

# A lifelong and hereditary power: the question of the *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte*

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# A LIFELONG AND HEREDITARY POWER: THE QUESTION OF THE PARALLÈLE ENTRE CÉSAR, CROMWEL, MONCK ET BONAPARTE

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## Abstract

On 10 Brumaire An 9/1 November 1800, a 16-page anonymous pamphlet entitled *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte* was published in Paris. In it, figures central to revolutions and changes in political power from the past – such as Oliver Cromwell, George Monck, and Julius Caesar – were directly compared to Napoleon Bonaparte, First Consul of France. ‘Who wrote it?’ and ‘Why?’ were questions that were asked at the time, and indeed still today. Furthermore, Napoleon himself seems to have been directly involved. In a few days there were copies of the pamphlet throughout France. But suddenly, Napoleon took against it, angered by the ‘folly’ of trying to institute heredity by a law, officially denying any connection with the *Parallèle* and having it removed from circulation. How was it possible that the affair caused so much commotion? This article takes a new look at the pamphlet,

which seems to have been a sort of public opinion test balloon on the question of heredity, and considers its place within Bonaparte's relatively swift (and easy) journey from republican Consulship to 'Carolingian' Emperor.

## A LIFELONG AND HEREDITARY POWER: THE QUESTION OF THE PARALLÈLE ENTRE CÉSAR, CROMWEL, MONCK ET BONAPARTE

On the 10 Brumaire An 9/1 November 1800, the *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte* was published in Paris.<sup>1</sup> It is a 16-page pamphlet in which figures central to revolutions and changes in political power from the past – such as Oliver Cromwell, George Monck, and Julius Caesar – were directly compared to

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1 The author is grateful to the editors for their help with this article. *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte*. Fragment traduit de l'Anglais, without publisher or date (but early November 1800), 16 pages. Online here: <https://digicol.lib.depaul.edu/digital/collection/p16106coll2/id/7455>, consulted in March 2023. A copy of the first edition of the pamphlet was also reproduced by Baron Antoine-Marie Røederer (ed.) in his edition of his father the Comte's works, *Œuvres du comte P.[ierre]-L.[ouis] Røederer [...]* (Paris: Typographie de Firmin Didot Frères, 1854), vol. 3, 342-46. Thierry Lentz, in 'Vers le pouvoir héréditaire: *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte* de Lucien Bonaparte', in *Revue du Souvenir Napoléonien*, no. 431 (oct.-nov. 2000) : 3-6, (presumably basing himself Pierre Louis Røederer, see here note 6) dates it to 10 Brumaire An 9/1 November 1800. It saw at least three editions – with varying texts – before 25 Brumaire/16 November (The *Journal des débats et des décrets*, dated 19 Brumaire, An 9 (10 November 1800), p. 3-4, notes that it had appeared « ces jours-ci »). See also Yuki Kusuda, 'Les fantômes des Anglais du XVIIe siècle au temps de la Révolution française' in *La Révolution française. Cahiers de l'Institut d'histoire de la Révolution française*, vol. 19 (2021), <http://journals.openedition.org/lrf/4605>, consulted in March 2023 and Bernard Gainot, 'La République contre elle-même. Figures et postures de l'opposition à Bonaparte au début du Consulat (novembre 1799-mars 1801)', in Antonino De Francesco (ed.), *Da Brumaio ai Cento giorni. Cultura di governo e dissenso politico nell'Europa di Bonaparte* (Milan: Guerini, 2007), 143-156.

Napoleon Bonaparte, First Consul of France.<sup>2</sup> What sets it apart is the author's identity and the effects of the publication. Pierre-Louis Røederer, close not only to the First Consul's brothers, Joseph and Lucien, but also the consul himself, wrote: "Il est à peu près avoué, de tous les hommes instruits des détails, que la brochure est de Fontanes, sauf les exclamations de la fin, qui sont dans le genre de Lucien".<sup>3</sup> Jean-Pierre Louis de Fontanes was a poet and writer who wrote for the *Mercure de France*, a newspaper with a conservative outlook and at the time favourable to the First Consul's entourage.<sup>4</sup> Røederer also noted Napoleon's own involvement in the pamphlet as far as the ideas were concerned whilst at the same time noting the Consul's dissociation of himself from the final part: "J'en avais moi-même donné l'idée<sup>5</sup>, pour répondre aux calomnies anglaises. Mais les deux dernières pages sont de la folie ; jamais l'hérédité n'a

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2 This was picking up on an issue highlighted precisely a year earlier on 19 Brumaire 1799, the source for which could have been Napoleon himself. In a dialogue distributed amongst the politicians (possibly written by Napoleon himself (or Napoleon's close collaborator, Pierre-Louis Røederer)?, between a member of the Conseil des Anciens and a member of the Conseil des Cinq-Cents, published in *Gazette nationale ou le Moniteur universel*, 19 Brumaire, An 8 (10 novembre 1799): "L'ancien. Un César, un Cromwel! ..... 'Mauvais rôles, rôles usés, indignes d'un homme de sens, quand ils ne le seraient pas d'un homme de bien.' C'est ainsi que Bonaparte lui-même s'en est expliqué dans plusieurs occasions."

3 Remark dated 26 Brumaire/17 November, 1800, see Røederer, *Œuvres*, vol. 3, 350.

4 Fontanes, infamous for his flattery of the Consul and later Emperor, held increasingly important roles in the consular and later imperial France. In 1808 he was appointed *Grand maître de l'Université* (head of the French Universities) and, in the same year, count of the Empire. After Napoleon's abdication, however, Fontanes immediately sided with the new regime, being appointed Minister of Education by Louis XVIII and, later, elevated to marquis.

5 Though he was not sure (in his memoirs he puts forward his deductions in four long points), Røederer also had heard from Lucien that Bonaparte had seen and approved the pamphlet before publication and had made several corrections, Røederer, *Œuvres*, vol. 3, 348: "[...] Lucien dit en partant que la brochure pour laquelle on l'envoyait en exil avait été connue de son frère, et approuvée par lui ; si bien qu'il en emportait l'original, où se trouvaient quatre corrections de la main du premier consul. Cela est-il vrai ? Je n'en sais rien ; mais je le pense [...]".

été instituée ; elle s'est établie d'elle-même. Elle est trop absurde pour être reçue comme une loi [...]".<sup>6</sup> In the period before the publication of Røederer's memoirs in the 1850s, some attributed the pamphlet to Pierre-Louis de Lacretelle, also known as "Lacretelle the Elder",<sup>7</sup> a philosopher and literate also collaborator of the *Mercure de France*. Certainly, a credible hypothesis, considering Lacretelle's positions and the fact that just one year before (1 December, 1799) he had published a pamphlet entitled *Sur le dix-huit Brumaire. À Sieyès et à Bonaparte*,<sup>8</sup> a text that expressed a flattering judgment of the coup d'état and that spoke openly of dictatorship, exalting the figure of the First Consul.<sup>9</sup>

In any case, in a few days there were copies of the pamphlet throughout France. As Røederer wrote "Il [the pamphlet] a paru le 10 brumaire, a été adressé sous enveloppe à tous les fonctionnaires publics à Paris et dans les départements. »<sup>10</sup> Napoleon then, as noted by Røederer, angered by the folly of trying to institute heredity by a law, officially denied any connection with the *Parallèle* and

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6 Røederer, *Œuvres*, vol. 3, 353.

7 In some cases, the text is attributed to his younger brother, Charles de Lacretelle. See Antoine-Alexandre Barbier, *Dictionnaire des ouvrages anonymes* (Paris: P. Daffis, 1872-1879), 781: "*Parallèle entre César, Cromwell, Monk et Bonaparte. Fragment traduit de l'anglais*. S.l. n.d. (décembre 1800), in-8, 16 p. Le "*Dictionnaire des anonymes*", sous le No. 23173, attribuait cet écrit à Charles-Joseph Lacretelle le jeune. M. Thiers le donne à L. de Fontanes. Bourienne l'a inséré dans ses *Mémoires* t. VI, p. 81 à 96, il l'attribue Napoléon, aidé de son frère Lucien. Voy. "*le Quérard*", t. II, p. 637."

8 Lacretelle ainé [Pierre-Louis de Lacretelle], *Sur le dix-huit Brumaire. À Sieyès et à Bonaparte* (Paris: Imprimerie du Journal de Paris, An VIII [1799]).

9 For an analysis of the text, see Peter Hicks, "At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, you cannot do what they did in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup>". Napoleon, Lacretelle, Jordan and Bonald: the consulate and contemporary political theory', in *Napoleonica. La Revue*, no. 13 (2012): 65-77, especially 68-71.

10 Røederer, *Œuvres*, vol. 3, 342 n. 1.

had it removed from circulation.<sup>11</sup> In a three-way meeting with the head of police Fouché and Lucien Bonaparte Interior Minister, the First Consul dismissed his brother, the convenient scapegoat, from his prestigious ministry.

How was it possible that the pamphlet caused so much commotion, and that the comparison with important, but loaded, figures from the past was enough to make the First Consul politically to “repudiate” his own brother?

## The Context

The generalised dissatisfaction with the Revolution during Directory in the last four years of the Revolutionary decade (1795-1799), notably amongst the so-called *idéologues*<sup>12</sup> and their opponents, the Feuillants and Club de Clichy members, had made the bloodless coup d'état of 18 Brumaire possible, along with the consequent strengthening of the executive (initially in the hands of the three Consuls). A significant part of the coup d'état had belonged to Lucien in his role as president of the Council of Five Hundred – it

11 Rœderer, *Œuvres*, vol. 3, 346 n. 2 : The police minister, Fouché, wrote to the prefects in the departments as follows: “Je vous charge, citoyen préfet, d'arrêter la distributions d[e...] *Parallèle entre Bonaparte, César, Cromwell et Monck*. Je sais qu'il vous a été envoyé en très-grande quantité, et que les auteurs de cette production ont prétendu, en vous l'adressant, vous en faire le distributeur. Jugez-la comme elle mérite de l'être, comme le fruit d'une intrigue.”

12 Proclaiming themselves moral successors of the Enlightenment philosophers, the *idéologues* gathered in 1795 in the *Société des idéologues*, with the goal of contributing to the political management of the France through a series of reforms aimed at creating a secular and deeply anti-authoritarian and anti-despotic society. If at first the *idéologues* supported Napoleon in his political rise and in the coup d'état of 18 Brumaire, their opposition to what they considered increasingly despotic positions of the First Consul soon became evident. See Sergio Moravia, *Il pensiero degli idéologues. Scienza e filosofia in Francia (1780-1815)* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1974). On the Feuillants and Clichy Club and their figurehead Carnot, see Peter Hicks, 'Lazare Carnot, a forgotten piece in the Napoleon Bonaparte jigsaw', in *Napoleonica. La Revue*, no. 16/1 (2013): 64-74.

was he who interrupted the assembly when it was about to vote the outlawing of Napoleon, following the latter's intrusion in the Council Hall.<sup>13</sup> However, the Constitution of the year VIII (promulgated in December 1799) was to set in stone a strengthening of the executive in the increasingly singular power of the First Consul, Napoleon Bonaparte. According to some scholars,<sup>14</sup> already upon the general's return from the Italian Campaign in 1797, the reception of Bonaparte in Paris had made imaginable the establishment of a personal power, and so laid the foundations of a personal and authoritarian rule, fully accomplished after the proclamation of the Empire.

## The Parallèle

The *Parallèle* was an exaltation of Napoleon's persona and a winning comparison with the great figures of the past, showing him as the only and unique possible saviour for France, worthy of a "lifelong" and, above all, "hereditary" power. It begins with a resonant eulogy to the providential nature of Napoleon's coming to power.

Notre révolution avait enfanté jusqu'ici des évènements plus grands que les hommes. Les chefs trop faibles qui avaient voulu la conduire étaient tombés tour à tour. [...] On cherchait depuis dix ans un main ferme et habile qui pût tout arrêter et tout soutenir. [...]

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13 On the coup d'état of 18 Brumaire, see Thierry Lentz, *Le 18 Brumaire* (Paris: Picollec, 1997) and Jean-Paul Bertaud, *Bonaparte prend le pouvoir* (Brussels: Complexe, 1987), as well as the important and extensive work of Jacques-Olivier Boudon, *Histoire du Consulat et de l'Empire* (Paris: Perrin, 2003).

14 See Philippe Bourdin, 'Rêves d'empire chez Bonaparte. Construction intellectuelle d'un modèle politique', in *Siècles* no. 17 (2003): 133. On the forms of creation and permanence of the Napoleonic personal cult towards the end of the Consulate, particularly after the proclamation of the lifelong Consulate, see Cyril Triolaire, 'Célébrer Napoléon après la République: les héritages commémoratifs révolutionnaires au crible de la fête napoléonienne', in *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 346 (2006): 75-96. More specifically on the imperial period, see Riccardo Benzoni, *San Napoleone. Un santo per l'impero* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2009).



Il fallait, pour ramener l'ordre, à cette époque mémorable, un personnage digne de servir lui-même d'époque au peuple français. Ce personnage a paru. Qui ne doit reconnaître *Bonaparte*?<sup>15</sup>

After recognizing Bonaparte as the man of providence, comparisons and specifications begin in the text, reinforcing this assertion in a rhetorical, political and, also in this case, propagandistic way. The past and certain characters from it are used to explain why the First Consul was not only the right man for the times, but also a hero like those of history, though better than them when set in comparison, and, above all, not driven by personal interests.

Then comes the first comparison, with Oliver Cromwell. The figure of Cromwell had indeed been evoked in France many times during the revolutionary period and associated with different political figures. Indeed, it was part of a process of comparison between the events that followed 1789 and those of the English civil war of the previous century. In 1993, Roger Barny<sup>16</sup> retraced the list of "*nouveaux Cromwells*" during the revolutionary period, noting Laclos, La Fayette, Bailly, then Mirabeau, Fauchet, Danton (who even replied to the infamous accusation), Ronsin, obviously Robespierre and, finally, inevitably, Bonaparte. Barny notes that for those of the last decade of the 18th century: "l'image de Cromwell est toujours odieuse : c'est l'incarnation superlative du crime politique et de la laideur morale", and that Cromwell was also considered "une sorte de proconsul, coupé de l'électorat [...]", "un démagogue".<sup>17</sup> However, perhaps the best definition of what contemporaries thought a "Cromwell" was comes from Napoleon himself, in the dialogue attributed to Bonaparte that was distributed to lawmakers in the garden at Saint Cloud on 19 Brumaire 1799 : « un César, un Cromwel [...] *Ce serait une pensée sacrilège [...] que celle d'attenter au gouvernement représentatif dans le siècle des lumières et de la*

15 *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte*, 1-2.

16 Roger Barny, 'L'image de Cromwell dans la Révolution française' in *Dix-huitième Siècle*, no. 25 (1993) : 387-397.

17 Barny, 'L'image de Cromwell', 390, 391 and 392.

*liberté* [i.e., like Cromwell]. *Il n'y a qu'un fou [...] qui voulut, de gaieté de cœur, faire perdre la gageure de la République contre la royauté de l'Europe ; après l'avoir soutenue avec quelque gloire de tant de périls* [supposedly Napoleon's own words quoted by the author of the pamphlet, Napoleon himself !]<sup>18</sup>

Clearly it was this aspect of Cromwell that the *Parallèle* was highlighting and contrasting it with that of Bonaparte. And though Cromwell was indeed “si l'on veut, le héros de la guerre civile”<sup>19</sup> he was unlike Bonaparte in that not a real hero destined to change the world.

Cromwell n'annonçait alors par aucune qualité frappante, le sort qui l'attendait un jour. Rien ne le distinguait de la foule des officiers vulgaires. Les moyens de son élévation furent préparés par d'autres que par lui-même. Les troupes qui le firent vaincre avaient été formée par Fairfax. En un mot, les historiens l'ont vanté plutôt comme un habile officier que comme un grand général. D'ailleurs ses talents militaires, quels qu'ils aient été, ne se déployèrent jamais que contre sa patrie. Il fut l'apôtre, le chef, et s'il on veut le héros de la guerre civile. Mais ce ne fut point *un de ces conquérants qui naissent au jour marqué pour renouveler le monde*. Il eut encore moins la gloire d'un pacificateur. »<sup>20</sup> And so on in the same vein, for a further six pages...

Cromwell had taken actions for his own personal gain; Bonaparte had acted for the salvation of France. Cromwell had no particular talents; Bonaparte possessed them all. In the end, Cromwell was directly guilty of his own destiny; Napoleon acted to defend “*des crimes qui n'étaient pas les siens*”<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, as the *Parallèle*

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18 See note 2 for the beginning of the quotation and the source.

19 *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte*, 3.

20 *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte*, 3. My italics.

21 *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte*, 6. My italics.

went on : “Quel reproche légitimes peuvent lui adresser les ennemis de la révolution ? *Les maux qu'elle a faits commencèrent avant lui.*”<sup>22</sup>

It was in this statement that the fundamental discriminating element in favour of the First Consul lay: Bonaparte had the advantage of youth, which had kept him out of the events of the first phase of the Revolution. More than his talents, more than the human difference between him and the English general, it was time that saved him: Bonaparte was not a regicide, he had not stained himself with the crime of having condemned and killed a king. This statement actually had a double value: in addition to marking the difference with Cromwell, it served as a dividing line for the Revolution itself. Napoleon was a new man, different not only from the chimeras of the previous century, but also from the Revolutionary leaders themselves, Robespierre above all:

Cromwel à la fois geolier, juge et bourreau de son maître, Cromwel qui, d'une fenêtre voisine de la place *Wittehal*, eut la cruauté de voir tomber la tête auguste qu'il avait condamnée, Cromwel, en dépit de ses triomphes, semble dans la plus fameuse époque de sa vie, n'avoir servi de modèle qu'au farouche Robespierre et au vil d'Orléans. In ne manquait à ces deux montres que du courage pour lui ressembler tout-à-fait.<sup>23</sup>

In conclusion, it was not to Cromwell that one should look to find a figure worthy of being compared to Bonaparte:

On s'étonne et on frémit en lisant l'histoire du premier; on admire et on espère en lisant celle du second. L'un a détruit, l'autre répare: l'un excite les guerres civiles et déchire le sein de sa patrie pour parvenir; l'autre parvient et triomphant des ennemis étrangers, et en calmant les guerres civiles. Cromwel était obscur à quarante ans, et dès sa première jeunesse Bonaparte était un héros. Le premier trompe son siècle, le second l'éclaire. L'un outrage les savants, l'autre les honore. L'un veut gouverner par des erreurs, l'autre par les

22 *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte*, 6.

23 *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte*, 4.

lumières. Cromwel a pris quelques villes, Bonaparte a conquis des Empires. Cromwel a tué son roi, Bonaparte s'est hâté d'abolir cette tête odieuse instituée par les bourreaux d'un roi, et tandis que le nom du *protecteur* est à jamais inscrit sur la liste des tyrans heureux, le premier Consul a déjà sa place à côté des plus grands héros de l'antiquité<sup>24</sup>.

A direct comparison, a clear conclusion. Like in the greatest Romantic contrasts, there was a protagonist destined for great things from a very young age, capable of enlightening an era with his presence and embodying all positive virtues, while, on the other side, there was a dark, opposing figure, destined to perish for his own faults and to remain on the wrong side of history. There was, of course, no match.

In closing the first comparison, the perspective shifts to General Monck, another character taken from the English revolution or civil war. Neither of the choices was accidental, and they demonstrate the political and targeted use of history made by the authors of the *Parallèle*. George Monck had played a leading role in the events that followed the death of the usurper, Oliver Cromwell, being considered the main instigator of the restoration of English monarchy. Indeed, he received the title of Duke of Albemarle from the new king Charles II amongst many other honours. Comparing Bonaparte to Monck had a very specific purpose, once again not new in post-revolutionary rhetoric: if distancing oneself from Cromwell meant moving away from an idea of personal despotism and civil war — with half an eye on the *idéologues* — distancing oneself from Monck meant dissipating the increasingly strong rumours swirling around Napoleon that he was a “royalist”, eager to restore the monarchy in France. Once again, the prose is decisive and drastic in judgment, guiding the reader to the obvious conclusion: Napoleon could not be compared to Monck for a whole series of reasons.

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24 *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte*, 7-8.

Monck, le transfuge de tous les partis, Monck qui n'eut pas une qualité d'un ordre supérieur, qui fut tour-à-tour le partisan du Roi, du Parlement et de Cromwel, et dont le caractère équivoque et indécis laisse encore douter à l'histoire s'il voulait se décider réellement pour la République ou pour la Monarchie! Est-ce dans quelques expéditions obscures que fit le général Monck au milieu des rochers de l'Ecosse, qu'on peut trouver le rival de celui dont les trophées couvrent l'Europe, l'Asie et l'Afrique? Est-ce dans les lenteurs, dans les irrésolutions, dans l'indolence connue du premier, qu'on veut chercher des comparaisons avec le plus actif et le plus entreprenant des capitaines? Le titre de duc d'Albemarle put contenter sans doute l'orgueil de Monck et plaire à sa vieillesse oisive; mais croit-on que le bâton de maréchal, ou que l'épée de Connétable suffit à l'homme *devant qui l'univers s'est tû*, au destructeur et au fondateur des empires? ... Ne sait-on pas qu'il est certaines destinées qui appellent la première place? que Bonaparte est trop grand pour jouer un second rôle? Et d'ailleurs, s'il pouvait jamais imiter Monck, ne voit-on pas que la France serait replongée dans les horreur d'une nouvelle Révolution. Les tempêtes, au lieu de se calmer, renaîtraient de toutes parts [...].<sup>25</sup>

As with Cromwell, the comparison with a distant past had the function of detaching Napoleon also – and perhaps especially – from the recent past, the Revolution and its excesses. Monck is liquidated in just two pages, but the passage is still worth taking into consideration for three reasons: first of all because, as mentioned, it met the author's need to increase the gap between Bonaparte and the revolutionary period; secondly because it was useful to affirm the uniqueness of the French events, a concept that Napoleon himself

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25 *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte*, 8-9.

rhetorically evoked several times in the course of the events<sup>26</sup>; thirdly because there was a very real fear that Bonaparte would restore the Bourbons. Furthermore, Napoleon was too big to play a second-rate role, albeit that of kingmaker.

The picture painted so far: was he a Royalist seeking to restore the monarchy (like Monck), was he a despot who would use his power to his own personal advantage (like Cromwell), or was he a saviour, a peacemaker of the Revolution, a hero of Providence?<sup>27</sup> Maybe he was all three... The pamphlet was ready for the final exaltation, the climax that makes the first ten pages of the *Parallèle* nothing more than a premise. A premise, however, that was a direct consequence of the French political framework after 18 Brumaire. You had to look further back if you were to find a figure worthy of Napoleon's glory. You had to go to a distant past, strongly evocative and through which there would have been no risk of reopening wounds that were still too fresh.

Dans la décadence des Rois Carlovingiens, quand la Monarchie était prête à s'anéantir, parut tout-à-coup un personnage extraordinaire, dont aucun historien n'a connu précisément l'origine, et que ses grandes qualités mirent à la tête des Français. Le temps, à travers l'immense variété des événements, ramène plus d'une fois les mêmes causes et les mêmes effets, et qui connaîtrait bien le passé, pourrait prévoir l'avenir. C'est à des Martel, à des Charlemagne et non à des Monck qu'il convient de comparer Bonaparte.

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26 "Qu'on ne cherche pas dans le passé des exemples qui pourraient retarder votre marche! Rien, dans l'histoire, ne ressemble à la fin du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> siècle; rien, dans la fin du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> siècle, ne ressemble au moment actuel". These were the words used by Napoleon on 18 Brumaire, see Jean Massin (ed.), *Napoléon Bonaparte, l'œuvre et l'histoire: Tome I: Ecrits personnels de Napoléon Bonaparte, choisis et présentés par Jean Tulard* (Paris: Editions Le Club du Livre Français, 1969), 463.

27 See the discussion by Peter Hicks on the public perception of the figure of Napoleon and on the significance of the consulate itself, "At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, you cannot do what they did in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup>".

Il faut franchir deux mille ans pour trouver un homme en quelque point semblable à lui. Cet homme, c'est César.

César donne dès sa jeunesse, des signes de sa future grandeur. Il échappe, comme par miracle, à la prévoyance de Sylla, qui voyait en lui plus d'un Marius. Il triomphe dans les trois parties du Monde connu. Il soumet les Peuples les plus barbares et les plus éclairés. Il s'immortalise à la fois dans l'Italie, dans les Gaules et dans l'Afrique.

Bonaparte est fameux au même âge et dans les mêmes contrées. Les milices asiatiques et les meilleures troupes de l'Europe ont reconnu son ascendant. Ils sont nés l'un et l'autre au milieu *des guerres civiles*, et tous deux les ont terminées ; mais César, en accablant le parti le plus juste, et Bonaparte, en ralliant les Citoyens contre le parti des brigands : et ici, Bonaparte et César qui se ressemblent comme guerriers, diffèrent comme politiques.<sup>28</sup>

As we can see, the outline of the narrative changes slightly. No longer a salvific protagonist and an antagonist with exclusively negative characteristics, but two protagonists, both fabulous, both full of positive qualities. One, however, was infallible in every action, both military and political (Napoleon); the other (Julius Caesar), albeit in his military greatness, had made mistakes as a politician, mistakes underlined in the pamphlet so as to mark the differences.

[...] César souleva les fureurs de la multitude contre la sagesse patricienne, qui était le vrai rempart de la Liberté : Brutus, en attaquant César, défendit l'Ordre Social contre l'Anarchie, la Propriété contre la Loi Agraire, le Peuple contre la Populace. Robespierre et ses partisans qui attestaient le nom de Brutus étaient condamnés à la fois par ses actions et par sa doctrine. L'ignorance révolutionnaire avait tout confondu ; il est temps de rétablir les vraies notions de l'Histoire et de la Politique : *C'est contre les Démagogues que Brutus s'est armé : César a été le chef des Démagogues* : il est

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28 *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte*, 9-10. My italics.

arrivé au pouvoir suprême, en étouffant la voix des bons Citoyens, par les cris forcenés de la multitude<sup>29</sup>.

From this third, last comparison, it is clear how the author used each parallel to underline one or more negative characteristics both of the characters and of the revolutionary period, and to compare it with the saving figure of Napoleon. As we have seen, Cromwell was used to separate Napoleon from the revolutionary past and from the excesses of regicide and demagoguery; Monck was to underline that there was no risk Bonaparte would restore the Bourbons and bring about a second revolution. It was with Caesar that the *Parallèle* transformed itself into a contemporary political manifesto, for what Napoleon was doing and representing and for what he intended to do:

Bonaparte, au contraire, a rallié la classe des propriétaires et des hommes instruits, contre une multitude forcenée : les acclamations de ses soldats ont été les seuls suffrages du dictateur ; et la puissance du premier Consul a reçu la sanction de trois millions de Citoyens votants individuellement et en secret dans toute la latitude de leur liberté. Le premier Consul, loin d'ébranler comme César toutes les idées conservatrices de la société, leur rend leur antique empire. Il protège toutes les classes de l'État, mais il a soin de remettre en honneur celle que la propriété, l'instruction, le devoir et l'intérêt appellent plus essentiellement au maintien de la chose publique. En un mot, César fût *usurpateur et Tribun du Peuple*, Bonaparte est *Consul légitime*<sup>30</sup>.

If we read the pamphlet correctly, from 1789 onward, the revolutionaries were nothing more than demagogues, mass agitators, whipping up the crowd against patrician wisdom, acting like Caesar, who in his time, had been the leader of demagogues. In the image of a First Consul acclaimed by the plebiscites, who protected all classes of the state but acted according to the law and re-estab-

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29 *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte*, 10-11. My italics.

30 *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte*, 11-12. My italics.



lished order, there was the definitive dissociation from demagoguery, whether Jacobin, from the assemblies, or from the Directory.

After the victorious comparisons comes the personal exaltation of the protagonist (was not Fontanes infamous for his base flattery of the man?). Bonaparte was:

un de ces caractères prédominants, sous qui s'abaissent tous les obstacles et toutes les volontés : ses inspirations paraissent tellement surnaturelles, qu'on n'eût pas manqué de le croire sous la garde d'un génie, d'un Dieu particulier [...].

Bonaparte, Alexandre et César ont eu souvent le même théâtre de gloire ; tous trois ont triomphé par leurs lieutenants ; tous trois ont porté les Arts et les Sciences dans des contrées barbares. Les deux Héros de l'Antiquité eurent une grande influence sur l'avenir. Celle du Héros Français sera-t-elle aussi durable ?<sup>31</sup>.

At this point, Fontanes' work was done, whereupon Lucien Bonaparte took up his quill. The last two pages are a real exhortation to the reader, an ode to the First Consul and his immortality. Lucien paints him as a Caesar or an Alexander, entering into history as a superlative hero. Just as the great heroes of the past had done with their own countries, Bonaparte would offer France «sans doute [...] un nouveau siècle de grandeur»<sup>32</sup>.

Heureuse République, *s'il était immortel* ! Mais le sort d'un grand homme est sujet à plus de hazards que celui des hommes vulgaires. O nouvelle discordes ! O calamités renaissantes ! si tout-à-coup Bonaparte manquait à la patrie ! où sont ses héritiers, où sont les institutions qui peuvent maintenir ses exemples et perpétuer son génie ? Le sort de trente millions d'hommes ne tient qu'à la vie d'un seul homme ! Français, que deviendriez-vous, si à l'instant un cri funèbre vous annonçait que cet homme a vécu ? Retomberiez-vous sous le règne d'une assemblée ! Hélas, dix ans de troubles, d'erreurs et d'adversités, vous ont appris ce que vous devez en attendre.

31 *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte*, 12-13.

32 *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte*, 13.

Ils sont bien près de vous encore ces jours terribles, où le pouvoir sans cesse divisé, laissait vos destinées à la merci des factions, où la tyrannie était partout, parce que l'autorité véritable n'était nulle part. Elle existe aujourd'hui cette autorité tutélaire ; *mais rien ne l'assure ni pour vous-même ni pour vos descendants*. Vous pouvez donc vous trouver encore au milieu des délateurs, des prisons et des échafauds ; vous pouvez demain à votre réveil être jetés dans les routes sanglantes des révolutions.

Si la tyrannie des assemblées vous épouvante, quel sera votre refuge, si ce n'est la puissance militaire ? Où est-il le successeur de Périclès ? Où est-il le héros que la confiance unanime du peuple et de l'armée portera tranquillement au consulat et qui saura s'y maintenir ? ... Vous seriez bientôt sous le règne de quelques chefs militaires qui se détroneraient sans cesse, et que leur faiblesse rendrait cruels<sup>33</sup>.

This final section raises the appalling scenario of what would happen « si à l'instant un cri funèbre vous annonçait que cet homme a vécu ? » The scarecrow of the terrible ten years of Revolution is waved. Things are fine under Bonaparte, but nothing guarantees the future. If he goes, then military men will succeed him and bring about the awful situations that plagued the successors of Alexander. Their weakness will render them cruel. France needed Napoleon's legacy to continue, both figuratively and effectively. France had no alternative:

Français, tels sont les périls de la Patrie: chaque jour vous pouvez retomber sous la domination des Assemblées, sous le joug des

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33 *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte*, 13-14.

S.<sup>34</sup>..., ou sous celui des Bourbons ... A chaque instant votre tranquillité peut disparaître ... Vous dormez sur un abyme!! et votre sommeil est tranquille!  
Insensés!!!<sup>35</sup>

As mentioned at the beginning, the spread of the *Parallèle* cost Lucien the post of Minister of the Interior. And though Napoleon admitted that he had in a way inspired the text, he nevertheless dissociated himself from the last two pages describing them as “de la folie; jamais l'hérédité n'a été instituée; elle s'est établie d'elle-même. Elle est trop absurde pour être reçue comme une loi”.<sup>36</sup>

## The effect of the pamphlet and conclusions

Despite having initially been in favour of the pamphlet (at least all except the last two pages, written by Lucien), Napoleon reacted by removing the piece from circulation. Røederer surmised that Napoleon had apparently stepped back from what the comte called “une mesure avantageuse” out of fear that it had been inspired by “une prétendue opinion générale, dont le tableau mensonger aura été l'ouvrage du ministre de la police [Fouché].<sup>37</sup> Antoine-

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34 Sieyès, a reference obvious for contemporaries. Napoleon forced Lucien to change this part by replacing it, starting with the second edition, with the word «militaires», but the damage was already done. Røederer reports that the First Consul himself sent Talleyrand to personally apologize to Sieyès: “Talleyrand m'a dit qu'il avait été chargé officiellement par le premier consul d'aller faire des excuses à Sieyès pour la dernière phrase du *Parallèle de Cromwell*, où il - Sieyès - est désigné d'une manière odieuse par la lettre initiale de son nom”. See Røederer, *Œuvres*, vol. 3, 348. The modification, among other things, did not bring beneficial effects. Again Røederer tells how Sieyès sent general Moreau to carry his complaints to Bonaparte (*Œuvres*, vol. 3, 349). Napoleon made a public act towards the military, by having Lacuée burn “sur la place des Invalides, à la parade, mille exemplaires du *Parallèle*” (*Œuvres*, vol. 3, 349).

35 *Parallèle entre César, Cromwel, Monck et Bonaparte*, *Œuvres*, 15.

36 Røederer, *Œuvres*, vol. 3, 353.

37 Røederer, *Œuvres*, vol. 3, 349.

Clair Thibaudeau in his memoirs noted that “Fouché [...] le [the pamphlet] porta au Premier Consul et lui représenta le mauvais effet que produisait une démarche aussi intempestive,”<sup>38</sup> which (as Røederer tells us) Napoleon interpreted not as the truth but rather as a subterfuge of Fouché’s. It was too early to suggest heredity as the solution for a time when the First Consul would be no more, as Napoleon himself noted: “la nation n’était pas ENCORE MURE pour l’hérédité”.<sup>39</sup> Røederer also thought that the retraction of the pamphlet was also a means of punishing Lucien.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps also, as Thierry Lentz noted in his article on the *Parallèle*, it was “the elite, the Brumarians, the Revolutionaries and Royalists pell-mell” who caused Napoleon to think again (though this article in fact adduces no real evidence for this).<sup>41</sup> Be that as it may, Napoleon felt obliged to distance himself publicly from the document and its contents and detach himself from his brother, Lucien. A sacrifice that was not in vain and actually served the First Consul. In the end, it highlighted the (all too powerful) figure of Fouché, police minister, paving the way for Fouché’s removal in 1802.<sup>42</sup>

Through the story of the *Parallèle* it is possible to grasp a good part of what was moving around the First Consul and his path towards the inheritance of his power. From the words of Napoleon himself, in fact, this was the goal, but what had happened had demonstrated how the realization of the project required time. Public opinion had to be prepared for the idea of a return to a hereditary regime, and this preparation could not be forced. If anything, it had to be guided.

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38 E.[douard] D.[riault] (ed.), *Mémoires de A.[ntoine]-C.[lair] Thibaudeau, 1799-1815* (Paris: Plon, 1913), 50.

39 Røederer, *Œuvres*, vol. 3, 349.

40 Røederer, *Œuvres*, vol. 3, 349: “que [Lucien] reprochât [à Napoléon], un jour de mauvaise tête, d’avoir puni le mauvais succès après avoir approuvé l’intention.”

41 Lentz, *Vers le pouvoir héréditaire*, 3-6.

42 Emmanuel de Waresquiel, *Fouché. Les silences de la pieuvre* (Paris: Tallandier, 2021).

What the few pages of the *Parallèle* represent is the direction in which the France of the time was travelling and which Lucien Bonaparte (very probably with Napoleon's blessing) attempted to accelerate recklessly and clumsily by means of this pamphlet. Although the political consequences of the 18 Brumaire were already consolidated and accepted, elements of French life that were as revolutionary as they were republican still survived.<sup>43</sup> In such a context, any type of debate on executive power could be accepted, and the writings of Benjamin Constant had already laid down some fundamental points.<sup>44</sup> The raising of the question of the inheritance of executive power was to seem however too startlingly redolent of a return to the ancien régime.

It may even be that the First Consul had another go on the same subjects a mere twelve months later. Another, much longer work, composed of two volumes of over three hundred pages each, appeared in the bookstores of Paris entitled *Essai sur l'art de rendre les révolutions utiles*, initially anonymous (1801), but attributed to l'abbé Jean-Esprit Bonnet in the 1802 second edition.<sup>45</sup> According to the emperor Napoleon's second librarian, Antoine-Alexandre Barbier (though in 1822), the work was actually produced within the First Consul's private office and that two chapters of it were even written by Napoleon himself, chapters which (clearly not by

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43 See the special thematic issue of the *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 346 (2006), guest-edited by Jacques-Olivier Boudon and Philippe Bourdin, entitled *Les héritages républicains sous le Consulat et l'Empire*, especially the editorial introduction (3-15) and the articles by Josiane Bourguet-Rouveyre, *La survivance d'un système électoral sous le Consulat et l'Empire* (17-29) and by Nathalie Petiteau, *Les fidélités républicaines sous le Consulat et l'Empire* (59-74).

44 See in particular Benjamin Constant, *De la force du gouvernement actuel de la France et de la nécessité de s'y rallier* (without place or editor, 1796); *Id.*, *Des réactions politiques* (without place or editor, An V [1796]); and *Id.*, *Des effets de la Terreur* (without place or editor, An V [1796]).

45 [Jean-Esprit Bonnet], *Essai sur l'art de rendre les révolutions utiles* (Paris : chez Maradan, 1801), 2 volumes, reprinted in 1802 with the author's name.

chance) dealt directly with executive power and its transmission in hereditary form.<sup>46</sup>

Though a complex and demanding read, the *Essai* repeats almost slavishly, albeit in more articulated and detailed way, many of the principles expressed in the pamphlet of the previous year. Here, however, these principles are no longer expressed as an exaltation of what was to come, but rather as something that was now fixed and acquired. The First Consul was no longer described as the one who would pacify the Revolution, but as the one who had already completed this task, who had neutralized the factions, abandoned extreme positions and allowed calm to return, allowing people to speak freely again.

Whilst the *Parallèle* primarily focused on exalting Bonaparte's figure and making it salvific, dealing only indirectly (though explicitly) with the theme of the inheritance of his power, the *Essai*, on the other hand, was openly more explicit, defining the inheritance of executive power as something that could no longer be hidden and represented the obvious and natural consequence of concentrating power in the hands of one person, and that person was Bonaparte.<sup>47</sup>

That this subject was part of the spirit of the times (and quite likely encouraged by the First Consul) can be seen in remarks made by Røederer in January 1801 and also an anonymous pamphlet by a centrist politician published in 1802. Røederer shrewdly defined

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46 A.[Alexandre]-A.[ntoine] Barbier, *Dictionnaire des ouvrages anonymes et pseudonymes*, Seconde Édition (Paris: Barrois l'ainé, 1822), Tome Premier, 429: "On prétend que cet ouvrage a été rédigé dans le cabinet de Napoléon, et qu'il est lui-même auteur de plusieurs chapitres, tels que celui du *prétendant* (Sa Majesté Louis XVIII) et celui de *l'hérédité du trône*." The author implies that his source was an *Almanach du vieux astrologue* of 1814, though the date of publication of that almanac might imply that it was written during the Restoration and therefore untrustworthy. The volumes are not mentioned in the earlier, 1806, edition of Barbier's work.

47 [Bonnet], *Essai sur l'art*, vol. 1, 22-24.

Napoleon as a “roi républicain”,<sup>48</sup> and immediately after the plebiscite which in 1802 consecrated Napoleon as consul for life, another anonymous pamphlet was published (actually by Camille Jordan<sup>49</sup>) even went as far as to suggest an hereditary “imperial” future for Napoleonic France: “Serait-il vrai – he wondered – [...] comme des écrits ont semblé l’indiquer, que quelques courtisans auraient médité de proposer l’adoption de quelque titre d’Empereur, d’Empereur des Gaules?”<sup>50</sup>

While the *Parallèle* of the previous year can be seen as a simple French public opinion test balloon, the *Essai* leaves no room for doubt: hereditary executive power is a “natural” consequence of concentrating power in the hands of one individual: “l’hérédité du pouvoir fait partie de la concentration”<sup>51</sup>. And Camille Jordan naturally picked up that ball and ran with it, seeing it as the real implication of the life-consulship.

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48 “[...] je ne suis pas assez bête pour conseiller à Bonaparte de se faire ce qu’il est et de se nommer roi, tandis qu’il gouverne en roi républicain sous le titre de consul. Il est *roi* dans le vrai sens du mot: il régit la France libre, à l’abri de tout pouvoir arbitraire par ses institutions républicaines”. Roederer, *Œuvres*, vol. 3, 366.

49 Of monarchical-constitutional positions, he wrote both against the Directory and against the Consulate. While confessing that he himself voted for the consulate for life, in fact, Jordan expressed very critical positions in the pamphlet, which led to the arrest of the publisher, who was later released after the confession of Jordan himself. See P. Hicks, “*At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, you cannot do what they did in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup>*”.

50 [Camille Jordan], *Vrai sens du vote national sur le consulat à vie* (Paris: chez les marchands de nouveautés, 1802), 49.

51 [Jordan], *Vrai sens du vote*, 261.