The end of the eighteenth century saw the publication of a curious Dutch booklet which presented itself as an ‘imitation’ of Erasmus’s *Moria*. It appeared at Grave (in the south of the Netherlands) in 1798 and was printed by Adrianus van Dieren. The title was not especially elegant: *Navolging nopens Lof der Zotheid*, that is *Imitation concerning Praise of Folly*, where we might have expected *Imitation of the Praise of Folly*. Only one copy of the booklet has survived; it is to be found in the Library of Tilburg University (shelf number TRE C 0143), where it came from a provincial library at Den Bosch, just like the famous Scriverius manuscript, our only source for a number of Erasmus’s poems.

The author of this late eighteenth-century *Imitation* was major Jan van der Wyck. Very little is known about him. Gerbrand Bruining (1764–1833), a friend who was later to become his opponent, refers to him in his memoirs as ‘Baron van der Wyck’.1 This was certainly an exaggeration; in the genealogy of this noble (but not baronial) family we come across a Jan van der Wyck (1762–1833), who married Eva Alida Paape in 1804; he is probably the man we are looking for. His father Jan Hendrik van der Wyck (1731–1809), was lord of Stoevelaer but had not been admitted to the *Ridderschap* of Overijssel.2 This does not preclude the possibility that Jan van der Wyck may have styled himself baron, since in the Régiment Royal Liègeois he was later to join there was a second lieutenant whose name is

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2 *Nederland’s Adelsboek* 1953 482–483. This non-noble branch of the Van der Wycks died out in 1843.
given as ‘M. le Baron Vanderwick van Stoevelaer’. We owe it to Bruining that we have at least some information about Van der Wyck. His command of French seems to have been rather good, at least good enough for him to condemn Bruining’s French as inauthentic, and to persuade the latter to stop writing a philosophical novel in that language. As a young man Van der Wyck was highly impressed by Rousseau’s Contrat social, and he liked speculating about metaphysics and politics. However, he chose a military career. Politically he was in favour of the Patriots and got involved in their actions. At some moment he was considered a deserter, and as a consequence had to travel around in civilian clothes.

After the revolutionary actions of the Patriots had been thwarted in 1787 thanks to the intervention of Prussian troops, a large number of Patriots went into exile. Many of them settled in French St. Omer, the soldiers among them in Béthune. Van der Wyck joined the French army and was assigned to the recently established Régiment Royal Liègeois. In the Netherlands the tables were turned in 1795. The reign of the Stadtholder and his Orangists came to an end. Early in 1795 French armies invaded the Netherlands, where many people welcomed them as liberators. After the foundation of the Batavian Republic in 1795 Van der Wyck joined the ‘third battalion of the seventh half-brigade’ of the Batavian Army. As to his intellectual interests, his extensive reading and studying had eventually resulted in a burnout. For two years he felt incapable of reading anything, even writing a letter was almost too great a burden for him. He had come to the conclusion that no true certainty was to be expected from metaphysics.