

# **British satirical poems and cartoons about Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte: deconstructing authenticity and aura**

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This article draws on opposing cultural concepts of authenticity and imitation, combined with Walter Benjamin's notion of the aura, to examine the self-promotion of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte as successor of Napoleon I. The article confronts Louis-Napoleon's strategy of self-promotion with the criticism it attracted in British satirical cartoons and poems. Louis-Napoleon constructs a public image laying claim to the aura of his uncle as Romantic hero; conversely, his critics exploit the same imagery to ridicule him as an inferior imitator. They reject both the idea that aura is transferable and the concept of authenticity based on external authority (via dynastic lineage) in favour of one located in the original, unique self. The article explores the paradox that, while attacking Louis-Napoleon for his inauthenticity, caricatures and parodies are themselves reliant on imitation.

It contends that this paradox arises from the genres' transitional position between historically and culturally divergent ways of perceiving the original and the copy.

**Keywords:** aura; authenticity; caricature; imitation; originality; parody; satire.

In 1852, there appeared in London an illustrated volume of eighteen poems entitled *The Poetic Works of Louis Napoleon Now First Done into Plain English*. At the time, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte (1808-73), the nephew of Napoleon I (1769-1821), was at the forefront of public interest throughout Europe. Having been elected French President in 1848, he had in 1851 pre-empted the need to step down at the end of his term of office by seizing power in a *coup d'état*. The early period of his eighteen-year reign as Emperor Napoleon III, which would end with his defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, was characterised by a policy of repression against his political opponents. By 1852, he had also published three books which spelled out his political ideas, the most notable of them, *Des idées napoléoniennes* ([*Napoleonic Ideas*] 1839), with a London publisher during one of several periods of exile in Britain. He would later publish an incomplete (ghost-written) *Histoire de Jules César* ([*History of Julius Caesar*] 1865-66), another vehicle for his ideas on political leadership.

Unlike this body of Louis-Napoleon's propagandist prose, the *Poetic Works* were a spoof. They are just one instance of the remarkable variety of British works which featured the French Emperor, including factual, literary and visual works, ranging from fierce polemic to hagiography.<sup>1</sup> This article focuses on British visual and poetic satires about Louis-Napoleon from the period 1848-52. It confronts the public image he created for himself as the rightful successor of his famous uncle with critiques of this self-

fashioning. The broader aim of the analysis is to contribute to a better understanding of mid-century satires and their role in creating and critiquing public figures. While critics of textual satire tend to prioritise the literary strategies by which satire is articulated, political cartoons are predominantly studied from a historiographical perspective, focusing on the drawings' intervention in political debates.<sup>2</sup> The present article combines these approaches, exploring how satires in the two media are related to both political and aesthetic debates of the period, interacting with other artistic productions (both satirical and "straight").

The interdisciplinary choice of cartoons and poems and the transnational focus on British responses to a French public figure require some explanation. The two genres have been chosen for their simultaneous difference and similarity. Although the status of cartoons and caricature as the visual equivalent of textual satire has been established by critics like Vincent Carretta (1990), they present strong contrasts too: poetry with its reliance on the formal features of a particular language is culturally specific, whereas a cartoon's visual medium makes it universal, crossing language and cultural boundaries much more easily. The article will demonstrate that, despite their use of different media, both visual and poetic satires of Louis-Napoleon rely heavily on the same aesthetic device: parody. The analysis of British sources invites certain conclusions about the place of parody in the development of nineteenth-century British aesthetics, while the focus on a French public personality yields insight into how political satire works within a transnational frame. Combined, these allow us to trace how certain satirical tropes and symbols are transferred not just between different media but also from one cultural context to another.

Two groups of sources which criticise Louis-Napoleon's self-fashioning in the image of Napoleon I will be examined: first, cartoons from the satirical magazine *Punch* from

the years 1848-52 (the period surrounding his accession to power and before the alliance of Britain and France in the Crimean War led to a sharp reduction in attacks on the Emperor); and second, poems from the spoof *Poetic Works* which have the same focus on nephew and uncle. The satirists' methods of critique will be examined in comparison to those used by their subject for his self-promotion. The analysis will reflect on the opposed effects of imitation by the Emperor and his critics, exploring parallels and differences between Louis-Napoleon's appropriation of his uncle's prestige and the reliance on distorting imitation which lies at the heart of the genres of caricature and satire. Louis-Napoleon's public persona and the satires which deconstruct it will be considered through opposing concepts of imitation and authenticity, drawing on Walter Benjamin's notion of aura in evaluating originality in works of art.

### **Louis-Napoleon's self-fashioning**

Louis-Napoleon's political rise was meteoric: forced into exile at the age of eight, he came to public attention through his two failed *coups d'état* at Strasbourg (1836) and Boulogne (1840). The latter was punished with imprisonment, from which he escaped after six years, seeking exile in Britain. While still abroad, he was elected to the Constituent Assembly of the newly declared Second Republic in June 1848. In November of that year, he won France's first presidential election with 74% of votes, retaining power through his *coup* three years later. His popularity was such that in referenda held in December 1851 and November 1852, his *coup* and the establishment of the Second Empire were resoundingly legitimised with 92% and 97% of votes respectively (75% and 77% of registered voters).

These electoral victories were due in part to Louis-Napoleon's skilful combination of welfarist social policies<sup>3</sup> with his allegiance to the conservative Party of Order, which allowed him to appeal to two major political constituencies. They were also a result of his claim to continue the political project of his uncle, i.e., autocratic rule endorsed by plebiscites. Louis-Napoleon exploited the widespread nostalgia, especially among the peasantry, for the First Empire and the figure of the Emperor which had led in 1840 to the repatriation of his remains under the July Monarchy (1830-48). The previous Bourbon Restoration (1814-30) had prohibited public references to and representations of Napoleon I, which resulted in an underground perpetuation of the Napoleonic Legend through secret symbols and songs.<sup>4</sup> Louis-Napoleon's presidential campaign benefited from the currency of these popular hagiographic images of his uncle. As James McMillan (1991, 33) observes, the campaign played to this current within popular culture through the distribution of "images, posters, medals, engravings, songs (often evoking the theme of the messianic return), all of which were skilfully diffused by itinerant agents at fairs and markets in the countryside." Such popular ephemera also appropriated the first Emperor's secret moniker "Lui" ("Him"), taking advantage of the pun on his nephew's name, Louis (Bury [1964, 20]). As Robert Pimienta's (1911) extended study of Louis-Napoleon's propaganda in 1848 demonstrates, the candidate's posing as the Bonapartist pretender was crucial to his electoral strategy. Alert to the value of brand recognition, the still relatively unknown Louis-Napoleon was able to quickly and effectively establish his place in the public consciousness as his uncle's legitimate successor: Louis was "Lui" (i.e., Napoleon I).

The Napoleonic Legend on which this electoral campaign traded so astutely was a manifestation of the nineteenth-century interest in the concepts of heroism and authenticity. For many contemporaries, Napoleon I was the exemplary modern hero.<sup>5</sup> The

most famous celebration occurs in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* ([*Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*] delivered 1822-30 and published in 1837) and the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* ([*Phenomenology of Spirit*] 1807). Hegel presented Napoleon I as a man of action who actualised the Absolute on the level of politics. Similarly, he featured alongside Oliver Cromwell as the exemplary "Hero as King" in Thomas Carlyle's lectures *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History* (delivered in 1840 and published in 1841). While the formerly so prestigious heroic literary mode became outdated (Trilling [1972, 84]), the period's fascination with the hero reflected the ongoing rise of interest in the self, heightened by the Romantic promotion of originality and individual genius. The hero's unselfconscious being true to himself, i.e., his authenticity, or, to use the period's preferred term, "sincerity," was a vital part of his appeal.<sup>6</sup> Carlyle states:

No Mirabeau, Napoleon, Burns, Cromwell, no man adequate to do any thing, but is first of all in right earnest about it; what I call a sincere man. I should say sincerity, a deep, great, genuine sincerity, is the first characteristic of all men in any way heroic. Not the sincerity that calls itself sincere; ah no, that is a very poor matter indeed;—a shallow braggart conscious sincerity; oftenest selfconceit mainly. The Great Man's sincerity is of the kind he cannot speak of, is not conscious of: . . . No, the Great Man does not boast himself sincere, far from that; perhaps does not ask himself if he is so: I would say rather, his sincerity does not depend on himself; he cannot help being sincere! (Carlyle [2013, 53])

As Lionel Trilling (1972, 92ff) argues, it is the Romantic period that sees the rise of authenticity as a supreme criterion of aesthetic and moral quality. In his essays "Upon Epitaphs," for instance, William Wordsworth sets out his aim "to establish a criterion of sincerity by which a Writer may be judged," stating that "our sensations and judgements depend upon our opinion or feeling of the Author's state of mind. [...] nothing can please us, however well executed in its kind, if we are persuaded that the primary virtues of

sincerity, earnestness and a moral interest in the main object are wanting” (Wordsworth [1980, 108 and 115-16]). Defining authenticity, however, is a far from simple matter. Etymologically, it is grounded in “an authorizing *origin*,” as Tim Milnes and Kerry Sinanan (2010, 5) observe; but this origin can be located in a variety of sources, including parentage in the case of “an individual’s everyday being,” or in the case of a poem, for instance, “its relation to the hand of the writer from which it originated” (Milnes and Sinanan [2010, 5]). Complicating further these divergent perspectives is a historic shift between ancient and modern concepts of authenticity as Geoffrey Hartman (2002) identifies them. As Hartman puts it, definitions of authenticity based on the transmission of “vital truths from ancient sources” were replaced with a “moral strength” that does not rely on external authority (Hartman [2002, vii-viii]). It is this latter definition that encapsulates the authenticity of a character like Wordsworth’s Michael and of Romantic confessional writing (Trilling [1972, 92-4]).

Hartman defines authenticity as the antonym of a range of terms, “imitation, simulation, dissimulation, impersonation, imposture, fakery, forgery, inauthenticity, the counterfeit, lack of integrity.” Significantly, the first term in Hartman’s list is “imitation” (25). This emphasis on the rejection of imitation foregrounds Romanticism’s distinctiveness from the preceding Neoclassical era, when imitation and following the authority of the ancients had been acceptable means of asserting artistic value for a new work. By contrast, Romanticism’s concept of creativity relied on the ideal of the solitary, original genius creating *ex nihilo*. Within that perspective, the tracing of one’s essence to an external authority or the claim to be the reincarnation of an earlier heroic figure became a sign of inauthenticity and hence inferiority.

Louis-Napoleon’s electoral self-fashioning draws on the concept of authenticity in its older sense: his presidential candidacy is legitimised through his reference to the external

authorising essence of his ancestor. His electoral successes from 1848 to 1852 suggest that a strong majority of the French electorate (on a basis of universal male suffrage) accepted this claim. However, this claim becomes suspect if measured against the above Romantic definition of authenticity, which locates the source of authenticity inside the self rather than in external authority. This Romantic authenticity is unique to the original individual and cannot be replicated by anyone, not even a blood relative. Such authenticity is, moreover, spontaneous and unselfconscious and hence irreconcilable with deliberately generated propaganda. This becomes a key line of attack for Louis-Napoleon's critics, who mostly shape his public image to the present day.<sup>7</sup> So while Louis-Napoleon founds his claims on an older concept of authenticity through genealogical and ideological lineage and draws on ideas of messianic return and reincarnation, his detractors diagnose a lack of self-identity. For them, he is guilty of a calculated, inadmissible appropriation of characteristics which belong only to one person, the original Napoleon.

The period 1848-52, when severe press censorship was imposed in France, saw a plethora of satirical cartoons of Louis-Napoleon. They played a key part in the opposition to his campaign and ensuing reign and were produced both by French critics and foreign cartoonists, who were in turn strongly influenced by French models.<sup>8</sup> Representations of Louis-Napoleon as small or usurping his uncle's clothes are dominant tropes (see Rhoden [2011, 67-74, 392-411, 427-30]). The frequent reference to the uncle is not surprising given that, when Louis-Napoleon burst onto the political scene in 1848, caricaturists had to construct a recognisable representation of a man whose face was not well known, while Napoleon I, and the metonymic device of his famous uniform, were available as well-known cultural referents (Rhoden [2011, 68]). The exaggerated manipulation of size, too,



is a common debunking device in both textual and visual satire, especially in caricature with its reliance on the distortion of physiognomy.

The cartoonists' attack on Louis-Napoleon as a fake Napoleon I was developed further by the most famous early promulgator of Louis-Napoleon's "Black Legend" (contrasting with the "Golden Legend" of Napoleon I), Victor Hugo. After supporting his candidacy in the presidential election campaign of 1848, Hugo turned into the Emperor's fiercest and most eloquent critic, denouncing his violent *coup* and repressive measures. In a variety of texts – above all the prose pamphlets *Histoire d'un crime* [*History of a Crime*] and *Napoléon le Petit* [*Napoleon the Little*] (both written in 1852) and the verse collection *Les Châtiments* ([*The Castigations*] 1853) – he portrayed Louis-Napoleon as an arch-villain. Leaving aside the obvious political criticism, what underlies Hugo's attack aesthetically is the Romantic value of originality which demotes Louis-Napoleon to being a fraudulent impostor. The predominant trope through which Hugo attacks him, especially in *Napoléon le Petit*, is the comparison with his uncle, presenting the nephew as a derisively diminutive, inauthentic copy of the uncle.

The valuing of authenticity and originality that shines through Hugo's works about Louis-Napoleon is arguably even more pronounced in British Romanticism, and it may go some way towards explaining the status of parody in the Victorian period. Victorian literary parody can be understood as a reaction to the celebration of originality. Victorian poets in particular found themselves labouring under the burden of belatedness and oppressed by the fear of having nothing to say that their Romantic predecessors had not already said (see Bloom 1971). Parody offers a way out of this impasse in that it practises an ironically distanced imitation of a predecessor, free from the stigma of unoriginal imitation and usually with an implicit assumption of superiority over the ridiculed original. This characteristic of the genre may account for the paradox that the "belated"

Victorian period was, in terms of publications and sales, a productive age for poetic parody. Today's literary critics (still overwhelmingly under the influence of the Romantic aesthetics of originality) generally do not consider the period's parodies worthy of critical attention – in contrast to the substantial critical interest in, and valuing of, modernist and postmodernist parody.<sup>9</sup>

Caricatures and satirical cartoons place a similar value on Romantic authenticity. As Amelia Rauser argues, imitation here gives access to authenticity. She identifies as the catalyst for the “golden age” of caricature and its rapid popularisation around 1780 the emergence of a modern concept of selfhood, which consists of an inner, authentic core of self hidden behind the façade of an outer, public self (2008, 15 and 20). Caricature helps us negotiate our way past the deforming representation of a person's exterior appearance to gain insight into (what the caricaturist perceives to be) the hidden, “real” self.

Lawrence Streicher (1967) offers an alternative perspective on this mechanism of caricature. He draws on Walter Benjamin's (1955) characterisation of the modern age of mechanical reproduction as destroying the unique individuality of an original work of art, what Benjamin calls its “aura.” We wish to see the original Mona Lisa, not any number of reproductions of it. In political caricature, by contrast, the image “is meant for mass reproduction from the beginning and sometimes looks better in print than in the original, which may be a rough draft at best” (Streicher [1967, 433]). It is not the aura of the original drawing that is undermined but that of the person represented, as caricature engages in “debunking and downgrading prestige inflation” (Streicher [1967, 433]), i.e., the positive self-image or public image of the person is shown to be inflated. Rauser and Streicher both point to the paradoxical importance that satirical cartoons accord to authenticity: while these lack authentic uniqueness, their function is to expose the hidden authentic self of their target. *Punch* cartoons of Louis-Napoleon are a perfect illustration

of this recourse to an imitative medium in order to lay bare deeper essential truths about their subject.

### ***Punch* caricatures of Louis-Napoleon**

[Figure 1 near here]

“My Uncle!” (*Punch*, 1848, Fig. 1) presents a hustings scene anticipating the 1852 presidential elections, which never took place because of the *coup*. Louis-Napoleon points to the Napoleonic bicorne hat, military coat and boots as a short-hand for his claim to be the rightful heir of his uncle. He is juxtaposed with his prospective competitor, François d’Orléans, Prince de Joinville, who founded his campaign on being the uncle of the Orleanist pretender to the French throne, Philippe d’Orléans (the little boy). The mirroring statements, “I am the uncle of my nephew” and “I am the nephew of my uncle” underline the parallel between both men’s doubtful qualification to govern the country, as the candidates’ claim to authority through dynastic association is disparaged. Little Philippe d’Orléans, whose featureless face can barely be seen, looks decidedly unregal. Yet the Prince de Joinville holds on to the body of his nephew, grounding his claim to power in the physical presence of the pretender and his tactile connection with him. By contrast, while Napoleon I’s uniform acts as a convenient metonymy to evoke his heroic aura, this representation via his clothes without a depiction of his body suggests a more tenuous connection between the two Bonapartes. The absence of Napoleon I’s body encodes the nephew’s inability to access the authentic essence of the heroic uncle in the Romantic sense, one that cannot be transferred via the mere externals of clothing.

While Louis-Napoleon’s imitation of his uncle is debunked, the cartoon’s attack on him is complicated by the fact that “My Uncle!” – like several other *Punch* cartoons – is

itself an act of imitation. It is clearly derivative of French predecessors, in particular “Les Prétendants” ([*The Pretenders*] *Le Journal pour rire*, 1848). This cartoon contrasts the two presidential contenders – Louis-Napoleon dressed in his uncle’s uniform and holding the imperial eagle – with their mirroring claims that the *Punch* cartoon translates, “Je suis l’oncle de mon neveu” and “Je suis le neveu de mon oncle.” The device of the uncle’s empty uniform as standing for the nephew’s claim to his succession seems inspired by one of Cham’s “Croquis électoraux” [“Electoral Sketches”], produced in the run-up to the 1848 presidential election, “Profession de foi napoléonienne” ([“Profession of Faith/Statement of Political Principles”] *Le Charivari*, 1848). It pictures a crowd in front of an election poster which depicts only the Napoleonic military coat, boots, bicorne and a telescope. Louis-Napoleon appears here, so to speak, not as the emperor without clothes but as the emperor who is *nothing but* clothes – and what could be worse, according to Romantic aesthetics, than borrowing from others to hide one’s lack of selfhood?<sup>10</sup> Louis-Napoleon’s transgression against the concept of authenticity and his position as a hate figure for the opposition are so dominant that the *Punch* cartoon’s own lack of authenticity is screened out: its functionality as an efficient attack outweighs aesthetic considerations of originality. Besides, readers of *Punch* would generally not have had access to the French works that are being imitated, so the *Punch* cartoon’s lack of originality does not inform their reception of the work.

[Figure 2 near here]

A less directly imitative example is “Scene from ‘The President’s Progress’ (Suggested by Hogarth)” (*Punch*, 1852, Fig. 2). It is a sequel to the earlier “The President’s Progress” (*Punch*, 1849), a comic-strip-style satirical history of Louis-Napoleon’s rise to the presidency. Published shortly after the 1851 *coup*, the sequel presents Louis-Napoleon, still President at this point, betraying his ambitions by having

himself measured up for his imperial suit. In the right-hand bottom corner lies some fabric with Napoleon I's bee pattern, labelled "imperial purple first quality," but a closer look at the scene suggests that we are viewing here a second-rate Napoleon. References to the uncle abound: a painting of him reviewing his guards above the mantelpiece (evoking [Audibran's "Napoléon passant la revue de sa garde"](#), ["Napoleon Reviewing His Guard"] ca. 1811); the iconic bicorne hat; and a pile of imperial insignia on the floor. Yet everything seems to be in tatters: the jackboot has a hole in the sole; the room is in bad repair; and the position of the Hand of Justice from the Imperial coat of arms suggests that the bust of Napoleon I is thumbing its nose at his inferior imitator.

Despite the pervasive references to Napoleon I as a military leader, the emphasis here is on Louis-Napoleon's usurpation of the title of emperor, as he is dressed in a court suit rather than a uniform. The cartoon is, of course, a parody of the first scene from William Hogarth's [A Rake's Progress](#) (1734). On coming into his inheritance, Hogarth's rake pays off his servant-mistress for his breach of promise. This translates into Louis-Napoleon's violent *coup* as a desertion of the cause of Liberty (whose allegorical figure is comforted by France in the cartoon) after the promises made in his election campaigns and pamphlets. By contrast, the foundation of the First Empire – attained through a bloodless *coup* – is no target of critique. Indeed, the inclusion of the French civil code, the "Code Napoléon" (1804), even commends Napoleon I's record as a legislator. Here, more clearly than in the cartoons discussed above, Napoleon I is implicitly presented as possessing a heroic aura, while Louis-Napoleon's attempt to claim a share in it is inappropriate.

This cartoon too is derivative in that the allegory of Liberty had featured prominently in republican iconography such as Eugène Delacroix's painting [La Liberté guidant le peuple](#) ([*Liberty Leading the People*] 1830), which *Punch* readers may well have

recognised. The British audience would have been less conscious of the pervasive presence of Liberty in French political cartoons from the 1840s and 1850s (see Rhoden [2011, 520-7]). As Jack Rhoden contends, it was crucial to the demonising construction of Louis-Napoleon as an enemy of republicanism – although *he* was the one supporting universal male suffrage, not the republicans (45-67, 99-138). However, in contrast to “My Uncle!,” the parody of Hogarth moves this cartoon beyond straightforward imitation. It pays homage to a British artist, situating itself within a specifically British cultural frame despite the foreign subject and the many tropes imported from the French context. By evoking Hogarth’s story of a dissolute and unworthy spendthrift heir, it also highlights Louis-Napoleon’s reputation as a conspicuous dandy during his years of London exile, of which the British audience would have been aware. Imitation is here alleviated by the creative translation from Hogarth’s model to the new target of critique.

[Figure 3 near here]

The creative play with imitation and the assessment of the two Napoleons are more complex in John Leech’s “A Beggar on Horseback; Or, the Brummagem Bonaparte out for a Ride” (*Punch*, 1851, Fig. 3). More clearly than “Scene from ‘The President’s Progress,’” Leech’s cartoon echoes the Hegelian glorification of Napoleon I as a man of political action. It parodies Jacques-Louis David’s highly romanticised propaganda painting, [\*Bonaparte franchissant le Grand-Saint-Bernhard\*](#) ([*Napoleon Crossing the Alps*] 1801). This first official portrait of Napoleon I, which exists in five life-size versions and was reproduced in a variety of media, depicts an extravagantly imposing General Bonaparte on horseback at the Saint Bernhard Pass *en route* to victory in Italy. His heroic credentials are unsubtly reinforced by the inscriptions “Bonaparte,” “Hannibal” and “Karolus Magnus” on the rocks in the bottom-left corner, which openly claim the aura of historical military leaders for the young general.

Leech's cartoon also seems to take inspiration from two other, less obvious but more contemporary sources, drawings from *Le Journal pour rire* [*The Laughter Magazine*]. It invites comparison with Edmond Morin's "Mieux fait douceur que violence" ([“Better be gentle than violent”] 1850), in which President Louis-Napoleon in his uncle's uniform tries to ride a resistant horse whose Phrygian cap identifies it as the Republic, while a bystander (anticipating the *coup*) advises him that using force may result in being thrown off the horse. However, the tone and the historic moment of Leech's cartoon, published in the immediate aftermath of the *coup*, is markedly different, adopting instead elements from another cartoon co-created by Morin. The champagne bottles which Leech's Louis-Napoleon carries in his saddle recall Morin and Félix Pech's "Etude monumentale" ([“Study for a Monument”] 1850). This mock-monument to Louis-Napoleon depicts him in military uniform astride a horse composed of items of food and drink, such as hams, sausages and champagne, alluding to his alleged bribery of the local garrisons to support his three *coups*.

David's heroic Napoleon I contrasts with the strikingly inglorious figure of Leech's Louis-Napoleon. The title identifies him as a “Beggar” and “Brummagem Bonaparte,” i.e., a cheap, shoddy imitation. While the human cost of the Italian campaign is screened out of David's painting, Leech's cartoon stresses Louis-Napoleon's use of violence: he wears a skull instead of a medal on his chest, and his horse tramples over the corpse of a civilian mourned by a woman. The pose of the horse trampling an innocent woman may be a further intertextual allusion to George Cruikshank's “Victory at Peterloo” (1821), a mock design for a monument to the Peterloo massacre. However, the threat implied in this pose is tempered by ridicule as Louis-Napoleon's horse charges over a precipice of which the rider seems quite unaware. Leech thus practises the same mix of borrowings from French and British predecessors and two different cultural contexts as “Scene from

‘The President’s Progress.’” He adds the complexity of adopting elements from different historical moments (the Second Republic and Peterloo) to apply them to the topical situation of the 1851 *coup*.

The mixture of threat and ridicule in Leech’s cartoon also suggests a debt to representations of Napoleon I by British artists like James Gilray and George Cruikshank from the first two decades of the nineteenth century, which had a profound influence on British political cartoons. Both repeatedly associated Napoleon I with the devil and derided him as a childish or grotesque figure who exceeded the limits of his abilities. These caricatures created the original trope of Napoleon the Little, spreading the myth of his short stature, although at 5 feet 7 inches he was actually taller than average (see Ashton 1884, *Boney* 1985, Clayton and O’Connell 2015). The ridiculing portrayal of a diminutive yet dangerous Louis-Napoleon by cartoonists of the 1840s and 1850s is hence an imitation of techniques used by their illustrious predecessors – with the important difference that they effectively transform the former arch-enemy of British caricature into an inimitable hero.

### **The *Poetic Works* of Louis Napoleon**

The same implicit promotion of Napoleon I as a way of denouncing his nephew can be seen in the spoof *Poetic Works* of Louis Napoleon. Here, too, references to Napoleon I’s military attributes, especially his uniform, loom large. In “The Lay of the Strasbourg Coup” (pp. 30-43), for instance, Louis-Napoleon dons for his first attempted *coup* a pair of jackboots which he claims to be his uncle’s. The sight of the boots, like his evocations of imperial “gloire” and a cockatoo as a farcical substitute for the imperial eagle, secure him the support of Strasbourg’s garrison. This is undone, however, when a local



bootmaker dispels the myth of the emperor's boots by revealing that he made them for the nephew. Even the metonymic attributes on which Louis-Napoleon bases his claim to his uncle's aura are hence revealed to be fake, adding to the fakery of the nephew himself.

The popular lyrical genre of the lay evokes the tradition of propagandist songs which made an important contribution to the perpetuation of the Napoleonic Legend among the French lower classes and which Louis-Napoleon's campaign revived so astutely. The lay is yet another illustration of a device used successfully by Louis-Napoleon but also deployed against him with a shift from hagiographic to comic tone to devalue his act of imitation.

The poem "The Eagle" (pp. 5-17) – a parody of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" (1845) – depicts a tipsy Louis-Napoleon in his London exile, depressed not by the death of his beloved Lenore but by debt. He is visited not by a raven but by an eagle, which perches not on a bust of Pallas Athena but on one of the ballerina Carlotta Grisi, with whom Louis-Napoleon may have had an affair. The eagle's repeated utterance is "You're a bore," replacing Poe's ominous refrain "Nevermore." Louis-Napoleon construes this as a positive message from the "Emperore" inviting him to recover the imperial crown. Just as in "Scene from 'The President's Progress,'" Louis-Napoleon is represented through a key signifier of Napoleon I's imperial aura, but is confronted with the repudiation of his illicit appropriation via the voice of the bird.

Combined with the homage to Poe, there is also an allusion here to Jean de La Fontaine's fable "Le Corbeau voulant imiter l'aigle" ["The Raven Wishing to Imitate the Eagle" 1668] in which a hubristic raven attempts to hunt prey as big as that of an eagle. It is eventually captured by a farmer, a costly lesson about not aspiring beyond one's limited capabilities. This allusion to La Fontaine may in turn be inspired by a French caricature, "Suite aux fables de La Fontaine: L'Oie parée de plumes d'Aigle" ([Sequel

to the Fables of La Fontaine: The Goose decked out in Eagle Feathers”] 1848) in which a goose – a stock image for Louis-Napoleon – poses in front of a mirror dressed up as an imperial eagle.<sup>11</sup> The imagery of the imperial eagle and the metaphor of dishonest disguise are brought together, reinforcing the rejection of Louis-Napoleon’s act of illicit imitation.

### **Caricature, parody and changing aesthetic paradigms**

These samples from the *Punch* cartoons and the *Poetic Works* demonstrate how the attack on Louis-Napoleon’s appropriation of his uncle’s aura draws on the period’s valuing of authenticity and a concomitant denigration of imitation. Both cartoons and poems also bring into sharper focus political and aesthetic problems inherent in attacking the new Napoleon through association with the old. On the political level, two paradoxes emerge. First, as noted above, the representation of Louis-Napoleon as an inferior imitator implicitly promotes the erstwhile national arch-enemy Napoleon I as a positive foil. This revaluation becomes less problematic since the focus has shifted from the no longer threatening uncle to the living nephew whose *coup* and early repressive reign were documented in detail by the British press (see Palm 1948).

Second, unbeknownst to the general British public, both the *Punch* cartoons and the *Poetic Works* readily adopt the iconography of French republican cartoons, although their political position is a lot more conservative. *Punch*’s politics in the 1850s are best described as patriotic conservatism. The fact that *Punch* was the only satirical magazine whose pieces the *Times* occasionally reprinted is an indicator of how mainstream the initially more liberal magazine had become (Altick [1997, 11]). Indeed, its key contributors, Mark Lemon, Douglas Jerrold and John Leech, had served alongside Louis-Napoleon as special constables in the repression of Chartism (Scully [2011, 161]). The

*Poetic Works* have been attributed to William Edmondstoune Aytoun (1813-65), either as single author or in joint authorship with Theodore Martin (1816-1909), with whom he collaborated for the staunchly conservative *Blackwood's Magazine*.<sup>12</sup> The poet's/ poets' conservatism would explain why the *Poetic Works* contain no references to Louis-Napoleon's crushing of the short-lived Roman Republic of 1849 to reinstate the worldly power of the Pope, while the collection denounces the confiscations in January 1852 of all possessions of the Orléans family who had ruled France from 1830 to 1848.<sup>13</sup>

Two explanations for the surprising proximity of conservative satirists to the republican idiom suggest themselves. First, political sympathies would have been outweighed by the outrage at Louis-Napoleon's repressive press laws, which *Punch* repeatedly denounced in its pages.<sup>14</sup> Second, the general politics of British publications may be more defined by the preferences of their broadly conservative audience than by the, at least in part, more liberal values of their contributors. The hostility towards Louis-Napoleon among the British conservative mainstream may have provided satirists with an opportunity to launch attacks on anti-liberalism abroad rather than at home, without offending public opinion, just as campaigning for democratic causes in other countries, notably Italy, acted as an outlet for liberal intellectuals like Elizabeth Barrett Browning or A. C. Swinburne.

Turning to the aesthetic problem inherent in these works, the analysis has highlighted the parallel between the British cartoonists' stigmatising of Louis-Napoleon as an imitator and their own heavily imitative works. Similarly, the *Poetic Works* are a *tour de force* of literary imitation, including the close verbal parody of popular poems such as Joanna Baillie's "The Outlaw's Song" (1840) in "The Chough and Crow to Roost are Gone" (pp. 18-19), and the looser parody of Thomas Babington Macaulay's historical poem "The Armada" (1842) in "My Armada" (pp. 20-27). The parody also extends to the general

mode of the popular ballad and includes a poem entitled “My Uncle” (pp. 28-29), which adopts the title, rhyme scheme and some of the content of a poem published in *Punch* in January 1852. The *Punch* poem is itself a parody of Ann Taylor’s much parodied popular poem “My Mother” (1803).<sup>15</sup> Unless the anonymous *Punch* poem was by Aytoun and/ or Martin, who seem to have had no association with the magazine, “My Uncle” and the *Poetic Works* as a whole are therefore derivative at multiple levels.

Of course, these instances of imitation in the cartoons and poems could be justified as acts of homage to predecessors. Analysts of caricature stress the genre’s “highly self-referential and richly intervisual” nature, “constantly borrowing from and innovating upon earlier prints” (Haywood [2013, 9-10]). Similarly, modern theorists of parody reject the common association of parody with ridicule of the imitated predecessor text, replacing it with a more neutral definition as a repetition with a difference, which can include the acknowledgement of aesthetic debt (see Hutcheon [2000], Rose [1993]). Yet the works examined here do not quite fit with Linda Hutcheon’s definition as “transcontextualising” previous works. Criticism on the genre assumes the relationship between parody and parodied predecessor text and the aesthetic argument between the two to be the central interest of the work. However, in the parodic works on Louis-Napoleon the predecessor work is of secondary importance: it is a mere vehicle deployed the better to attack the target. The end (efficient political attack) justifies the means (derivative imitation). This dominance of the works’ pragmatic over their aesthetic dimension would again explain why they do not receive attention from critics whose primary concern is aesthetic.

Looking at the critical evaluation of Aytoun’s work more broadly, the pragmatic nature of his extensive output in imitative genres seems to account for his marginal status in criticism. His works do not lend themselves readily to twentieth-century definitions of parody like that promoted by the Russian Formalists as laying bare exhausted devices and

renewing artistic traditions through self-criticism (Shklovsky qtd. in Rose [1993, 114]). Aytoun built his reputation mainly on literary translations and on the *Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers* (1848), a collection of traditional, historical ballads which had reached its eighteenth edition by the time he died in 1865, and also on similarly popular parodies in the *Ballads of Bon Gaultier* (first published in *Blackwood's* 1836-44), co-authored with Martin. Aytoun is now best known for his mock review of *Firmilian* (1854), published under a pseudonym, through which he managed to laugh out of fashion the poets whom he labelled as "Spasmodic." *Firmilian* indicates how powerful a tool satirical parody was in Aytoun's hands, but it also alerts us to the fact that it is always reliant on the existence of predecessor texts to which it responds. It cannot claim the prestige of originality. The Spasmodics may have relied heavily on elements of Romantic poetry, such as overblown Keatsian imagery and the Byronic pose of the *poète maudit*, but they were innovative in some respects and influenced more important innovators like Tennyson and Browning. In *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau*, the latter was able to engage with the complexities of Louis-Napoleon's character and his self-fashioning through the new genre of the dramatic monologue, avoiding the danger of becoming a belated imitator himself. By contrast, all that Aytoun arguably did was stifle the innovation of the Spasmodics, offering no fresh alternative to their poetics (see Cronin [2002], Boos [2004]).

In the *Poetic Works*, the uncomfortable parallel between the imitative poet and his target is most striking in the construction of Louis-Napoleon's literary belatedness. The fictional Louis-Napoleon who authors the *Poetic Works* emphasises his identity as an author through a paratextual apparatus of a preface, notes and a dedication, which is of course "To My Uncle." Here, and elsewhere in the collection, he alludes to the work which establishes his claim to be his uncle's political heir, *Des idées napoléoniennes*, and refers to Napoleon I's taste for James Macpherson's spurious Ossian poems (1760),

stating that “You were poetic yourself: you read Ossian (in the original Gaelic)” (*Poetic Works*, p. v). The reference to Ossian signals that the *Poetic Works* are a hoax like Macpherson’s poems. The work thus offers an infinite regress of imitation and fakery: Aytoun parodies poems by popular authors to create a fictional imitation of a historical figure (Louis-Napoleon) who imitates a subject (Napoleon I) who admires an author (Macpherson) who forges the writing of a non-existent author (Ossian) whose writings are based on anonymous, orally transmitted texts.

It is tempting to read this infinite regress of ostensibly imitated but actually intangible “originals” as an illustration of the deconstructionist absence or deferral of the original. This would suggest that the attack on Louis-Napoleon for being an imitator is invalid, since original and copy have been replaced by simulation, where the simulacrum no longer represents a pre-existing reality (Baudrillard 1983). Jean Baudrillard categorises this situation as the third of his four phases of the image: the simulacrum “masks the absence of a profound reality” (1983, 6). By contrast, Louis-Napoleon’s satirists display an attitude characteristic of Baudrillard’s second phase in considering his copy as “mask[ing] and denature[ing] a profound reality,” as “an evil appearance . . . in the order of maleficence” (1983, 6). Their agenda consists in replacing the simulacrum of Louis-Napoleon’s public self-image with what they consider to be a representation of the original, true self. However, they do this by means of a deliberately falsifying simulacrum: visual and verbal parody.

Baudrillard associates this second phase historically with the onset of the Industrial Revolution, when, as Benjamin argues, the advent of commodified mass reproduction leads to a breakdown of the distinction between reality and representation, meaning that the copy is perceived as just as real as the original. This leads to the original’s loss of its unique aura. As noted above, Streicher singles out caricature, which relies on mass

reproduction, as a prime example of this process leading to the devaluing of the unique artefact. Consequently, caricature and parody, with their similar debunking of the original's value, can be considered ahead of the sensibilities of their era, which still revolve around originality and authenticity.

This progressive feature of the genres may explain why satires of Louis-Napoleon can criticise him for a lack of Romantic authenticity while they themselves are not to be judged by the same standards. Adding to the critically devalued pragmatic nature of these works, the two genres' dual aesthetics may also go some way towards explaining why criticism has given relatively little attention to them. Victorianist critics may be too used to judging works by the Romantic standards that dominate the period's taste, in contrast to critics of modernism and postmodernism, periods which embrace fakery and imitation as creative acts. The cartoons and satirical poems about Louis-Napoleon not only lay bare the aesthetic values of the period and how they can be exploited for opposing political purposes in various media; they also give an insight into shifts in aesthetic paradigms and more specifically into how works situated at a watershed moment can accommodate two ostensibly opposed aesthetics.

### Figure captions

**Figure 1** Anon. 1848. "My Uncle!." *Punch, or the London Charivari* 15 (October? 1848): 189.

**Figure 2** Anon. 1852. "Scene from 'The President's Progress' (Suggested by Hogarth)." *Punch, or the London Charivari* 22 (January 1852): 37.

**Figure 3** Leech, John. 1851. "A Beggar on Horseback; Or, the Brummagem Bonaparte out for a Ride." *Punch, or the London Charivari* 21 (December 1851): 275.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> See e.g., Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Poems Before Congress* (1860), Robert Browning's *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* (1871), Robert Buchanan's *Napoleon Fallen* (1871), Algernon Charles Swinburne's *Diræ* (1873) or William Blanchard Jerrold's *The Life of Napoleon III* (4 vols., 1874-82). For a study of primarily French period sources which focuses on their literary modes, see Baguley (2000).
- <sup>2</sup> See e.g., Rhoden (2011).
- <sup>3</sup> See especially *Extinction du paupérisme* [*The Elimination of Poverty*] 1844).
- <sup>4</sup> For a study of these artefacts see Tudesq (1965, 7-34).
- <sup>5</sup> For the role of Napoleon I's own propaganda in his hero cult, see Dwyer (2004). For the development of this cult under the Bourbon Restoration, see Hazareesingh (2004).
- <sup>6</sup> Trilling (1972) distinguishes unselfconscious "authenticity" from the performance of truthfulness that is "sincerity". As Trilling's books has shaped the critical vocabulary, this essay adopts his terminology, even though nineteenth-century writers often use "sincerity" when referring to what Trilling would label "authenticity."
- <sup>7</sup> The "Black Legend" developed mostly after Louis-Napoleon's reign, when under the Third Republic the illegality of his coup, the political repression and corruption of his reign and the territorial losses that resulted from the defeat at Sedan were denounced. Republican propaganda as well as republican teleological historiography firmly established the view of Louis-Napoleon as a dictatorial impostor and of his reign as an aberrant phase of regression in an otherwise progressive narrative of the French nation towards liberal republicanism (see e.g., Seignobos, 1921).
- <sup>8</sup> For a detailed study of French caricatures of Louis-Napoleon, see Rhoden (2011), and for an overview of European caricatures see Scully (2011). For the broader debt of British satirical press to French models see Schlicke (2004).
- <sup>9</sup> See also McFarlane's (2007) account of the beginning of this swing back to an appreciation of imitation at the end of the nineteenth century.
- <sup>10</sup> The popularity of Hans Christian Andersen's tale "The Emperor's New Clothes" (1837) can be read as an indicator of how this clothes imagery speaks to contemporary ideas about authenticity and external appearance.
- <sup>11</sup> For further suggestions of debts British caricaturist owe to Nadar's *Revue comique* [*Comic Review*] for the contrasting of uncle and nephew, see Carpenter (1997, 305-6, 308-12).
- <sup>12</sup> The American edition of the *Poetical Works, The Napoleon Ballads* (1852), was published under Martin and Ayton's joint pseudonym, Bon Gaultier. Parton's anthology (1881, 345-47, 512-14), which only names Aytoun, seems reliable, although neither Aytoun's posthumous *Poems* (1921) nor his biographers Frykman (1963), Weinstein (1968) and Martin (1867) himself mention the Louis-Napoleon poems.
- <sup>13</sup> See e.g., "A Vision of the Future. Being an Ossianic Fragment," p. 108.
- <sup>14</sup> See e.g., "La Presse est Morte: Vive la Presse" ["The Press is Dead: Long Live the Press"] 1848), "Free Discussion in France" (1850), "The French President and the French Press" (1851), "The New Law of the French Press" (1852).
- <sup>15</sup> Hamilton's (1884-89) anthology contains over one hundred parodies of this poem.

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