, many demonstrably suffered from the constant flood of uncertain reports. The third section examines discouragement and its related problems. Contemporaries were deeply aware that news could be used as a weapon and that the enemy made often use of it. One of Morillon’s constant worries and complaints was the discouragement amongst his compatriots directly related to bad news.¹⁷ Another aspect closely connected to news, health and credibility that often appears in Morillon’s correspondence is the difficult task of delivering bad news. Lastly, I will look at the coping mechanisms Morillon employed to deal with depressing news. I will demonstrate that, although he worried about the effects of bad news on his friends, he himself used various means to stay healthy whilst burdened with large daily doses of distressing news.

REACTIONS TO BAD NEWS IN MORILLON’S LETTERS: FEVER, MELANCHOLY AND INSOMNIA

Maximilien Morillon was the son of Gui Morillon, professor of Greek at the University of Leuven, and Elisabeth de Mil. After first obtaining a degree in law, he chose, against the wishes of his parents, for a career in the Church. When probably still a student he met the statesman and councillor of Emperor Charles V, Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle, who was impressed by Morillon’s

¹⁶ Besançon, Bibliothèque Municipale, Collection Granvelle, Ms. Granvelle 92–101. I counted no letters in the years 1570 and 1571 and only two in 1573. In comparison, Pouillet and Piot included 259 letters from this collection in their edited correspondence of Granvelle. Hereafter I will refer to the edited letters as *CCG*.

¹⁷ Van Nierop, ‘And Ye Shall Hear’. Cf.: Denise Turrel, ‘L’arme de la rumeur pendant les guerres de Religion: Michel de L’Hospital, “fils d’un bonnet orangé”’, in Jérémie Foa and Paul-Alexis Mellet (eds.), *Le bruit des armes: mises en formes et désinformations en Europe pendant les guerres de religion (1560–1610)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2012), 89–111.

talents and secured him as a client.¹⁸ Anton van der Lem describes Morillon as ‘patriotic, royalist, orthodox catholic and, unlike Granvelle, impeccable in his lifestyle’.¹⁹ Morillon would rapidly rise through the ranks in the wake of Granvelle. After Granvelle was appointed bishop of Arras, where he did not reside, he appointed Morillon as his secretary, canon in Arras and superintendent of the school system there. Partly due to Granvelle’s influence, Morillon obtained one clerical benefice after another: in Mechelen, Ghent, Brussels, Tournai, Veurne, Lille, Aire, Utrecht and Halle amongst other cities. After Granvelle’s appointment as archbishop of Mechelen, Morillon was his deputy there.

At the beginning of the 1560s, the resentment of the Netherlandish nobility against Granvelle, whom they considered to be a parvenu, steadily rose. In 1564, his position in the Council of State had become untenable and Philip II advised Granvelle to leave the Netherlands and visit his mother in Besançon.²⁰ From there Granvelle travelled on to Rome, where he had to assist Louis de Requesens, the Spanish envoy to the Pope. From Rome, and later as Viceroy of Naples, he advised Philip II and the Duke of Alba on the policy to be pursued in the Netherlands. He left Morillon in the Netherlands to act as his vicar general of the archbishopric of Mechelen and function as his informant. Left without his important patron, the situation would worsen for Morillon, as a few years later, the Dutch Revolt broke out. Confronted with violent iconoclasm, and Catholics fleeing before the advancing rebel troops, Morillon’s comfortable position as a prominent Catholic clergyman was suddenly in danger.²¹ Yet he remained in the Netherlands to act as Granvelle’s informant and confidante.

Raymond Fagel has recently analysed the communication lines between the Cardinal and the Low Countries in the first phase of the Revolt.²² He names for instance the Duke of Alba, Pedro del Castillo and Luis del Río, who belonged to important Spanish merchant families in the Low Countries, and many other prominent or less prominent inhabitants of the Netherlands as Granvelle’s correspondents. Yet Morillon stands out as his most steady and trusted correspondent throughout the years, ‘the center of the Cardinal’s intelligence in the Low Countries’.²³ He maintained good relations with most bureaucrats in Brussels and constantly searched for new useful informants. Morillon differs from many of Granvelle’s other correspondents in possessing a very evocative style of writing – his letters are full of atmosphere and details – and in displaying a penchant for emotional

¹⁸ On Granvelle and his family see for instance: Krista De Jonge and Gustaaf Janssens (eds.), *Les Granvelle et les anciens Pays-Bas* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2000).

¹⁹ See his short biography by Anton van der Lem on the Leiden University Dutch Revolt Website <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/dutch/personen/M/Pages/morillon.aspx> (accessed July 2022).

²⁰ Fagel, ‘Cardinal Granvelle’, 1–2.

²¹ https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/dutch/personen/G/Pages/granvelle_antoine.aspx (accessed July 2022).

²² Fagel, ‘Cardinal Granvelle’.

²³ *Ibidem*, 13.

scenes. He described for instance talking to another client of Granvelle's who 'almost [had] tears in his eyes'.²⁴ Granvelle's style was more business-like, yet he was frequently open to Morillon about his concerns and sympathies. Holding an important position as Viceroy of Naples, he wrote less often than Morillon – who in 1572 sent at least 84 very long letters to Granvelle. The Cardinal did comment on the writing style of his correspondents: at one point he criticized his informant Claude Bélin de Chassy: 'I beg you not to write to me in parables, but to write clearly what you want to say'.²⁵ Yet the extensive and elaborate letters of Morillon, who possessed a remarkable talent for gauging and describing the mood, seemed to have pleased him.

In his letters to Granvelle, Maximilien Morillon expressed his belief that the mounting troubles in the Low Countries in the 1560s and 1570s were exerting an effect on the health of their acquaintances. The most common complaints he mentioned were sorrow, fever, melancholy and trouble with sleeping.²⁶ In May 1572, he wrote his patron about the poor health of Josse de Courteville, who had left the Netherlands in the entourage of Philip II and had returned in the suite of the Duke of Alba. As Morillon wrote: 'I believe that his illness is made worse by sorrow about what he sees happening'.²⁷ Later that year, Morillon visited his brother-in-law, who was 'more ill with grief because of the present calamities than with corporal indisposition'.²⁸

Some years earlier, news about the impending arrival of the Duke of Alba had caused governess-general Duchess Margaret of Parma, or so Morillon had heard, to suffer from fevers.²⁹ Morillon also recorded how Maximilien Marzille, a nobleman from the court of Charles V, 'had died from fear' that the Count of Egmont would blame him for the troubles.

Marzille has died of pure fear that the count of Egmont, when visiting him, will blame him for what is happening. This idea has taken such a strong hold of him that the poor man fell ill with a hot fever that has made him half desperate, always rambling about Madame de Parme and her government.³⁰

²⁴ 'quasi les larmes aux yeux'. Ibidem, 9.

²⁵ 'Je vous prie non m'escrive par paraboles, mais cler, ce que vous vouldrez dire.' Ibidem, 7.

²⁶ The manifestations of melancholy in the early modern period have been extensively studied. See for instance: Angus Gowland, 'The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy', *Past and Present*, 191 (2006), 77–120; Olivia Weisser, *Ill Composed. Sickness, Gender, and Belief in Early Modern England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015); Erin Sullivan, *Beyond Melancholy. Sadness and Selfhood in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Elena Carrera, 'Understanding Mental Disturbance in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Spain: Medical Approaches', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 87.8 (2010), 105–36.

²⁷ 'Je m'apperceoyz que son mal luy est augmenté par pur regret de ce qu'il veoit passer.' CCG IV, 214.

²⁸ 'malade plus de regret à cause des calamitez présentes, que d'indisposition corporelle.' CCG IV, 234.

²⁹ CCG II, 482.

³⁰ 'Marzille est mort de pure paour que le comte d'Egmond, le visitant, luy mict au ventre de ce que passe; ce que le povret s'imprinct si fort au cerveau que une fièvre chaulde le print que l'at emporté demi désesperé et toujours ravessant de Mme de Parme et son gouvernement.' CCG I, 426.

Most of his friends' complaints he attributed to anxiety. The Countess of Canticrode had trouble sleeping but used water from Spa to improve her health.³¹ As he wrote of another mutual acquaintance: 'He is "adust" and takes matters too much to heart, which does nothing to improve his health (...). He is so feeble that he finds it impossible to either write or leave his room.'³² Another acquaintance experienced 'perpetual anxiety that kept gnawing at his heart day and night'.³³ Morillon often expressed how he himself suffered along with his friends, writing in a letter about an ill friend that he felt it in his heart.³⁴ After the battle of Heiligerlee of 23 May 1568, in which the Duke of Arenberg died, Morillon visited his widow in Brussels. He wrote to Granvelle how, upon seeing him, she burst into tears that shook even the bed on which she lay. 'It is pitiful', he wrote, 'to see her grief for the loss of her lord who was abandoned by all and was brought to the slaughter.'³⁵

Morillon's style of openness about feelings of worry and sadness in his letters might have been caused by sorrow being a 'fashionable disease'. For Morillon, a member of an international Renaissance humanist elite which believed genius and melancholy were linked, it was considered noble and fitting to be sensitive and react emotionally to such distressing news.³⁶ Some historians called it the "English malady" or 'Elizabethan malady' – others have stressed the ubiquity of the phenomenon, characterizing the Renaissance as 'the Golden Age of melancholy'.³⁷ Under the influence of pseudo-Aristotelian thought, this disease was regarded as an illness that politicians, scholars and artists, in particular, were prone to suffer. Highly gifted melancholiacs were constantly living on a peak corresponding to their ability to achieve greatness, but it was also believed that being atop this peak, they could easily lose their balance and fall into the depths of depression. As Olivia Weisser has argued, early modern patients attributed physical infirmity to worrisome events such as perilous credit relations or shocks like the deaths of loved ones: 'These events provoked emotional responses, which in turn sparked a series of internal mechanisms that resulted in illness'.³⁸

³¹ CCG IV, 123.

³² 'Il est aduste et prend les choses trop à cueur, que n'ayde rien à sa santé; (...) estant si débile qu'il n'est possible qu'il escrive ou sorte de sa chambre.' CCG IV, 128.

³³ 'une inquiétude perpétuelle que luy rongeoit le cueur jour et nuict'. CCG I, 275.

³⁴ CCG IV, 128–9.

³⁵ 'et est grande pitié de veoir les regretz qu'elle fait d'avoir perdu son seigneur, et qu'il at ainsi esté mené à la boucherie et habandonné de tout le monde.' CCG III, 251. My thanks go to Raymond Fagel for sending me this reference.

³⁶ Compare: Laurinda S. Dixon, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Melancholic Persona in Art, ca. 1500–1700* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013).

³⁷ Emily Anglin, "'Something in me dangerous': Hamlet, Melancholy, and the Early Modern Scholar", *Shakespeare*, 13.1 (2017), 15–29; Elizabeth Goldring, "'So lively a portraiture of his miseries": Melancholy, Mourning and the Elizabethan Malady', *British Art Journal*, 6.2 (2005), 12–22.

³⁸ Weisser, *Ill Composed*, 81.

These ideas are reflected, for instance, in the works of Morillon's contemporaries William Shakespeare and Michel de Montaigne. There are many ways that Shakespeare's characters express grief through somatic symptoms. Shakespeare uses poetic adjectives to highlight the dramatic impact of bad reports such as 'despiteful tidings', 'cold news', 'black tidings' and even 'dead-killing news'.³⁹ In *Henry IV*, the king's beard turns white upon hearing news of the rebellion, according to Falstaff. Other characters tremble, vomit, faint or are brought to deliver children prematurely.⁴⁰ 'If Henry were recalled to life again / these news would cause him once more yield the ghost', says Gloucester in *Henry VI, Part 1* (I.i.66). In *The Winter's Tale* Paulina says: 'This news is mortal to the Queen. Look down / and see what death is doing.' Leontes answers: 'Take her hence. Her heart is but o'ercharged. She will recover.' (III.ii.163). Such notions were not limited to Elizabethan England. Shakespeare's contemporary Michel de Montaigne describes in his essay 'On Sorrow' (1580) the effects of receiving bad news: 'as it happens to every one of us, who, upon any sudden alarm of very ill news, find ourselves surprised, stupefied, and in a manner deprived of all power of motion'.⁴¹

Many other contemporary examples show members of the upper nobility falling ill after hearing bad news. An Antwerp chronicle described how William of Orange failed to attend church on Easter 1567. 'The common people were surprised, but they said that he was sick of the news that the count of Hoogstraten had brought from Brussels.'⁴² Falling ill from bad news seems to have been a reasonable explanation for William missing the Easter service. Indeed, people could find biblical examples showing people made sick from reports they had heard. A 1562 drawing by the artist Maerten van Heemskerck illustrated the story of Job, the Bible's most famous sufferer of serial bad news (Fig. 1).

One of the most shocking events witnessed by Morillon was the iconoclasm that took place in the summer of 1566. All around him, his friends saw their libraries burn; the art and interiors of churches and convents were destroyed in a paroxysm of fervour and violence. Morillon often apologized for bringing Granvelle such terrible news, which it hurt to write down: 'because my heart aches when I think of it'.⁴³ In turn, Cardinal Granvelle made it clear that these reports shocked him. In February 1567

³⁹ E.g. Shakespeare, *Richard III*, IV.i.39; *Richard II*, III.iv.74.

⁴⁰ Kenneth W. Heaton, 'Somatic Expressions of Grief and Psychosomatic Illness in the Works of William Shakespeare and his Coevals', *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 73 (2012), 301–6.

⁴¹ 'Comme il nous advient à la chaude alarme d'une bien mauvaise nouvelle, de nous sentir saisis, transsis, et comme perclus de tous mouvemens.' Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, 'De la Tristesse'.

⁴² [Kaspar Verstockt], *Antwerpsch chronykje, in het welk... omstandig zyn beschreeven* (Leiden: Pieter vander Eyk, 1743), 127.

⁴³ 'Car le cueur me fait mal quand je y pense.' *CCG I*, 442; cf. Judith Pollmann, 'Countering the Reformation in France and the Netherlands: Clerical Leadership and Catholic Violence, 1560–1585', *Past & Present*, 190 (2006), 83–120, here 94.



Fig. 1 Maarten van Heemskerck, 'Job Receiving Messengers with Bad News', 1562, drawing, black chalk (traces), pen and brown ink, lines in black ink, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam

Granvelle himself told his friend Jean de Quesnoy that the unhappy news from the Netherlands caused him much grief. He described his symptoms: 'Unhappiness, sadness, extreme desolation, which truth be told causes me much heartache when I consider it (...). So many of my friends there (...) suffer without it being their fault.'⁴⁴

The artist and writer Carel van Mander recounted an account of a curious death caused by bad news during the first years of the Dutch Revolt. In 1568 the artist Willem Key, who had portrayed the Cardinal Granvelle in 1561, was painting a portrait of the Duke of Alba. Pretending not to understand any language but his native tongue, he overheard a conversation between Alba and a member of the Council of Troubles discussing the death sentence handed down against the counts of Egmont and Horne. Key, possessing great affection for the condemned men, went home, fell ill and died on the day they were beheaded, 5 June 1568. However, others said that he had in fact died earlier and that he had told a good friend that his death was approaching. It was a strange affair, Van Mander concluded inconclusively.⁴⁵ Montaigne, along these lines, even provided classical and contemporary examples of people who had heard *good* news and had died from an excess of happiness. He himself did not recognize it, remarking: 'I, for my part, am very little subject to these violent passions'.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ 'Mal contentement, tristesse, extrême desolation, que à la verité me donne grand douleur au cueur quant je le considère [...] tant d'amys que j'ai par delà [...] souffrent sans leur culpe.' *CCG* II, 274.

⁴⁵ Van Mander, *Schilderboek*, 176–7.

⁴⁶ 'Je suis peu en prise de ces violentes passions.' Montaigne, *Essais*, 'De la tristesse'.

The correspondence between Morillon and Granvelle, then, shows how often the two clergymen discussed the perceived effects of bad news on the health of their acquaintances. In the letters to his patron, Morillon painted a vivid picture of how the events of the Dutch Revolt worried many people in the Netherlands, using expressions that can also be found in the writings of his contemporaries such as Carel van Mander, Montaigne and Shakespeare. Morillon wrote how fear caused pregnant women to miscarry or give birth prematurely, whereas the elderly, for their part, had died or became ill out of terror.⁴⁷ He stressed to his patron how depressed some of their friends had become due to the continuous stream of distressing reports. As Granvelle was far away in Italy, but still acting as advisor of Philip II on the affairs in the Low Countries, these reports helped him to obtain a full picture of the situation in the Netherlands.

BELIEVING OR DISBELIEVING BAD NEWS: THE BURDEN OF UNCERTAINTY

Just as distressing reports were believed to hurt their recipients in a deep and immediate fashion, Morillon also described feelings of uncertainty about rumours as a heavy mental burden – especially in times of war. In the summer of 1566 when the Protestants rapidly rose in power and large groups assembled in the countryside to listen to Calvinist sermons, Morillon described how couriers bringing news went in and out of the house. He wrote contacts requesting that they confirm news items, then waited for answers: ‘I wait by the hour for his reply’, as he wrote to Granvelle.⁴⁸ Various historians have emphasized that early modern news consumers were used to long periods of uncertainty between first reports and their corroboration. Recent studies of sixteenth-century chroniclers in Europe demonstrate that some would jot down rumours in a draft but include them in their chronicles only after such accounts had been laboriously checked.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, although he was familiar with the news being unconfirmed and perhaps faulty, Morillon’s letters testify to the stressful aspects of uncertainty, which was often linked to fear: the ‘perpetual anxiety’ of uncertainty, he wrote, ‘keeps gnawing day and night’.⁵⁰ Much

⁴⁷ CCGV, 85.

⁴⁸ ‘J’attendz d’heure en heure sa response’. CCGI, 489.

⁴⁹ David Randall, *Credibility in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Military News* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008). Van Nierop, ‘“And Ye Shall Hear”’; Alexandra Schäfer, ‘The Acquisition and Handling of News on the French Wars of Religion: the Case of Hermann Weinsberg’, in: Joad Raymond, and Noah Moxham (eds.), *News Networks in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2016) 695–715; Rosanne M. Baars, *Rumours of Revolt. Civil War and the Emergence of a Transnational News Culture in France and the Netherlands, 1561–1598* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021) passim; Mark Greengrass, ‘Outspoken Opinions as Collectable Items? Engagement and Divertissement in the French Civil Wars’, *Renaissance Studies*, 30.1 (2016), 57–72, here 59–60; Tom Hamilton, ‘Recording the Wars of Religion: The “Drolleries of the League” from Ephemeral Print to Scrapbook History’, *Past & Present Supplement*, 11 (2016), 288–310.

⁵⁰ CCGI, 275.

of Morillon's correspondence is in fact concerned with judging the credibility of news reports.

Bad news kept pouring in during the spring and summer of 1566. Morillon received dispatches from all parts of the Netherlands about the rising power of the Calvinists. Whilst his patron Granvelle, far away in Italy, seemed at that moment more concerned with the wars against the Turks and the politics surrounding the French king, Morillon wrote him detailed reports about the anti-Catholic mood in various towns in the Low Countries.⁵¹ As in all his letters to Granvelle over the years, he reflected on the uncertainty of the reports he received. He never passed on the news to his patron without making an estimate of its credibility. His method was to include everything, be they wild rumours or substantiated reports. Then he would reflect on the veracity of the news. Hence, his letters are imbued with a 'language of doubt'. He often writes 'I doubt it', 'I have wondered', and, 'people say it, but I don't believe it'.⁵² Aware of both the impact of bad news and the challenges of determining its truthfulness, he always stressed his uncertainty. The delayed arrival of the Duke of Medinaceli, for instance, whom Granvelle and Morillon considered to be a better and milder alternative to the Duke of Alba as governor of the Netherlands, was a constant source of uncertainty.⁵³ Morillon's letters in 1572 and the beginning of 1573 are filled with complaints about 'false news of his arrival'.⁵⁴

Though aware of the heavy burden of the bad news he placed upon his patron, Morillon reported as faithfully as possible all reports about the troubles that he was able to collect. A sophisticated news gatherer, he was highly conscious of his own confirmation bias and strove actively to identify and counter the pre-existing prejudices he might have. In the patron-client gift exchange of news, it was crucial to establish the veracity of reports, as false information would diminish the value of Morillon's letters for his patron.⁵⁵ Granvelle made it clear that he approved of receiving this torrent of bad news since he sought to be as highly informed as possible. Indeed, it was the French, often the target of Granvelle's dissatisfaction, who were accused of hearing only what they wanted to hear. In a June 1572 letter, he complained about

⁵¹ CCG I, 226. Duke, *Reformation and Revolt*, 125–6; Gustaaf Janssens, 'Cardinal Granvelle and the Revolt in the Netherlands: The Evolution of His Thought on a Desirable Political Approach to the Problem', in: Krista De Jonge and Gustaaf Janssens (eds.), *Les Granvelle et les anciens Pays-Bas* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2000) 135–56.

⁵² 'Je me doute', 'Je me suis douté', and 'l'on dict [...] mais je ne le croy'. CCG III, passim, 265–366.

⁵³ Anton van der Lem, 'Medinaceli, Juan de la Cerda, hertog van', <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/dutch/publication/M/Pages/medinaceli.aspx> accessed July 2022.

⁵⁴ 'faulsses nouvelles de son arrivée'. CCG IV, 251.

⁵⁵ See Zsuzsa Barbarics and Renate Pieper, 'Handwritten Newsletters as a Means of Communication in Early Modern Europe', in Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond (eds.), *Correspondence and Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 53–79.

contradictory reports: 'This leads me to hope that it will be *à la française*, who establish as a fact everything they choose and desire.'⁵⁶

Corroboration and confirmation, which would dissipate the stress of uncertainty, came via official documents and letters from trustworthy persons. Obtaining certainty was thus yet one further privilege of the elite, who had access to information sources unavailable to members of the lower classes. Morillon explained to Granvelle that he often expressly wrote his contacts to receive corroboration of a news event: 'I have not yet any certainty, but I expect it today; because I have written to learn the truth.'⁵⁷ Since news could take some time to arrive, contemporaries were used to long time-spans separating first reports and satisfactory corroboration. As we have seen, this norm depended on a calculation of the perceived time it would take for a word to reach the recipient. Michiel van Groesen, in his study of Atlantic news in the Dutch Republic during the seventeenth century, used the term 'culture of anticipation' to describe the news flows in the circuit spanning Brazil, the Caribbean, and Amsterdam, stressing that newspapers also made mention of the fact when they had not received any Atlantic news.⁵⁸ In this regard, Morillon wrote to Granvelle of affairs about which he had expected to have received the news but had not yet heard anything.⁵⁹

The challenges of uncertainty and deferred corroboration can be illustrated by the arrival of news surrounding the battle of Mookerheide on 14 April 1574, a clash between Dutch and Spanish troops in the vicinity of Nijmegen. The battle being an event of huge importance, Morillon had subscribed to a news service in Sint-Truiden (Liège) that every hour brought him 'fresh news' about the battle. The Spanish victory prompted a jubilant report that was immediately brought to Brussels by the Spanish nobleman Don Juan d'Osorio. Governor-general Requesens celebrated the rebels' defeat with the sounding of bells and a *Te Deum*. It was especially joyful news that two brothers of William of Orange, Henry and Louis, as well as the Count Palatine, had reportedly been killed in battle. But their corpses had not been found on the battlefield, so there was some doubt whether they were in fact dead. Morillon wrote in a letter to Granvelle that Henry, Louis, and the count were thought to be still alive. Some people claimed to have seen them in Cologne at the beginning of May, with Henry appearing with his arm in a sling.⁶⁰ The Antwerp chronicler Godevaert van Haecht similarly noted in his chronicle that 'rumours went around for a long time that he [Louis of Nassau] had fled and

⁵⁶ 'Cela me fait espérer que ce sera à la Française, qui tiennent pour fait ce qu'ils désignent et tout ce qu'ils désirent.' CCG IV, 253–4.

⁵⁷ 'Je n'ay encore aucune certitude et l'attendz ce jourd'hui; car j'ay escript pour sçavoir la verité.' CCG IV, 4–5.

⁵⁸ Michiel van Groesen, '(No) News from the Western Front: the Weekly Press of the Low Countries and the Making of Atlantic News', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 44.3 (2013), 739–60.

⁵⁹ CCG, V, 10.

⁶⁰ CCG, V, 82.

was seen, here and there, but in the end it turned out that they were false'.⁶¹ Morillon expressed certainty about the deaths of the Protestant noblemen only at the end of May 1574, when an intercepted letter written by William of Orange confirmed the deaths of his two brothers and the Count Palatine.⁶²

The letters of Morillon demonstrate that the uncertainty of bad news reports made them even more damaging to their contemporaries' feelings of well-being. Moreover, the novelty and scale of the troubles of the 1560s and 1570s made it more difficult to judge the veracity of the news. Many events were unprecedented, and Morillon's letters frequently express his bewilderment, how he was 'astonished' and 'sad and perplexed'. Morillon attempted to reduce this uncertainty by collecting as many reports as possible, subscribing, for example, as noted above to news services that brought him hourly updates about battles. He was busy gathering news all day long. At the same time, he constantly stressed his doubts in his letters to Granvelle. The news service Morillon provided to Granvelle consisted of passing on as many reports as possible. Morillon chose comprehensiveness above all and was therefore not selective in his reports. As stated above, the Besançon archives hold an astonishing number of letters from Morillon to Granvelle from the first 8 years of the Revolt. Granvelle easily received a hundred letters a year from his client in the Netherlands, these letters often being about six pages in small handwriting. At the same time, within this flood of news sent to Granvelle, Morillon stressed, for each news item, its relative certainty or uncertainty. Apart from his reflections about the physical impact of bad news on one's body and the sufferings caused by uncertainty, Morillon was also concerned about the problem of demoralization. Keen as he was on all of the effects of bad news, he often complained about his enemies, who intentionally used it to discourage the populace and to win them over to their own side.

DELIVERING BAD NEWS AND THE PROBLEM OF DEMORALIZATION

An important feature of bad news in times of war was its potential for general 'discouragement'. The Habsburg government, though they celebrated their victories abundantly and used censorship to repress news about losses, was never able to stop oral news, pamphlets, pasquils, and songs from spreading. This problem was one of Morillon's greatest worries, about which he complained frequently in letters to Granvelle. The 'enemies' were thought to be spreading rumours (*semer bruits*), which had led to a loss of morale amongst the Netherlandish Catholics. In their conference volume on media production and polemic during the French Wars of Religion,

⁶¹ Rob Van Roosbroeck (ed.), *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht over de troebelen van 1565 tot 1574 te Antwerpen en elders* (2 vols., Antwerp: De Sikkel, 1929–30) Vol. 2, 293.

⁶² CCG V, 92.

Jeremy Foa and Paul-Alexis Mellet underscored that in the religious wars media themselves were important weapons. Various studies in their volume have shown how actors in these clashes attempted to sway public opinion toward their cause through the use of pamphlets, songs, print or the dissemination of vile rumours.⁶³ Morillon and Granvelle were indeed very much aware of the dangers of rumour and propaganda, especially as the latter had been the target of a pernicious defamatory campaign. Commenting on the ‘topic of conversation’ in urban market squares throughout the Netherlands, Morillon was frequently angered in noting that people believed unsubstantiated bad news.⁶⁴

Morillon’s letters show a deep understanding of the workings of slander and means that foster discouragement.⁶⁵ It is pertinent that he worried about the opinion of the ‘common man’, acknowledging that the adherence of towns to one side or the other in the Revolt depended very much on their inhabitants’ hopes and fears. As he indignantly noted in 1574: ‘many evil spirits [...] are spreading bad rumours [...], discouraging the good people’.⁶⁶ Great effort went into speculating on the sources of nasty and persistent rumours. His awareness of the ubiquity of false news made him increasingly suspicious about every account he received. In September 1568, for instance, he found reports of a Morisco Revolt in Spain hard to believe; as he wrote to Granvelle: ‘I think this comes out the Prince of Orange’s forge, or some another malicious spirit’.⁶⁷ Morillon personally became the victim of a slander campaign in 1566. Having heard that the Protestant nobleman Brederode had ‘publicized’ Morillon’s ownership of a dog called Brederode, which he was said to have beaten and threatened for his amusement, Morillon wrote indignantly to Granvelle: ‘it is shocking what they dare to say nowadays!’⁶⁸

According to Morillon and his peers, critical faculties were to be found only amongst their own class. The common people were perceived in general as gullible and thus had to be protected from misinformation. During the early years of the Revolt, both the Habsburg government and the urban magistrates created all kinds of censorship laws intended to prevent the uncontrolled spread of rumours. The Antwerp chronicler Godevaert van Haecht noted on 28 April 1568, for instance, how it was now prohibited to ‘repeat new tidings or inquire after them, on pain of being flogged’.⁶⁹ In her study on public debate and propaganda in Amsterdam in the Dutch Revolt, Femke Deen has

⁶³ Jérémie Foa and Paul-Alexis Mellet (eds), *Le bruit des armes: mises en formes et désinformations en Europe pendant les guerres de religion (1560–1610)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2012).

⁶⁴ Duke, *Reformation and Revolt*, 126; CCG IV, 230.

⁶⁵ Cf. on early modern slander: Robert Darnton, *The Devil in the Holy Water, or The Art of Slander from Louis XIV to Napoleon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

⁶⁶ ‘Beaucoup de mauvais espritz [...] font courir des mauvais bruitsz [...] discourgeant les bons.’ CCG V, 33.

⁶⁷ ‘Je pense que c’est de la forge du prince d’Orenges, ou quelque aultre esperit maling.’ CCG III, 51.

⁶⁸ ‘C’est chose espouvantable de ce que l’on ose dire maintenant!’ CCG I, 425.

⁶⁹ *Kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, Vol. 1, 21.

analysed the interplay between Protestant propaganda and the censorship measures taken by the Amsterdam authorities. Her study shows that handwritten newsletters and songs easily escaped the control of the authorities.⁷⁰

This potential for discouragement did not only concern the general populace but also affected the private correspondence between Morillon and Granvelle. As I have stated above, though the former was aware of the depressing impact of bad news, he pulled no punches when writing to his patron. Yet Morillon's letters expressed discomfort when, with the troubles in the Netherlands gradually worsening by the end of the 1560s, he increasingly had to deliver unhappy news. He tried to soften the blow of such unfortunate developments by prefacing his accounts with long introductions, for instance in the case of the capture of Brielle by the Sea Beggars on 1 April 1572: 'It displeases me bitterly to have to report on these sad occurrences to Your Most Illustrious Lordship, if I want to continue to fulfill my task.'⁷¹ Or, in a report about the defeat of royal troops at sea off Bergen op Zoom in January 1574, he began: 'I write this, being very sad and troubled by the great disaster that occurred last Friday.'⁷² Yet he believed in conveying all news, good and bad alike, in contrast to the French, whom we recall were often accused of having a twisted relationship with the truth and of withholding unhappy news. In June 1574, for instance, Morillon wrote to Granvelle that the French had tried to forestall public knowledge of the death of Charles IX for almost three weeks.⁷³

Morillon was not alone in struggling with the uncomfortable task of delivering bad or uncertain news. The vicar-general may have known that as a faithful correspondent it was his task to inform his patron of everything that happened in the Netherlands, but others went so far as to refrain from writing at all. The chronicler Marcus van Vaernewijck in Ghent, for instance, after copying the placard by Margaret of Parma pardoning the rebels in July 1567, described his fellow citizens' suspicion towards the document: 'People who had friends that had fled abroad, did not want to write [them] any [message of] comfort or certainty, because they [...] did not want to obtain ingratitude and be the cause of their friends' suffering and sorrow.'⁷⁴

Within the patron-client relationship between Morillon and Granvelle, the vicar-general was sometimes cautious in communicating bad news to his patron. Events had become increasingly bad over the course of the first years of the Revolt. Yet he always chose to convey all reports, good and bad alike, although on occasion he worded such accounts more carefully.

⁷⁰ Deen, *Publiek debat en propaganda*, 135.

⁷¹ 'Il me desplaict amèrement des tristes occurrences qu'il faut que j'escripve à Vtre Illme Srie, si je veulx continuer en mon devoir.' *CCG IV*, 200.

⁷² 'J'escripzt ceste fort triste et troulé du grand désastre advenu vendredi.' *CCG V*, 17.

⁷³ *CCG V*, 147.

⁷⁴ Ferdinand Vanderhaeghen, (ed.), *Van die beroerliche tijden in die Nederlanden en voornamelijk in Ghendt, 1566–1568* (5 vols., Ghent: C. Annoot-Braeckman, 1872–81) Vol 2, 294–7.

Morillon keenly described the impact of bad news amongst his acquaintances as well as on the general populace of the Netherlands. If Morillon recorded others falling ill after receiving bad news, how did he, who gathered news incessantly, escape this fate? Often in his letters, he expressed his fear, his worries, and occasionally even 'the pain he felt in his heart'. These same letters testify that Morillon availed himself of various strategies to cope with the stress of bad news, which he employed alternately in the years 1566–74.

Morillon doubtless experienced some of his worst moments in 1566. Over the summer of 1566, his letters demonstrate his mounting alarm over the Protestants' rise in power. Hedge preaching had reached the vicinity of Antwerp, where, according to Morillon, 30,000 people had gathered, 6000 armed with pistols. At the beginning of July 1566, deeming it prudent to go into hiding, he left Brussels for Leuven. Morillon knew the university town well: he had been a law student there, and his father had been a professor in Greek at the same university.⁷⁵ Yet it was hard for him to leave Brussels, where he lived amongst friends, and, most importantly, where he was aware of everything that went on. On 11 July 1566, he assured Granvelle that he would not fail to keep up his correspondence with his contacts. The tone of the letter differs from what we find conveyed by his usual measured style. Indeed, he openly expresses the regrets and unease he felt about having to go into hiding for his safety:

One of the main regrets that I have and will have is that I could not continue to do that which I have deliberately found my duty which I could [have done] if I could safely remain here (...). The pleasure that I will have to be unknown, hidden in a strange place, without contact with my friends and knowledge of what is happening everywhere as prompt as here; that I will forego the convenience and consolation of my friends here, abandoning them at a time when they need me most. (...) But I want to conform to the times; and even though I am away, I will not fail to correspond with your officials from every quarter, having ordered that their letters will be forwarded to me without delay, and having left one of my servants behind for this purpose.⁷⁶

Two days later Morillon arrived in Leuven, where he would stay until the middle of October 1566. By that time the authorities, shocked by the

⁷⁵ Anton van der Lem, 'Maximilien Morillon', <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/dutch/personen/M/Pages/morillon.aspx> accessed July 2022.

⁷⁶ 'Et ung des principaulx regretz que j'ay et auray est que je ne polray continuer ce que j'avoie si bien délibéré selon mon devoir si je pouvie icy demorer securement [...] le plaisir que ce me sera d'estre hors de ma cognoissance, cache en lieu estrange, sans communication d'amys, et participation de ce que passe de tous costelz si prompte comme je l'ay icy; que je lesse les commoditéz et consolation que j'ay icy des miens, les habandonnant au temps qu'ilz ont plus à faire de ma presence. [...] Mais je me veulz conformer au temps; et, pour estre absent, ne délessaray-je tenir correspondance à voz officiers de tous costelz, aiant miz ordre que leurs lettres me soient envoiez incontinent, et à ceste cause icy lessé l'ung de mes serviteurs pour m'adressser le tout et mes lettres à eulx.' CCGI, 360.

iconoclasm of August 1566, had taken action. Margaret of Parma sent an army to fight the Protestants in the Walloon provinces, and Philip II was making plans to send troops from Spain. Now it was William of Orange who suffered, according to Morillon's friend the Leuven professor Elbertus Leoninus. Elbertus had visited Antwerp and had told Morillon what people had observed: that the prince had looked very skinny and haggard and could no longer sleep at night and that both he and the Count of Egmont were fearful and plagued with doubts because they did not know whether they could trust the king.⁷⁷ Indeed, from 1567 onwards, after the arrival of the Duke of Alba, Morillon would often vent his annoyances and frustrations over the events in the Netherlands, but he would never express feeling the degree of chaos and confusion as he had admitted in the summer of 1566.

In his letters to Granvelle, Morillon also frequently stressed the humour of the situation. This approach aligned with contemporary neo-Stoic ideas about dealing with setbacks, such as the use of laughter.⁷⁸ He often remarked that his friends were taking matters too much to heart. In the summer of 1566, and in the years to come, Morillon often tried to alleviate the grim content of his letters by emphasizing the absurdity of the events he described. He regularly began his sentences with 'What makes me laugh...', recounting laughable expectations, promises, or actions of people around him. He also confessed to Granvelle that 'he could not help but laugh' upon hearing strange news.⁷⁹ This reflex, he confessed, presented particular difficulty when he received the news in person since he would possess a great desire to laugh when hearing strange news but would feel obliged to keep a straight face.⁸⁰ He also laughed away malicious rumours and the negativity of defamatory pamphlets, stating that he did nothing but laugh at them.⁸¹ He tried to make his own jokes, playing with the presumed healing powers of the duke of Medinaceli by calling him 'Medicina Celi' and laughing about their high expectations with regard to his arrival: 'if the duke of Medina does not perform miracles at his entrance, which I do not think is part of his instructions.'⁸² Even in the difficult summer of 1566, Morillon tried to imbue his reports with a silver lining, telling Granvelle that he wished that the latter could have seen Doctor Elbertus dressed as a soldier.⁸³

⁷⁷ CCG II, 18.

⁷⁸ See on the use of humor during the Dutch Revolt: Johan Verberckmoes, *Schertsen, schimpen en schateren. Geschiedenis van het lachen in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, zestiende en zeventiende eeuw* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1998). See also Cassie M. Miura, 'The Humor of Skepticism: Therapeutic Laughter in Early Modern Literature'. PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2016.

⁷⁹ 'Ce que me fait rire', CCG II, 553 '[Je] ne me suis sceu tenir de rire', CCG IV, 190; 'de ma part, je n'en fais que rire', CCG I, 280.

⁸⁰ 'J'ay grand faim de rire quant je ouhe toutes ces choses, mais je tiens bonne mine.' CCG II, 21.

⁸¹ 'de tout ce que je ne faitz que rire.' CCG V, 277.

⁸² 'Si le duc de Medina à son entrée ne faitz miracles, que je ne pense pas estre en ses instructions.' CCG IV, 259.

⁸³ CCG I, 435.

Morillon and the people in his network found comfort in these troubled times in other ways. Morillon's letters recount many of them taking the waters at Spa or ordering flasks of mineral water from the springs to drink, again confirming the contemporary notion of the unity of body and mind. He also often spoke about planning to go to baths. Morillon found comfort in talking to his friends, especially Elbertus Leoninus, who was, as Morillon wrote to Granvelle, perhaps not very firm in his anti-Calvinism but was prudent and virtuous, giving fair and credible warnings.⁸⁴ And as a humanist of his age, Morillon also turned to the classics, drawing parallels with the present. In 1566, he wrote to Granvelle that he had read the Catiline Orations and found there little difference from what was happening in the Low Countries.⁸⁵

Erika Kuijpers, studying fear and trauma in sixteenth-century war chronicles, has argued that the act of writing, of composing a narrative, benefitted contemporaries in coping with the wars and disasters that befell them.⁸⁶ The same can be said for the letters of Maximilien Morillon. One can speculate that he was managing to keep the emotional distress of events at bay by writing accounts of them for his patron. Moreover, he must have felt relieved to be able to freely vent his anger, frustration, suspicion, and hopes in his letters to Granvelle. Yet his relief lay not only in the act of putting these troubled events to paper. As a highly placed clergyman, he was able to take action and exert greater influence than could many of his compatriots. Morillon could approach his large network of acquaintances, engage professional news services, and search for pamphlets. Indeed, the occasions when Morillon expressed his frustration rather vehemently occurred under circumstances such as the iconoclasm of 1566, when approaching Protestant troops or illness prevented him from gathering news. Obviously, he had to explain his failure to perform his duty for his patron, but it also seems that Morillon had really become devoted to his task of informing Granvelle. The sheer abundance of Morillon's letters, now so valuable for scholars of the Revolt, are testimony of his dedication.

CONCLUSION

In *The Wonderfull Yeaere* (1603), the English playwright Thomas Dekker wrote that 'like a thunder clap', the devastating news of Queen Elizabeth's death 'was able to kill thousands, it took away hearts from millions'.⁸⁷ Historians

⁸⁴ CCG I, 374.

⁸⁵ CCG I, 305. Cf.: Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, 'Studied For Action: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy', *Past & Present*, 129.1 (1990), 30–78.

⁸⁶ Kuijpers, 'Fear, Indignation, Grief and Relief', 94.

⁸⁷ Thomas Dekker, *The Non-Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker. In five volumes*, ed. by A.B. Grosart, (London: Aylesbury, 1884), Vol. 1, 86.

have conceded that the study of news and propaganda is essential to understanding the dynamics of early modern conflicts. Yet whilst they have focused on the content of written and oral reports, propaganda pamphlets and their methods of dissemination, little attention has been paid to the perceived effects of bad reports on the populace. Within the emotional turn, historians have studied the emotional states of grief and anxiety as they were experienced by early modern individuals. Yet arguably their connection with the study of news can be made more explicit. In this article, I have attempted to do so, by demonstrating how Maximilien Morillon managed to cope with bad news and uncertainty during the first years of the Dutch Revolt.

Maximilien Morillon's letters offer rewarding study material not only because of the impressive volume of his correspondence but also because of the value of his reflections on all aspects of news and news gathering. He described to his patron Granvelle how their friends became ill from hearing news: he contemplated how to deal with the uncertain nature of news and studied its seditious potential. He might even be called a sixteenth-century media scholar, a forerunner of the twentieth-century discipline. He had his own premodern Netherlandish press agency, but this service was catered to a single patron, Cardinal Granvelle. This man, in his turn, was even a larger figure in contemporary news, both as a topic and as a news gatherer. Apart from the letters from Morillon, he received information from across Europe. After receiving Morillon's frequent complaints about enemy propaganda during the first years of the Revolt in the 1570s, Granvelle began studying the best ways to disperse propaganda in pamphlets.⁸⁸ Although this article has concentrated on their correspondence from the side of Morillon, Granvelle also expressed well-considered ideas about news credibility and the impact of bad news in his letters. He even studied the impact that news had on himself: often he honestly declared to his correspondents which news he wished to believe or disbelieve.⁸⁹ Years of long-distance correspondence between Morillon and Granvelle, in a time of conflict, rumour and uncertainty had sharpened their understanding of the intricate workings of early modern news and media.

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⁸⁸ Baars, *Rumours of Revolt*, 135.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, 151.