

JOOST
VAN DEN VONDEL
(1587-1679)

*Dutch Playwright
in the Golden Age*

BRILL

Edited by
Jan Bloemendal &
Frans-Willem Korsten

Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679)

Drama and Theatre in Early Modern Europe

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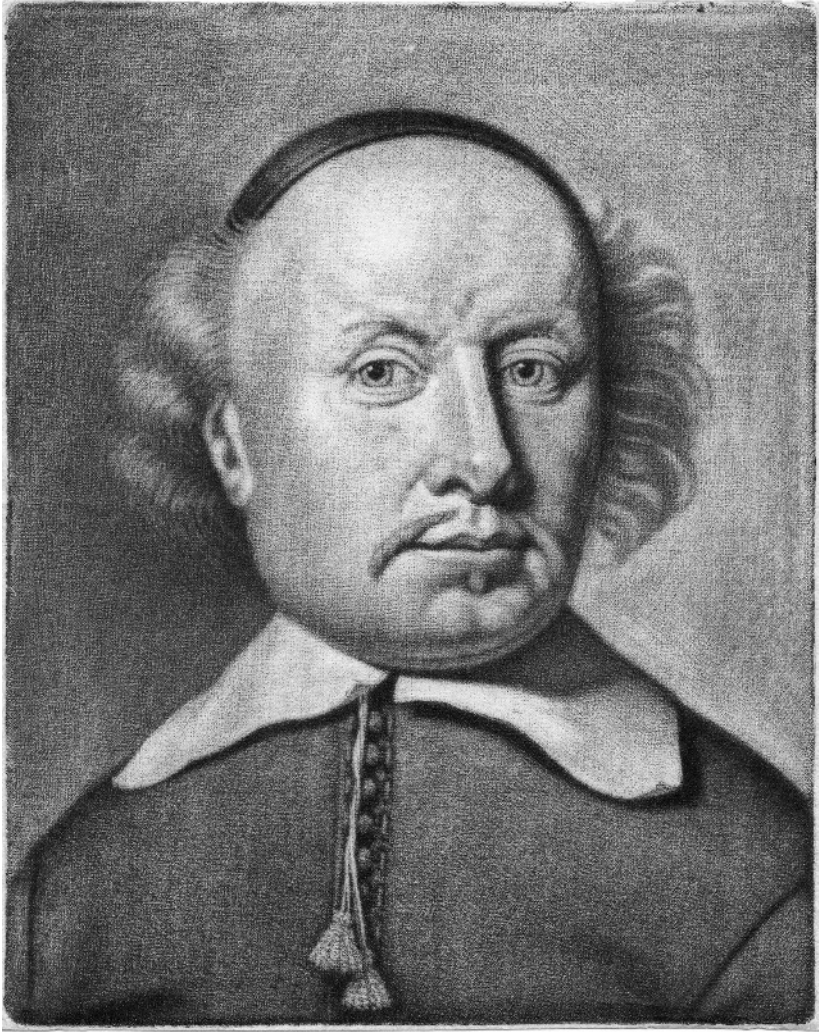
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CONTENTS

Preface.....	xi
1. Vondel's Dramas: A Chronological Survey	1
<i>Eddy Grootes and Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen</i>	
2. Vondel's Works for the Stage Read and Studied Over the Centuries	7
<i>Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen</i>	
3. Vondel's Dramas: Ways of Relating Present and Past.....	23
<i>Frans-Willem Korsten</i>	

PART I

VONDEL'S LIFE, WORKS AND TIMES

4. Vondel's Life.....	51
<i>Mieke B. Smits-Veldt and Marijke Spies</i>	
5. Vondel's Religion.....	85
<i>Judith Pollmann</i>	
6. Vondel and Amsterdam	101
<i>Eddy Grootes</i>	
7. Vondel as a Dramatist: The Representation of Language and Body.....	115
<i>Bettina Noak</i>	
8. Vondel's Theatre and Music	139
<i>Louis Peter Grijp and Jan Bloemendal</i>	
9. Vondel's Dramas: Their Afterlife in Performance.....	157
<i>Mieke B. Smits-Veldt</i>	
10. Between Disregard and Political Mobilization – Vondel as a Playwright in Contemporary European Context: England, France and the German Lands	171
<i>Guillaume van Gemert</i>	

PART II

APPROACHES AND DRAMAS

11. New Historicism – *Hierusalem verwoest* (1620) and the Jewish Question201
Jürgen Pieters
12. Politics and Aesthetics – Decoding Allegory in *Palamedes* (1625)225
Nina Geerdink
13. Translation Studies – Vondel’s Appropriation of Grotius’s *Sophompaneas* (1635)249
Madeleine Kasten
14. Intertextuality – *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (1637).....271
Marco Prandoni
15. Dramaturgy – Staging Problems in Vondel’s *Gysbreght van Aemstel*285
Peter G.F. Eversmann
16. Cultural Analysis – Joseph Plays.....317
Mieke Bal, Maaïke Bleeker, Bennett Carpenter and Frans-Willem Korsten
17. The Humanist Tradition – *Maria Stuart* (1646)341
James A. Parente, Jr. and Jan Bloemendal
18. Deconstruction – Unsettling Peace in *Leeuwendalers* (1647)359
Stefan van der Lecq
19. Religion and Politics – *Lucifer* (1654) and Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1674)377
Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen and Helmer Helmers
20. Gender Studies – Emotions in *Jeptha* (1659)407
Kristine Steenbergh
21. Close Reading and Theory – The David Plays427
Frans-Willem Korsten
22. Psychoanalysis – Law, Theatre and Violence in *Samson* (1660)445
Yasco Horsman

23. Law and Literature – <i>Batavische gebroeders</i> (1663)	459
<i>Jeanne Gaakeer</i>	
24. New Philology – Variants in <i>Adam in ballingschap</i> (1664)	489
<i>Jan Bloemendal</i>	
25. Philosophy – <i>Noah</i> (1667) on God and Nature	509
<i>Wiep van Bunge</i>	
26. Bibliography of Vondel's Dramas (1850–2010).....	529
<i>Jan Bloemendal</i>	
Works Cited.....	579
About the Authors.....	611
Index of Names, Including Characters	619
Index of Names of Scholars.....	629
Index of Concepts, Subjects, Themes, Geographical Names.....	635

PREFACE

Some early modern poets never lose their attraction. One of them is Shakespeare. Another one is the Dutch poet and playwright Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679), whose lifetime roughly coincides with the Dutch Golden Age. However, to the same degree to which the figure of Shakespeare is an elusive one, the life and work of Vondel are clear and well-documented. He was a famous and well-known figure in political and artistic circles of Amsterdam, a contemporary and acquaintance of Rembrandt (1606–1669). He was familiar with Latin humanists, Dutch scholars and authors and Amsterdam burgomasters. He interfered in literary, religious and political debates. His writings include over thirty plays, epics, epigrams, rhymed treatises, hundreds of poems and occasion poems, songs, eulogies and elegies. His tragedy *Gysbreght van Aemstel* was played on the occasion of the opening of a new town theatre hall in 1638, was to become the most famous play in Dutch history, and can probably boast holding the record for the longest tradition of annual performance in Europe. In general, Vondel's texts are literary works in the full sense of the word, attracting attention throughout the centuries because of their use of language and the multi-layered ambiguities that are hidden within them.

This volume is dedicated to the playwright Vondel, and therefore to his plays. Its aim is to present scholars, students and lay readers of Vondel's plays with a series of well-documented and readily intelligible essays that were made for the occasion and that will enhance the reader's ability to deal with the plays by bringing in a store of knowledge on a wide range of relevant topics. Secondly, our aim is to increase the knowledge of Vondel's work internationally. In this context, the volume fits in with a growing attempt to disclose Dutch literature to an international audience, witness the increasing number of Dutch literary histories in English, the latest ones being *A Literary History of the Low Countries*, edited by Theo Hermans (2009) and the two volumes *Women's Writing from the Low Countries*, edited by Lia van Gemert et al. (2010). A third aim of this volume is to fuel scholarly discussion on Vondel's plays, nationally and internationally, not only because they are deserving of it, but because they are of relevance to both his and our times.

First, Vondel's place in history is dealt with, in terms of his own times, of the centuries that followed these, and our own times. This is to say that the 'actual potential' of his work is taken into account throughout history. Part I of the volume offers a survey of Vondel's life and works, of his literary, historical and social contexts, and of the reception of his plays in other countries of Europe. Part II discusses most of Vondel's plays, each considered from a specific point of view, approached from a different methodological or scholarly angle. Finally a bibliography with regard to Vondel's life and dramatic oeuvre is presented. The volume is designed so that individual contributions can be read either on their own or in conjunction with other ones. The essays in the third part, for instance, all discuss a play in relation to a specific approach. This does not imply, however, that other approaches are not equally applicable to that work. Readers are encouraged to make their own connections between the theories or methods employed, and between Vondel's plays.

The idea to compile this volume arose when the editors were having a cup of coffee waiting for their plane at Newcastle Airport after having been to a conference in Durham in September 2007. It should not have come as a surprise, but the road from idea to realization was longer than we thought or wished for. Nevertheless, considering that we sent out our first invitation in February 2008, we are happy to be concluding a three-year collaboration with such an impressive collection of essays, provided by such a rich diversity of scholars, from emeritus professors to young scholars at the beginning of their career, and from those within the walls of Dutch studies and Dutch literary scholarship to those in other fields and disciplines and both *intra* and *extra muros*.

We wish to thank in the first place all contributors for taking the effort to write, rewrite, revise and correct all the texts and then wait for the final result. The translations of the chapters by Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, Grootes, Smits-Veldt and Spies were financed by the Translation Fund of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences and Stichting Reprerecht. The translations were made by Liz Waters. The final English correction, carried out by Will J. Kelly (Minerva Professional Language Services; <http://www.minerva-pls.com>), was financially supported by the Dr. C. Louise Thijssen-Schoute Stichting. We wish to thank Becky Stamps who helped us with proof-reading the text for the last mistakes and errors.

Special thanks are due to Stefan van der Lecq, who not only contributed one essay, but also co-edited a number of essays in his characteristically thoroughgoing and precise way, before deciding that there were other paths to be explored than just scholarly ones.

Finally we thank the publisher, Brill, who was so kind as to turn this volume into the one that opens the series *Drama and Theatre in Early Modern Europe*.

This book is published with the financial support of the Translation Fund of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Dr. C. Louise Thijssen-Schoute Stichting, the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), the Huygens Institute for the History of the Netherlands and the Institute for History and Culture (UvA).

Frans-Willem Korsten
Jan Bloemendal

CHAPTER ONE

VONDEL'S DRAMAS: A CHRONOLOGICAL SURVEY¹

Eddy Grootes and Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen

Vondel's dramatic work is marked by a series of paradoxes. He produced a remarkably extensive theatrical oeuvre of thirty-three plays² – many original, others translated from Latin or Greek – even though he only really started writing his major works for the theatre when he was around fifty. He was without doubt the most important Dutch playwright of the seventeenth century, deeply respected and with well-considered ideas on the theatre, but only just over half his plays were performed during his lifetime. He was a great propagandist for Latin and later also classical Greek drama, but he used their formal structures almost exclusively for the purpose of conveying content that was biblical and Christian. To later generations he was the preeminent writer of the fatherland and in his own time he served as Amsterdam's unofficial city poet, yet he was not actually born in the Low Countries but in Cologne. His parents had been forced to flee Antwerp because of their Mennonite faith. In about 1597 the Vondel family settled in Holland.

As an immigrant from the Southern Netherlands living in Amsterdam, the young Vondel joined the Brabant chamber of rhetoric 'Het Wit Lavendel' ('The White Lavender'), and it was for this theatrical company that he wrote his first play, *Het Pascha* (*Passover*, first printed in 1612). This drama about the exodus from Egypt features an epilogue comparing the liberation of the Dutch Republic from Spain with the liberation of the Jews from Egypt. Eight years would pass before his second play was completed, *Hierusalem verwoest* (*Jerusalem Destroyed*, 1620), a tragedy about the destruction of Jerusalem. Meanwhile he had taught himself Latin, and formal aspects of the play are strongly influenced by Seneca's *Troades*. In the 1620s, as part of the process of

¹ Parts of this chapter have been published previously in Hermans, *A Literary History of the Low Countries*, pp. 212–20. For an earlier survey of Vondel's dramas see Meijer, *Literature of the Low Countries*, pp. 127–42.

² Including the fragment of *Rozemont*, but excluding the unpublished *Messalina*.

improving his Latin, he translated *Troades* as *De Amsteldamsche Hecuba* (1626) and Seneca's *Phaedra*, also known as *Hippolytus*, as *Hippolytus* (1628). Another translation, this time of a Neo-Latin play by Hugo Grotius, *Sophompaneas*, on the biblical theme of the reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers, and on just government, was published in 1635.

Vondel had by this point developed into an ardent polemicist, and an advocate of the Arminian position in the religious and political conflicts of that time. His *Palamedes* (1625) treats the political process of the Grand Pensionary Oldenbarnevelt, disguised as the classical story of Palamedes and Ulysses. Vondel was heavily fined as a result, but *Palamedes* went through seven editions of the 1625 imprint.

Gysbreght van Aemstel (1637), his most frequently performed play right up to the present day, was written for a special occasion. It was intended to have its premiere in 1637, at Christmas, on the occasion of the opening of the new municipal theater, the Amsterdam Schouwburg, which was built by Jacob van Campen. In a typically paradoxical twist, Vondel chose to write a play for this festive occasion that describes the downfall of Amsterdam – although a prophecy by the angel Raphael right at the end does hold out the prospect of a radiant future. The planned festive performance was not to be. It became known that Vondel had included a celebration of the Catholic Mass in his play. This made perfect sense in the context of the time in which the play was set, the late thirteenth century, but it was unthinkable to show a Mass on stage in the current religious and political climate, especially on an official occasion. The Republic was a tolerant place, but this was going too far for the Protestant magistrate of Amsterdam. An expurgated version had its premiere on 3 January 1638. The play's success lasted for well over three centuries. It was traditionally performed around New Year's Day, right up until 1969 when the children of the revolutionary sixties abandoned the centuries-old custom. In recent times, however, directors have responded to the challenge of finding new forms for the play, some discovering ways to give it direct contemporary relevance, others looking back to the manner in which it was originally staged.

A translation of Sophocles's *Elektra* (1639) marked the start of a new period. Vondel used Latin translations, but sought advice from learned friends as well. It indicates his growing fascination with Greek tragedy, which would acquire prominence in his later work. About the same time he converted to Catholicism and one result was his tragedy

Maeghden (*Maidens*, 1639), dramatizing the legend of Saint Ursula and her eleven thousand virgins. In this period Vondel was using innocent victims as protagonists. In his play *Maria Stuart* (1646), for instance, Vondel presented Mary Queen of Scots, whom he regarded as a Catholic martyr, as the innocent victim of a heretical and vengeful Elizabeth I. This was simply unacceptable, even in tolerant Amsterdam. The Dutch government had no wish to become involved, even in such an indirect manner, in the ongoing power struggle between Charles I and Cromwell. The poet was brought before the courts and ordered to pay a substantial fine of one hundred and eighty guilders.

The play also presented a theoretical problem. In this period Vondel was engaged in a deeper examination of the practice and theory of Greek drama, which brought him new insights into the essence of tragedy, such as an awareness of the Aristotelian injunction that a hero should be somewhere between good and evil, that he should not be entirely blameless but rather brought down by his own shortcomings. The most brilliant result of this new insight was his *Lucifer* (1654).

Already in his *Gebroeders* (*Brothers*), published in 1640 and performed almost annually from 1641 to 1659, Vondel had been inspired by the example of Sophocles. The play, based on the story of 2 Samuel 21, portrays the moral struggle of King David who is forced by God's command to execute seven descendants of Saul. In the same year, 1640, Vondel wrote two plays about Joseph: *Joseph in Dothan* and *Joseph in Egypten*. Moulded into a trilogy with his earlier *Sofompaneas* (a translation of Grotius' tragedy), they were staged throughout the second half of the century. With his *Gysbreght* and these plays from the 1640s Vondel attained the peak of his success in the Amsterdam Schouwburg. His next play, however, was never performed. *Peter en Pauwels* (1641) is a rather static Roman Catholic drama about the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul in Rome. Reason enough to assume that Amsterdam audiences would not have liked it.

In 1647, when the negotiations to end the Eighty Years' War with Spain were expected to produce the desired result very soon, Vondel wrote an occasional play to glorify the peace. *Leeuwendalers* has a rural setting in which peasants and hunters from North and South finally end their longstanding conflict. It constitutes an exception in Vondel's predominantly tragic dramatic oeuvre. The play was staged five times in 1648, the year of the Peace of Westphalia. That same year *Salomon* was published, the next play in Vondel's series of biblical tragedies.

It shows King Solomon as a weakling. Carried away by sensuality, he causes his own downfall. Passionate arguments between two opposing groups of courtiers make good theatre. With more than thirty performances between 1650 and 1659, *Salomon* became one of Vondel's more successful productions.

Given its outstanding qualities, a modern reader would think that *Lucifer* (1654), regarded by many as Vondel's masterpiece, should have met with even greater success. But the subject – the Fall of the Angels and the Fall of Man – and the setting 'in Heaven', made staging the play unacceptable to influential circles in Amsterdam, especially the Reformed consistory. *Lucifer* was banned from the stage after two performances and the publisher's stock was confiscated. This did not prevent the rapid publication of seven new editions, but the financial damage was considerable, the theatre having invested a great deal of money in the heavenly scenery. Vondel wrote a new play with a mythological subject, *Salomoneus*, for which the same decor could be used, but it was not printed and performed until 1657. In Greek mythology, as well as in the play, Salomoneus is king of the Greek island of Elis who aspires to be worshipped as if he were Zeus.

There is every reason to think that with his *Lucifer* Vondel was not only exploring the heavenly matters of Fall and Redemption but staking out his ground in the political arena on earth. He believed the authority of the monarch to be divinely ordained and inviolable, and it is in these terms that he composed his dedication of the play to the highest authority on earth, Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand III. Even the Dutch Revolt against Spain comes in for criticism on matters of principle, although of course this did not mean Vondel would ever be disloyal to the Republic as it now stood. Many of his Catholic contemporaries, and indeed later generations of Catholics, adopted the same stance.

In 1659 one of his most important and interesting tragedies appeared: *Jeptha*. Vondel presents it as a model tragedy or, as he put it in his introductory essay, as a 'theatrical compass'. The introduction demonstrates his vast knowledge of classical drama theory and its interpretation by contemporary Dutch scholars like Hugo Grotius, Daniel Heinsius and Gerardus Johannes Vossius. The story of the play is from chapter 11 of the Book of Judges. After a military victory Jephthah promises to sacrifice to God the first thing he lays eyes on when he arrives home. To his horror the first thing he sees is his daughter, whom Vondel calls Ifis. The play has everything an Aristotelian drama requires: a noble and

courageous protagonist who brings down suffering upon himself through a fatal mistake (*hamartia*), thereby evoking fear and empathy; a sudden *peripeteia* from joy at victory to pain at Ifis's death; and the accompanying *anagnorisis* or insight into the situation. In his introduction Vondel expounds upon these and other theatrical matters in detail, pointing out with some pride that he has managed to achieve a double sequence of reversal and insight, in both *Jeptha* and his wife *Filopaie*. *Jeptha* represents a pinnacle of Vondel's dramatic art, but it did not fulfil its intended purpose as a model for other playwrights to follow. Only a limited number of performances took place. It was not at all what the Schouwburg audience was looking for, and the literary elite, especially the younger adherents of the French classicist theories, based their critical assessments on quite different criteria.

Even so, in the eight years between 1659 and 1667 Vondel published no fewer than ten tragedies, aside from complete verse translations after Sophocles (*Koning Edipus*, 1660) and Euripides (*Ifigenie in Tauren*, 1666). 1660 also saw the publication of *Koning David in ballingschap* (*King David Exiled*), *Koning David herstelt* (*King David Restored*) and *Samson*. The David plays deal with the conflict between King David and his son Absalom (2 Samuel 15 ff.), while *Samson* is based on the well-known story of Samson's humiliation and revenge. Inspired by the use of *peripeteia* in *Oedipus Rex*, Vondel chose characters from the Old Testament who go through a drastic reversal of fortune. The same applies to his *Adonias* of the following year, which tells of the failed attempt by Adonijah to depose his younger brother Solomon. In 1663 Vondel interrupted this long series of biblical plays with a tragedy on a secular subject, using an episode from the revolt of the Batavians against Rome as told by Tacitus. In *Batavische gebroeders* (*Batavian Brothers*) Claudius Civilis and his brother, regarded as heroic ancestors of the Hollanders, are portrayed as victims of Roman tyranny. The mythological content of his next play, *Faëton* (also from 1663), looks like another digression from Vondel's normal practice, but as W.A.P. Smit has argued, it corresponds with *Adonias* and *Batavische gebroeders* in its concentration on the complex relationship between guilt, justice and punishment.³

In the fifth act of *Lucifer*, the Archangel Gabriel reports the fall of Adam and Eve. Ten years later, in 1664, Vondel devoted a complete

³ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 3, p. 319.

tragedy to this subject, *Adam in ballingschap* (*Adam Exiled*), nowadays valued as a literary highpoint of Vondel's oeuvre, although it was not staged in Holland until 1910. A free adaptation by Jan Frans Cammaert, however, was rather popular in Flanders between 1756 and 1796. Along with *Lucifer* and *Noah* (his last biblical tragedy), it belongs to a trilogy of sorts about the fall and punishment of man and the prospect of salvation. Vondel was eighty years old when the last of his dramas were published. The subject matter of *Noah, of Ondergang der eerste weerelt* (*Noah, or Downfall of the First World*, 1667) fits the pattern of his earlier works, but *Zungchin, of Ondergang der Sineesche heerschappye* (*Chongzhen, or the Downfall of the Chinese Dominion*), probably conceived before *Noah* but published in the same year, comes as a surprise with its exotic subject: the end of the Ming dynasty in 1644, when the defeated emperor Zungchin (Chongzhen) took his own life. The Jesuit missionary Adam Schall plays an important part in Vondel's plot, and this offers some explanation as to how a Catholic like Vondel could be fascinated by such a story. Moreover, by the mid-seventeenth century a lively interest in Chinese matters existed in Holland, demonstrated by important publications such as Johan Nieuhoff's report on his embassy to China (1665), which was quickly translated into English, French and German. And, of course, the downfall of this emperor and his realm offered Vondel another opportunity to construct a moving *peripeteia*.

Two translations, one of Euripides's *Phoenissae* and the other of Sophocles's *Trachinian Women*, conclude an impressive career of more than fifty years as a dramatist. Vondel's versions, *Feniciaensche* and *Herkules in Trachin*, both came into print in 1668 and can be seen as a final tribute to his great classical precursors, both admired by Vondel for specific qualities of their own.

CHAPTER TWO

VONDEL'S WORKS FOR THE STAGE READ AND STUDIED OVER THE CENTURIES

Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen

Vondel and Shakespeare

In the Netherlands Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679) is traditionally regarded as the ‘prince of our poets’. The Dutch are proud of Vondel. There is a statue of him in the internationally famous (or infamous) Amsterdam Vondelpark, many streets are named after him, and he used to feature on our postage stamps as well as our pre-euro banknotes. In recommending him abroad we sometimes compare him to Shakespeare (1564–1616). They were after all contemporaries. Shakespeare died in 1616, by which time Vondel had seen his first tragedy performed (*Het Pascha, Passover*, 1612). They both produced a large number of plays, as well as much other writing. Shakespeare left more than forty works for the stage while Vondel wrote thirty-three. An important difference between the two men is that Shakespeare’s oeuvre is more diverse, including both comedies and tragedies, some in the form of history plays, others with a fairytale character, while the majority of Vondel’s work consists of biblical tragedies. In his political and historical dramas too, with a few exceptions, Christian thought is central. As a relatively young playwright and actor Shakespeare presented dramatic works on the stage with great regularity from 1590 onwards, whereas Vondel, after a hesitant start in 1610, did not begin producing his main body of work until 1637, when he was fifty. An important twentieth-century Dutch critic, Menno ter Braak, made the rather harsh observation that, as a result, ‘senex’ Vondel contrasted with the youthfully vibrant Shakespeare.

The reputations of both authors have had their highs and lows, but on the whole Shakespeare lives on in the theatre and in countless publications while Vondel, despite surges in attention occurring with persistent regularity, languishes. Rightly or wrongly? Either way, there is no disputing the facts.

Despite temporary dips in his reputation, Shakespeare is alive today in the English collective memory, as demonstrated by the fact that so many lines from his work remain familiar. Innumerable book titles are quotations from the bard, from *Brave New World* to *Pale Fire*. As a result his language does not seem so old-fashioned; indeed it actually becomes richer with time as later generations add further content to it.¹ Although an occasional citation of ‘Waar werd oprechter trouw’ (‘Where was Fidelity More True’) can be heard at weddings, Vondel is hardly ever quoted and so his language has missed its chance at the revitalization that Shakespeare enjoys. Still, Vondel too was a language virtuoso; more than that, he was a builder of language. Until well into the nineteenth century Dutch poetry was coloured by Vondel, even though what he wrote, certainly in his works for the stage, was almost always serious, biblical. His subject matter was serious: mankind full of guilt and shame in the presence of God. Even his lovers love each other before God’s eyes: Adam and Eve in their nascent and deeply earnest happiness, or a sexually charged Urania as the ultimate sinner in the final play, *Noah*.

There is some truth in Ter Braak’s remark. The playwright Vondel was a mature man who had left the passions of youth behind to concern himself with the great questions of human history, of state and law, good and evil, guilt and reconciliation, parent and child, fate and providence, mankind and God. What he wrote was topical at the time and indeed still is, for anyone willing to take a little trouble in reading it. In Shakespeare people act, play, joke and (also) think. With Vondel they always end up thinking. In his dramas he is never light-hearted.

The Seventeenth Century

Vondel (1587–1679) lived for almost a century and in the course of his life he increasingly became a leading figure in the Amsterdam theatrical world. It is true that his late tragedies, such as *Adam in ballingschap* (*Adam Exiled*, 1664) and *Noah* (1667), were not performed during his lifetime – fashions had changed – but the issuing of regular reprints of his tragedies proves they were read, admired, and indeed became the subject of dispute over many years. Controversy is surely

¹ For a far from complete list see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_titles_of_works_based_on_Shakespearean_phrases

one of the more crucial signs of life. In his own long life he built up an impressive and extensive oeuvre of thirty-three plays, some of them translations from Seneca or Euripides but the vast majority his own work. Several of his plays were extremely successful, including *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (1637), specially written for the opening of the new Schouwburg, which was traditionally performed on New Year's Day and the days that followed, even well into the twentieth century, or the *Joseph* trilogy about the son of a shepherd who becomes viceroy of Egypt (1638–1641). The *Joseph* trilogy was performed, either as separate plays or as a series, a great many times until 1665. Other tragedies quickly disappeared from the stage, but Vondel's work often sparked disputes for one reason or another. *Palamedes* (published in 1625) was actually intended not as a play but as an allegorical indictment couched as a play, attacking Prince Maurits of Nassau and his followers for the conviction and execution of Oldenbarnevelt in 1619. It had no chance of being performed at the time; on the contrary, the published script was banned. Vondel was in danger and he escaped harsh punishment only with the help of highly placed friends in Amsterdam. He got away with a fine. Yet the play that had caused such outrage provoked responses in pamphlet form and sold extremely well for many years. On this occasion it was his political stance that had displeased those in power.

More often, his religious insights aroused opposition. To some extent this also applies to *Palamedes*, which Counter-Remonstrants i.e. orthodox Calvinists in particular campaigned against. It was clearly the case with the historical drama *Gysbreght van Aemstel*. The original intention was that one of the characters, Bishop Gozewijn, would celebrate a Mass on stage as part of the performance. That was going far too far for the Amsterdam church council and the play could not be staged until the offending passage had been scrapped. The instincts of members of the church council had in fact been rather incisive, since a short time later Vondel became a Catholic and one of the fruits of his conversion was *Maria Stuart* (1646), a tragedy about Mary Stuart who, as a pious Catholic in Vondel's eyes, had been executed as a martyr for the faith. It appeared in a highly volatile period. In England the Civil War had begun, ending in 1649 with the beheading of Charles I, grandson of Mary Stuart. Sympathy for the Scottish Catholic queen did not sit well in the Republic, where the Catholic Church was tolerated only as long as believers kept quiet. Exaltation of a Catholic martyr was beyond the pale. Even though he had published the play anonymously and with a

fictional publishing house, Vondel was once again convicted and fined. The controversy led to five printings being issued in a single year.² A few years later there were problems with *Lucifer* (1654), the famous drama about the rebellion and fall of the angels. Again the Calvinist clergy moved against Vondel; from the pulpit came a campaign of opposition to the portrayal of heaven and its angels in the theatre. After just two performances, pressure from the church caused *Lucifer* to be taken off the stage. A major part was played in all this by the Reverend Petrus Wittewrongel. In 1661 he summarized his objections to the theatre and more specifically the theatrical work of Vondel in a long passage in his *Oeconomia Christiana ofte Christelicke huys-houdinghe* (*Oeconomia Christiana or Christian Housekeeping*), in which he allies himself closely with William Prynne's celebrated and exhaustive critique of the stage *Histriomastix: The Player's Scourge, or Actor's Tragedy* (1632). Vondel defended himself that same year with his *Tooneelschild* (*Shield of the Stage*). The fact that in it he presents Jesuit school drama as an example worth emulating will not have done anything to soften the clergyman's attitude.

It was not only strict Calvinists who opposed him. The Remonstrant clergyman Geeraardt Brandt, who wrote the first biography of the poet in 1682, makes it fairly plain that he held the explicitly Roman Catholic Vondel in less than high regard. Even some liberal Protestants, Andries Pels for instance, objected to religion on stage, whether because the kind of religion being propagated was 'wrong' for the Republic or because debates on stage, however well-intentioned, would only confuse simple listeners.³

In all these disputes it is noticeable that people tended simply to assert their own standpoints rather than entering into serious debates about the content of the plays. No analyses were published that set out with clarity and precision the sincere objections people had. It was more a matter of principle. In reality the church council was opposed to the theatre in general, and certainly to theatrical works by a Catholic, let alone a Catholic who put biblical subject matter on stage, thereby competing, as it were, with the only true exegetes, the Protestant clergy. Any pretext would do: a Catholic central character, a Mass, a world

² Schuytvlot, *Catalogus Vondel*, nos. 282–83 (pamphlets) and 433–481 (editions); *Maria Stuart* nos. 369–71 (pamphlets) and 633–39 (editions from 1646–1647).

³ Brandt, *Leven van Vondel*, pp. 35–36, 38–40, 45–47; Pels, *Gebruik én misbruik des tooneels*, ed. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, ll. 550–630.

populated by angels. No further debate was needed. A debate would have shown, for example, that in his biblical plays Vondel was in fact presenting not an explicitly Catholic vision but rather one that was Christian in a general sense, and 'ordinary Christians' – which is what most readers and audiences in the seventeenth century were – had little difficulty with it.

The only person to make a proper analysis of a Vondel drama in order to prove an ideological point was an otherwise completely unknown woman called Meynarda Verboom. Immediately after it was published she put *Adam in ballingschap* under a textual microscope to demonstrate that in his tragedy Vondel had set down an unbiblical and anti-feminist vision of women. In her *Pleyt voor onse eerste Moeder Eva* (*Plea on Behalf of Our First Mother Eve*, 1664), a poem of 296 lines in pamphlet form, she contended in an astute close reading that Vondel had used a distorted, incomplete, and above all fanciful interpretation of biblical evidence to place the blame for the Fall on Eve and as far as possible to exonerate Adam.

Why, then, does Vondel feel for women such contempt?
 Or does he think, perhaps, his pen will strike them dumb?
 But no, the man is getting old and quarrelsome;
 Whatever any woman says he'll contradict.
 Since women lack both power and the kind of wit
 To write a strong defence and rescue their good name,
 It's perfectly all right to give them all the blame.
 Make them the cause of sin, of every crime and curse;
 Then man is master still, for better or for worse.
 No need for Adam then to feel the least unease
 Or ever blush with shame, since all the guilt is Eve's.
 If that's what Moses wrote, then that's how it should be.
 But he did not; it's just a poet's fantasy.

(Translation: Myra Scholz)

She explains at length why it was indeed a poet's fantasy, one for which there is no basis in the Bible.⁴

Aside from all these ideological objections there was in general great admiration for Vondel's artistic qualities, though towards the end of his life criticism began to be heard in this regard too, if only after initial expressions of admiration.

⁴ Meynarda Verboom, 'Pleyt voor onse moeder Eva', Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, *Met en zonder lauwerkrans* pp. 305–12. See also Schenkeveld-van der Dussen in Van Gemert et al., *Women's Writing from the Low Countries 1200–1875*, pp. 48–49.

Andries Pels, an advocate of French classicism, began by praising Vondel as one of the ‘greatest and brightest lights of the Dutch language’ – later he would call him, with heartfelt admiration, an important theoretician of drama, as demonstrated in particular by Vondel’s Preface to the play *Jeptha* (1659) – but he went on to formulate objections to the structure of Vondel’s tragedies, pointing out that they often went on for a full act after the dénouement, winding up events. He also found the circumlocutory language unsuitable for the stage. As a telling example of Vondel’s dramatic poetry he quotes the first two lines of *Salomon*:

Thus you come far from the South, where the Cancer
paints the Moors, the tree casts so little shade.⁵

A few decades later, attitudes to Vondel became an important matter of contention in the so-called Poets’ War. Admirers rejected French-oriented classicism and advocated Vondel’s dramatic art and poetic language as a product of their native soil and worthy of imitation. The authoritative critic Balthasar Huydecoper, himself a playwright, declared in 1730 that ‘all poets nowadays have their eyes on Vondel’. Vondel’s language became the prevailing ‘language of Parnassus’.

The first explicatory studies to look at Vondel’s political, religious, and ideological opinions, and at the stylistic structure of his work, which was gradually coming to be seen as old-fashioned, set the tone for later readers and researchers. The points made in them were returned to over many years.

Eighteenth Century

By the eighteenth century little remained of the admiration for Vondel as a writer for the theatre. The use of the word ‘God’ on stage was seen as objectionable and to the extent that Vondel’s work was still performed at all, the scripts were expurgated. In 1729 an edition of *Gysbreght van Aemstel* appeared that was ‘printed word for word as it is played in the Amsterdam Schouwburg’, with the words God and Christ and all references to Catholic services of worship excised. It remained the standard text for years. People also criticized the structure of the

⁵ ‘Gij kwaamt dus verre van het Zuiden, daar de Kreeft / de Mooren verft, de boom zo weinig schaduw geeft.’

plays. Vondel did not, for example, stick to the absolute unity of time, a requirement whereby the time taken by the action represented must coincide with the time taken by its representation, while others believed that his lengthy monologues led to one-sidedness because the character in question could not be contradicted for so long. His language was seen as uneven, with 'base' expressions occurring in elevated passages. When it came to the content, people complained that the 'love interest' was accorded too little attention. His plays were hardly ever staged, with the exception of *Gysbreght van Aemstel* and occasionally *Faëton* and *Palamedes*, both of which were made more attractive by the addition of spectacular 'shows'.

Although biblical tragedies were regarded as unsuitable for performance, there was a general belief that it was acceptable for them to be read.⁶ Yet Vondel's work rarely was. In 1720 the complete plays were issued in two volumes by the publisher Joannes van Oosterwyk as *Alle de treurspelen (All the Tragedies)*. After that, with occasional exceptions (the *Joseph* trilogy, *Maeghden*), no new editions were published. The work nowadays seen as one of his most important, *Lucifer*, was not reprinted at all between 1661 and 1826. Only *Gysbreght* remained in print throughout the century.

Not everyone was happy about this failure to appreciate the Netherlands' most famous poet. In 1770 Le Francq van Berkhey, a poet and cultural historian, complained that 'the excellent plays of the great Vondel, Hooft [...] gems in their language, distinguished in style, are now [...] being supplanted by bastard hordes'. But such voices had little influence. One authoritative literary theorist, Hieronymus van Alphen, did value Vondel's 'genius' and credited him as a representative of the seventeenth century, a time when literary refinement and 'good taste' had flourished in the land. He also admired his powerful and expressively emotional language. Nevertheless, in his view Vondel lacked the proper insight into aesthetic principles and as a result took liberties that detracted from 'the truly beautiful'.⁷ In any case, as a pious

⁶ See De Haas, *De wetten van het treurspel*. For the text expurgated on religious grounds see pp. 204, 224; for playing time p. 98; monologues p. 144; linguistic usage pp. 18–182; love interest p. 44; biblical subject matter onstage p. 228.

⁷ For eighteenth- and nineteenth-century attitudes to Vondel see Molkenboer, *Rhythme van de Vondelwaardeering*; Smit 'De waardering van Vondel'; Wiskerke, *De waardering voor de zeventiende-eeuwse literatuur tussen 1780 en 1813*; Wiskerke, 'Wat zal ik U van onzen Vondel zeggen'; Spies, 'Nederlands vele Vondels'.

Protestant Van Alphen will no doubt have had little respect for the Catholic Vondel.

Nineteenth Century

At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth various different notes were sounded. In reaction to the French classicism that had been dominant throughout the eighteenth century, more value was now attached to poetic originality. At the same time there was increasing admiration for the great Greek authors who had laid the foundations of European theatre, and in this context fresh admiration arose for Vondel as a representative of classical Greek theatre.

Of even greater importance than these diverse literary-theoretical opinions was a nationalistically tinted notion of progress. The seventeenth century had been a Golden Age; never had the Netherlands been so prosperous, so powerful, and so culturally rich as it was then. Of course the concept of progress brought with it the insight that even at that time perfection had not been achieved. A few years into the nineteenth century, national decline became painfully obvious: the 'Kingdom of Holland' was governed by a brother of Napoleon and thereafter became merely a part of the Napoleonic Empire, from which low point it was possible to look back for inspiration to the seventeenth century when the nation had flourished, and to express the expectation that, building upon what had been achieved in those years, a fresh start could be made, with renewed zest. Anyone who imagined progress as a spiral could combine a view of Vondel as a model with the hope of attaining a higher level. There was no need to overlook the shortcomings of his work, since they could be attributed to the more primitive cultural level of Vondel's time, but appreciation of his imaginative power, his vivid language, and especially his patriotism ought to be an inspiration – even if some dissenting voices claimed that Vondel, as a Catholic, was clearly in some respects the opposite of a useful national model.

Only a person who saw progress as purely linear rather than spiral in form would place emphasis on Vondel's shortcomings. One such person was the literary critic P.G. Witsen Geysbeek, whose views were expressed in a biographical dictionary of Dutch literary figures. He discussed the bourgeois dialogues between Sir Gijsbreght and Lady Badeloch in derisive tones and denounced the base sensuality of the

language used by the angel in *Lucifer*, who falls in love with Eve. Furthermore Witsen Geysbeek views Vondel with contempt as a Catholic perpetuator of the 'Medieval Dark Ages'.

Another important factor was the emancipation of the Catholic segment of the population, which had been achieved in full at the time of the Batavian Republic (1795–1806). To this sizeable slice of the Dutch nation Vondel had now become a great hero. In their eyes Vondel's Catholicism was not something to be glossed over wherever possible. On the contrary, his conversion was an event of central importance. Only then had he found his true calling, only after he became a Catholic had his series of biblical tragedies grown to its full stature, only then had he written those wonderful apologetic didactic poems about the Eucharist, *Altaergeheimenissen* (*Secrets of the Altar*, 1645) and *Bespiegelingen van Godt en Godtsdienst* (*Reflections upon God and Religion*, 1662). It was the Catholics who introduced Vondel as a champion of the Counter-Reformation and a great baroque poet, presenting him as the literary counterpart to Rubens.⁸

Such debates and differences of opinion prompted responses from the academic world. The first professorships of national history and literature had been established, and their occupants pointed out that poets from the past could not be talked about as if they were contemporaries. The necessary knowledge of seventeenth-century language and culture was lacking, so it was not possible simply to praise or condemn Vondel's linguistic usage and representation of things. Professor B. Lulofs (among others) argued that much study would have to be done first. Commentaries on Vondel's work were needed and in 1831 he set an example by publishing an anthology that included notes and an introduction providing the historical background.

Catholics were particularly industrious in producing editions of the texts with accompanying commentary. They felt a need to make Vondel's work accessible to fellow Catholics. A lawyer called Hoppenbrouwers, for example, produced an edition of *Altaergeheimenissen* (*Secrets of the Altar*, 1822–1825) and the Catholic professor J.M. Schrant, who lectured on Vondel in Ghent and Leiden, was responsible for new editions of plays including *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (in 1851) and *Lucifer* (1856).

⁸ Anton van Duinkerken, 'De Roomse Vondelschool'.

It was not a Catholic, however, but a liberal who, as an admirer of the great seventeenth-century poet, was the first to set in train a weighty chronologically arranged multivolume edition of Vondel's complete works, editing and partly financing it himself. His name was Jacob van Lennep and he had been a devotee of Vondel since childhood; he knew *Gysbreght* by heart by the time he was six, having been mesmerized by a New Year's Eve performance of the play. Between 1855 and 1869 twelve volumes appeared, dedicated to King William III. It firmly established Vondel as a national poet for all Dutch people. To make it more attractive Van Lennep had his edition illustrated by contemporary artists. Events in Vondel's life were depicted, and illustrations were included in the works themselves. Seventeenth-century plates were replaced with nineteenth-century versions, for which Van Lennep was later much criticized.

But Van Lennep wanted above all to produce a scholarly edition. He put a great deal of work into elucidating the text, dating the poetry, unearthing biographical details, and exploring the political and religious context of the poems. The resulting scholarship was made accessible by means of extensive indexes that have retained their usefulness to this day.

Van Lennep's work gave an impetus to further editions of Vondel's texts, which appeared relatively soon afterwards. The freethinker Johannes van Vloten produced an edition in modern Dutch spelling in 1864–1866 that was intended to make Vondel accessible to a broader readership, and the leading Catholic J.A. Alberdingk Thijm initiated an edition with Catholic commentary that was completed by others after his death and published in 1887. Vondel was truly a poet for everyone. It was also the time of the great Vondel festivals. In 1867 a statue of him by Royer was erected in Amsterdam. The Catholic architect Pierre Cuypers designed the plinth for the statue as well as the floats that paraded through the city as part of the festivities surrounding its unveiling. 1879 saw the celebration of the two hundredth anniversary of the poet's death.

The Roman Catholic Vondel School

Vondel editor Alberdingk Thijm is regarded as the founder of the 'Roman Catholic Vondel school'. He was the editor of a new edition of Vondel's work and he had published a generally well-received series of

'portraits' of Vondel. Moreover, he regularly produced critical reviews in response to the work of Van Lennep. In putting together his own edition he was supported by J.F.M. Sterck, who in turn became a leading Vondelian and in 1901 the founder of the Vondel Society, which published a periodical called *Vondel-Museum* to which Sterck made frequent contributions of an archival or bibliographical nature. The first Catholic Vondelians produced their theses in about 1910: Moller, Brom, Molkenboer – they would all write about Vondel and edit editions of his work for decades to come. In 1933 a Chair in Vondel Studies was established at Nijmegen Catholic University and Molkenboer was the first to occupy it. To mark the occasion he gave an inaugural oration called *Het rythme van de Vondelwaardering* (*The Rhythm of Vondel Appreciation*), which was written mainly from a Catholic perspective. 1930 had seen the first issue of the *Vondelkroniek*, again at the instigation of Sterck, with Molkenboer as editor-in-chief. The journal remained in existence until 1941.

The veneration of Vondel reached one final highpoint in this period, the Commemoration of 1937, celebrated at a solemn meeting in Amsterdam, with a *Gedenkboek* (Commemorative Book) as a permanent contribution. That year also saw the publication of the final volume of an edition begun in 1927, *De werken van Vondel. Volledige en geïllustreerde tekstuutgave in tien deelen* (*The Works of Vondel. Complete and Illustrated Edition of the Texts in Ten Volumes*). The series editor was J.F.M. Sterck and it was largely the work of Catholic scholars, including Molkenboer and the philologist L.C. Michels, but since this was after all a national publication, scholars from other denominations worked on it as well. It remains to this day the most recent scholarly edition of the complete works. In the same year, 1937, Albert Verwey, man of letters and a professor at Leiden University, issued an edition of Vondel in modern spelling, this time as a single volume and aimed at a wide, culturally engaged readership.

Vondel in Modern Research

After the Second World War, interest in Vondel among a broad audience became, frankly, a thing of the past. Even the annual tradition of performing *Gysbreght van Aemstel* to see in the New Year was abandoned in 1968. There is no longer a place for Vondel in Dutch secondary schools.

The debate about his work that began in the seventeenth century belongs to the past as well. The issues that dominated discussion of Vondel for several centuries seem to have lost all relevance. Vondel's ideology leaves readers and audiences cold. The question as to whether and to what extent his work should be interpreted as Catholic excites no one any longer. His language is perceived as alienating, even curious, and hardly anyone nowadays can detect the supposed contrast between elevated and earthy tones in his work. The long speeches in his plays no longer cause irritation for their alleged one-sidedness, they merely put audiences to sleep. In short, none of the things that once angered people and led to fierce debates arouse any interest today, even in a negative sense.

Vondelian academic research quickly revived, however, and for a time it flourished once more. The customary philological method remained in vogue, as evidenced by innumerable studies and editions of the works. It would be impossible to discuss or even to name all these modern studies in this very short essay, even were we to limit ourselves to theatrical research.⁹ There is space only for a few examples of books that make innovative contributions. The 1950 dissertation by philosopher and literary theorist J.G. Bomhoff, for instance, influenced by the then prevalent philosophy of existentialism, attempts to understand Vondel through the prism of 'the tragic' as a universal and eternally valid category. Taking a rather different approach, Norwegian expert on German and Dutch literature Kåre Langvik-Johannessen tried in several studies between 1963 and 1987 to offer what he called a 'psychosymbolic' interpretation of Vondel's tragedy as expressing the antinomy between heaven and earth, spirit and matter, and thereby to present him as a typical baroque poet. He often interprets the characters in the tragedies as symbols for inner conflicts in the protagonist, between for example his objective-earthly and subjective-earthly selves. American professor of German studies James A. Parente studied neoclassical tragedy, including works by Vondel, in terms of its relationship to older, Christian-Humanist drama (1987). Peter King compiled word indexes and frequency lists for several works by Vondel, including *Lucifer*, and based on his interesting semantic investigations concluded that, from a dogmatic point of view, *Lucifer* is 'a failed

⁹ For a thorough discussion of works on Vondel from 1945 to 1987 see Spies, 'Vondel in veelvoud'.

theological play'. Incidentally, these studies indicate that Vondel had his enthusiasts and admirers, some with critical comments to make as well, even beyond the Dutch-language area. Several of his plays have appeared in translation in various European languages.¹⁰ Lieven Rens, whose doctoral thesis took the form of a study on the narrowly focussed theme of the priest-king conflict in Vondel's tragedies, took the first step towards a psychoanalytical interpretation of Vondel's dramas in 1979. None of these approaches has as yet been taken further to any great degree.

Particularly influential, on the other hand, has been the approach of Utrecht professor of Dutch language and literature W.A.P. Smit. Between 1955 and 1962 he published a three-volume work called *Van Pascha tot Noah (From Pascha to Noah)* in which he treats the tragedies in chronological order, tracing the development of Vondel's poetics. Having started out as a member of a chamber of rhetoric, Vondel later encountered Seneca and translated works including *Troades* and *Phaedra*. Then he got to know Sophocles and translated *Elektra*. He also seems to have followed closely the literary theories of his contemporaries Hugo Grotius and Daniel Heinsius. All this led him to new Aristotelian insights: the character of the protagonist lies in the tension between good and evil, and key moments in the tragedy are the *agnitio*, or sudden insight into the true situation, and the accompanying reversal of events, the *peripeteia*. At this point something develops that Smit calls the duality drama, in which the central character himself is at stake. Smit believes Vondel's work is lent its significance by the idea of 'the meaningfulness of God's rule'. This is strongly reminiscent of Milton's 'to justify the ways of God to men', the stated purpose of *Paradise Lost* (1667) (I, 26). Yet the difference in emphasis should not be overlooked. In Vondel's view God does not need to be 'justified' to men; his intention is to demonstrate God's just and merciful rule.

Each volume of the study closes with an 'overview' in which the defining characteristics of the tragedy under discussion are set out schematically, a didactic aid that made the book significantly more persuasive.

¹⁰ For example, English versions of *Gysbrecht van Aemstel* (1991) and *Mary Stuart, or Tortured Majesty* (1996) by Kristiaan Aercke and of *Lucifer* by Charles van Noppen (1898 repr. 1942) and Noel Clark (1990).

Smit's book, with its strongly historicizing approach, combined with 'close reading' as he himself remarks, was in a positive sense a milestone and in a negative sense almost a terminus. There seemed to be hardly any room left for alternative readings, all the more so since Smit, from his principles based on contemporary insights, also seriously and powerfully contested the studies produced before and after his own. Bomhoff's opinions were in his view 'typically modern' and took no account of Vondel's beliefs or his sources. J. Poulssen suggested in 1963 that the all-pervasive influence of seventeenth-century literary theory which Smit describes may have amounted to an obstacle to Vondel, perhaps adversely affecting his 'poetic identity'. Smit claimed that this argument had largely remained stuck at the hypothetical stage.¹¹

Smit's approach fits neatly into the literary-historical paradigm in force in his own day, with its focus on seventeenth-century rhetoric and the literary theory of the author's time. The same foundations were built upon for many years. Other interesting and innovative studies on Vondel's dramas appeared, theoretically following in Smit's footsteps, along with editions of the works that continued to build upon his insights. The chorus was studied by Lia van Gemert (1990). Jan Konst wrote his 1993 dissertation on the passions in seventeenth-century tragedy, paying much attention to Vondel, and in his *Fortuna, fatum en providentia Dei in de Nederlandse tragedie (Fortuna, Fatum, and Providentia Dei in Dutch Tragedy, 2003)* he devotes the entire second volume of some 125 pages to Vondel. Points of departure are formed by the ideas of Vondel's day about the passions and about the broad issue of *fatum* (fate) and divine dispensation.

To get out from under the shadow of Smit's book a paradigm shift was required, a switching of attention from the literary historian to the reader, the self-determining reader, the deconstructing reader. In his detailed responses to positions taken by others, Smit noted that their interpretations were too modern or too hypothetical, but such arguments were no longer regarded as valid. Readers refused to be governed by seventeenth-century literary theories. Poulssen had already put forward the hypothesis that Vondel had perhaps allowed himself to be overly browbeaten by the demands of the literary theory of his day, and others went a step further and read Vondel on the basis of their own ideas.

¹¹ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, II, p. 176; Smit, 'Nieuwe Vondel-literatuur'.

In one sense in particular this was certainly no loss. As Smit saw it, the modern reader needed to step out of his own world. He ought to be interested in Vondel in the light of the poet's own time, and if that specific interest was lacking then unfortunately there was nothing to be done. That it was lacking became all too clear. Vondel had hardly any readers and his plays were performed only rarely. Even when they were, the directors who took them on were not about to let Smit lay down the law. Far from it. In 1979, for instance, Hans Croiset produced a *Lucifer* that omitted the final chorus, in which insight is offered into the salvation of mankind by Christ. Dramatist Guus Rekers made *Lucifer* into a character corresponding to 'l'homme révolté' as described by Camus. It was an impressive and much praised production, but Vondel would have rejected any such interpretation.¹²

In academic discourse this kind of modern approach to Vondel was first advocated by Ernst van Alphen in a chapter in his book *Bang voor schennis* (*Fearful of Desecration*, 1987) in which he uses Vondel's *Lucifer* to demonstrate how the convention of dramatic unity causes the reader to smooth away contradictions and problems in a text. One such contradiction in his view is the clash between the social code according to which the angels are entirely right to stage a revolt and the theological code according to which they should submit to God's commands as a matter of course. The fall of the angels is therefore both justified and unjustified, and it is up to the reader to choose which code to follow. He should do so irrespective of what Vondel himself thought. Van Alphen assumes the poet favours the theological reading, so there is a suggestion here that the reader can stand in opposition to what an author explicitly lays before him. Such opposition was manifested in the feminist reading of Vondel's theatrical works, for example, in which criticism was made of his one-sided view of women as martyrs, temptresses, and obedient wives – criticism that, as we have seen, arose even in the seventeenth century.¹³

Frans-Willem Korsten, in his study *Vondel belicht: Voorstellingen van soevereiniteit* (2006, translated in 2009 as *Sovereignty as Inviolability: Vondel's Theatrical Explorations in the Dutch Republic*), went a step further. He investigates the concept of sovereignty in Vondel's theatrical works and argues that according to Vondel the political system of law

¹² See Guus Rekers, 'Vondel in het perspectief van "L'homme révolté"; of Hoe kun je de onspeelbare *Lucifer* laten werken?' (1981).

¹³ Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, *Vondel en het vrouwelijk dier*.

cannot be founded on the almighty God, who imposes a system of law of his own, but that we should instead look to the value of the natural order. Smit's 'meaningfulness of God's rule' is in Korsten's view not the statement of a conclusion but on the contrary a position that comes up for debate and is ultimately rejected. The historical figure of Vondel, a convinced Christian who bowed down before the authority of God as revealed to him in the Bible, is thereby sidelined altogether. Whatever Vondel may assert in the various prefaces to his tragedies about the way in which he has read the Bible and what his characters are intended to represent, Korsten dismisses it all as a series of rhetorical constructs to which he pays no further heed. In his book he rightly objects to a one-sided reading of Vondel as an author who does not ask questions but instead offers certainties, but he himself gives a no less one-sided reading, based on what he as a modern reader wishes to see. His book expresses no opposition to the author; as a person he is simply put to one side. There is no further debate with him. The reader has taken command.

In my position as a philologist of the old school I have every respect for deconstructionist innovation as a fascinating, indeed perhaps necessary heuristic method. Nevertheless, readings that arise from a concentration on detail, never addressing the fact that the work as a whole contains signals that clearly point in a different direction, I regard as an incorrect way of dealing with the past.

With Korsten the new paradigm, in which the reader is the central figure, is taken all the way to its logical conclusion. The many reviews ranged from admiring to negative. It remains to be seen how the study of Vondel will develop from this point on.

CHAPTER THREE

VONDEL'S DRAMAS: WAYS OF RELATING PRESENT AND PAST

Frans-Willem Korsten

Interest and Anachronism

It is a question that can be asked for any writer, but still: why read Vondel? Of course, one possible answer could be that a figure such as Vondel – more famous than Rembrandt in his own times – should not be forgotten. History, however, is not fair. Lots of historical figures who were famous in their own times are now forgotten. Vondel is not. The question why we should still read him or, by extension, Dutch Renaissance literature in general, was central to Eddy Grootes, one of the towering figures in the study of seventeenth-century Dutch literature, when he said his farewells to the Academy in 1997.¹ Tellingly, the work of Vondel sparked controversial comments. But the very controversy was a sure sign that Vondel (metonymy for his work) was not dead. His texts are very much 'present', for instance on the much-visited website of DBNL, the Dutch on-line wealth of literature from the recent and distant past. His texts are evidently with us, there, among many texts from different times: they exist simultaneously, *now*.²

When we address the question as to what the relevance may be of this historical work for our present, one question is already answered, then. To the question 'how can the work still be with us?', the straightforward answer is that, apparently, there is something in the work that has kept it alive throughout the centuries as a point of interest. It survived the literary market that is in perpetual development over time, as George Orwell formulated it.³ Vondel survived the test of time.⁴ This is

¹ Van den Berg and Pleij, *Mooi meegenomen?*

² <http://www.dbnl.org/>. On the presence of historical texts on the web, see McGann, *Radiant Textuality*.

³ George Orwell in his essay 'Lear, Tolstoy, and the Fool', in which he dealt with the arguments concerning this issue by Samuel Johnson and David Hume.

⁴ Savile, *The Test of Time*; note that Savile is the first to contend that in the field of art mere survival is not the most relevant issue.

not all that self-evident, nor does it need to be something special. More artefacts are lost than there are artefacts preserved, for a host of reasons, and lots of artefacts survived that might as well have been lost. We can only salvage and safeguard so much. Anyone who has ever had to decide what to do with all the goods accumulated by deceased parents during their lifetime knows that more is thrown away than kept. So, in a rather simple sense, relevance is proven when the work is still preserved, studied or performed.

Talking about the dead, one could argue that they speak to us, and we speak with them. In the Low Countries, this has been one of the major points of concern in the work of Jürgen Pieters.⁵ His work, inspired by scholars such as Stephen Greenblatt, Lisa Jardine, Catherine Belsey and Jerome McGann,⁶ can be seen as an ongoing exploration of the relation between past and present. It is within that context that the conversation between the living and the dead is a recurring *topos*. The dead are not gone. They are still here, in a different form, addressing us by way of their manifold manifestations. Attractive as this notion may be, however, it does not explain why we choose to speak to this specific deceased person and not to any of the others. Many more of the dead are forgotten than the marginal number we care to remember. This riddle can be solved by pointing to the aesthetic power of the text, which is why Pieters especially focuses on the work Jerome McGann. Both, however, tend to ignore the inescapable issue of interest. Why would we study texts if we are simply not interested in them?

The matter of interest directs the questions as to how the historical work is actualized, how it acquires meaning, and how it is able to show its force as a work in the present or, somehow, of the present. Such questions are distinctly different from what has been called by Greenblatt (for instance) 'Old Historicism'. This approach would be dealing with the work of art as a piece of history, in which case its force and content is unequivocally determined by its historical appearance and context. In contrast, Greenblatt proposed his New Historicism

⁵ Pieters's thoroughly revised studies on this issue can be found in his *Historische letterkunde vandaag en morgen*. For earlier studies on New Historicism, see his *Moments of Negation*.

⁶ Notably Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning from More to Shakespeare*, Jardine, *Reading Shakespeare Historically*, Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy*, and *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden*, and McGann, *Radiant Textuality* and *The Beauty of Inflection*.

(although, perhaps, we had better stick to his idea of 'cultural poetics'). The major difference between the Old and the New was that New Historicism would shun any totality in the description of an historical situation. Still, both are forms of historicism. The alternative would be to consider the historical work as an actual thing of the present. To this end, it can best be studied in semiotic terms – or in material terms, as Paul de Man would describe it, with language and textuality as forms of acting matter.⁷

In relation to the materiality of language, one could argue that the very idea of 'history in the present' is only the result of the rhetorical or linguistic turn in the twentieth century. The point would be that there is no thought or meaning without manipulated – and manipulating – language, or any other sign-system. There is not one untarnished meaning deep within language; neither is there thought without language; and nor is there history without mediation. Through language, thought, meaning and history are made, which is why Michel de Certeau called the writing of history a matter of 'making history'.⁸ Philosophy as well as historiography, in their search for truth, are not simply using language: they are made by language itself, time and again, in a specific present. Within that context, principally, the 'present past-ness' of historical works may be called a form of anachronism.⁹

The term 'anachronism' has its advantages, because it is a technical term and a necessary concept to indicate a mismatch between two times. To be sure, this term has been used pejoratively to indicate, for instance, how awkward it is when, in a movie that purports to be historically accurate, we meet a Jesus wearing rubber shoes. But this awkwardness, the unease or *strangeness* produced by anachronism, is functional, as Mieke Bal argued in a study that was tellingly titled *Loving Yusuf: Conceptual Travels from Present to Past*. Anachronism opens up another potential of 'interest', as that which is in-between and can never be contained in one domain alone. When, for instance,

⁷ See the volume edited by Tom Cohen, *Material Events*.

⁸ '[F]aire de l'histoire', Michel de Certeau, *L'écriture de l'histoire*.

⁹ The dominance of the present in our study of the past has often been called 'presentism' lately. The notion has rather easily turned into a pejorative term that serves to disqualify those accused of using the past for their own, present, agenda. This is one reason why I prefer anachronism.

characters from the Bible wear seventeenth-century clothes in a Rembrandt painting, this is surely a kind of mismatch. However, one could also describe it as the coincidence of different times, or the new embodiment of things past in a present – what Hans Blumenberg called *Umbesetzung*.¹⁰ Things, ideas and texts travel through time and are taken up differently in different times. In a fundamental sense, any historical artefact that functions in some kind of present can be seen as an example of anachronism. The complexity here is not so much a matter of language or representation, but is primarily an issue of how we can connect to, or experience history, or deal with history in terms of actuality.

Gilles Deleuze convincingly argued that time as history – chronological time – cannot deal with history on its own terms.¹¹ The radical cleavage in time between one moment and the next excludes history from being present. There is simply no getting back to history. This is why Deleuze postulated another mode of time in which history and the present are, or can be, brought together. This is the mode in which history is always in, or together with, the present. The two are not reducible to each other, but they are principally connected or related. As a consequence it is impossible to consider them as two separate positions. Such a separation would allow the present to become a position from which one can survey a radically different past. In fact, bringing the two together in time causes them to be lifted out of the chronological organisation of time called history. This is what produces anachronism, as was put forward by Walter Benjamin, although he did not explicitly use this term. He defined it as a form of understanding that consisted in blasting open ‘the continuum of history’.¹²

Is this a typically postmodernist stance? I think not, as the case of Benjamin, or Vondel, may indicate, or that of Catherine Belsey, who is rightly quoted at the end of the aforementioned study by Pieters: ‘To read the past, to read a text from the past, is always to make an interpretation which is in a sense an anachronism.’¹³ If anything, Belsey

¹⁰ Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*.

¹¹ Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*.

¹² See Benjamin. ‘A Berlin Chronicle’, or ‘On the Concept of History’ and ‘Prolipomena to “On the Concept of History”’ (especially thesis XVI, *Selected Writings* IV, p. 396). For a survey, see Ferris, ‘Introduction: Reading Benjamin’ or Pensky, ‘Method and Time: Benjamin’s Dialectical Images.’

¹³ Quoted in Pieters, *Historische Letterkunde vandaag en morgen*, p. 207.

surely cannot be called a postmodernist. Moreover, even if this is a characteristically postmodernist position, the qualification need not be damaging – as long as it does not amount to the recurring and nonsensical view of postmodernism as the philosophy of ‘anything goes’. In the case of historiography such a view would come down to saying that, if history does not exist independently, we can do anything with history and manipulate it in any way we see fit, or appropriate it for our own needs. There are several forms of postmodernism, or postcolonialism, in which scholars and writers are highly interested in such manipulation, in relation to notions of truth and representation. By and large they acknowledge that truth and representation cannot be considered separately from subjectivity, power and interest. They also insist on the fact that, as a result, there can never be such a thing as ‘the’ history. There are always different histories, connected to different parties and interests, which is anything but relativism.

Moreover, the accusation that postmodernism implies an ‘anything goes’ has its ironies when brought forward from within the field of history. Generally, history is qualified as the substance of recorded history. The very fact that history exists because of records, because of writing and representation, means that manipulation stands at the heart of history.¹⁴ With regard to this manipulation, there are indeed many disturbing traces of an ‘anything goes’ attitude. This attitude would not be the result of scholarly or philosophical irresponsibility, but of a pivotal connection between recording and power. To put it simply, having the power and ability to record implies having the power and ability to make ‘history’, or to contest it. One famous and relatively recent example is the sudden rise of attention that has lately been paid to the Chinese admiral Zheng He (or Cheng Ho, 1371–1435). Anybody surfing the net right now will find hundreds of sites and a society entirely devoted to the study of Zheng He’s life and works.¹⁵ He travelled to the east coast of Africa, to South and North America and Australia, before any European did. The story goes that the fifth Ming emperor Yongle (or Xuan Zong) had ordered his admiral to give testimony to other nations that he was now emperor. The records of these

¹⁴ This can be seen as one of the dominant themes in the work of Michel Foucault, throughout its different phases, as in *Madness and Civilization*, *The History of Sexuality*, *The Order of Things* and especially *The Archaeology of Knowledge* with the influential ‘Discourse on Language’.

¹⁵ See <http://www.chengho.org/>

travels were destroyed, however, on the orders of Xuan Zong's successor (presumably his son), who would prohibit the building of ships with three masts, thereby effectively ending China's imperial expansion overseas.

This is a clear case of history being made, in different ways and modes, in past and present. It is rather evident that the renewed attention for Zheng He is almost directly linked to the rise of China as a dominant global power. The fact that Zheng He was a Muslim even expands the possibilities of claiming him as a heroic ancestor (although this complicates things as well, in the Chinese context). For those readers who are a little surprised that I use this Chinese example in relation to Vondel's historical presence in the present, it may be of interest to know that Vondel wrote a play in 1667 on the fall of the last emperor of the Ming dynasty that took place some decades earlier, in 1644: *Zungchin of ondergang der Sineesche heerschappije* (*Chongzhen or the Downfall of the Chinese Dominion*). In this play about the emperor Chongzhen, Vondel amply testifies to his ability to handle histories, bringing together distinctly different strands of culturally diverse and even disparate histories in his text. It will come as no surprise that, in doing so, he was appropriating the history of others. Still, in doing this, the play highlights an important distinction.

If we speak about history in the present, this can mean either our present or the present of the play in its own time. For both, similar questions are involved. Consequently, we can look at the way in which Vondel's plays are part of our present, or at the way in which history was made present in the plays by Vondel in his own day and age. In what follows, in order to stress the importance of this distinction I will devote two sections to the force of history in Vondel's present and three sections to history in our present.

Perhaps the most direct way in which history is built into the present consists of structuring characteristics that lead to the recurrence through time of unresolved issues and problems within a certain socio-cultural body. Consequently there is the possibility of a dialogue through time, which is always performed within a certain present, with partners from different historical times debating the issue concerned. The second, rather direct form of history in the present consists in path dependency, or tradition, as a result of which the contingent and yet pre-given character of history manifests itself in the present. With the third form of history in the present, we enter more complex territory. It concerns the issue of trauma, which keeps human beings 'caught in

history', as if the past is a cage that holds subjects imprisoned in any future present, freezing the way in which they can or wish to remember. As a fourth option, history can also be located on the level of representation. The past as such is not what is present, but its *active* representation is. Likewise, memory is not a natural given, but an act.¹⁶

Finally, with the fifth form we will deal with the dynamic between 'pre' and 'post'. This dynamic is commonly considered in terms of precedence – the *pre* coming before the *post*. What I will question is not the issue of precedence, but what, in some context, is the *pre* and the *post*. Historically, for instance, all material from classical antiquity predates the material from the seventeenth century. The point is that the classical material is taken up the other way around, in the light of seventeenth-century (Christian) society. What came later in time is put up front in order to read what came earlier as, somehow, the result of what came later. This once again indicates how, indeed, one can also consider history in Vondel's present. But allow me to first continue with Vondel's historical presence in our present.

Transcendence in History: Speaking to Each Other Through Time

Vondel's works cannot be reduced to the issues and problems they deal with or the thoughts they express. This, however, has been a dominant way of dealing with art, as Jean Mary Schaeffer has argued. When discussing the work of Hegel, he explains how for the latter, ideal knowledge and real being conflate in philosophy and art but in a markedly different way. With art, they do so in 'sensuous reality'.¹⁷ This will lead, in the Hegelian frame, to the question of what art is *about*, thus abstracting an ideal expression from a real object. It is as sensuous objects, however, that works of art can do many things, both at the same time and *through* time. This never occurs in an abstract fashion, but always in particular ways.

Works of art are part of a history in which it is hard to speak of some kind of progress. In the field of art things surely change, but one cannot say that twentieth-century authors write better plays than their seventeenth-century predecessors. They simply write different plays.

¹⁶ On memory as an act, see Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, the collection of essays edited by Bal et al., *Acts of Memory*, or Todorov, *Hope and Memory*.

¹⁷ See Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*, specifically p. 139.

Because of this, one can trace formal or technical problems that make works comparable through the ages, in a relatively horizontal way. They exist on a par. In the case of Vondel, for instance, one of his artistic problems is how to write Christian tragedy. Whereas Christian comedy could consist of the change of a miserable, desperate situation into a spiritual and enlightened one, Christian tragedy had a basic problem, for the end of any history had to be just. There could not be such a thing as an undeserved fate. Consequently, the issue of the possibility of Christian tragedy has vexed many authors throughout the centuries, and they have come up with rather different ways of dealing with it.¹⁸ One can see this as an ongoing discussion that transcends time. When, for instance, Dutch author Connie Palmen published her novel *Lucifer* in 2007, she was not engaging with Vondel's play *Lucifer* as a historical piece locked in its own time, but rather as a work in the present that deals with a recurring theme or problem.¹⁹ In fact, the notion of intertextuality developed by Kristeva pointed to this possibility of looking at texts on a strictly horizontal level.

As the example of Christian tragedy may have indicated, there is more to this particular problem than formal organization. In terms of content, it is hard to speak in terms of progress in many cases. One can argue that the present-day juridical organization of the Netherlands is surely better than the juridical organization prevalent in the seventeenth century. If the possibility of time travel existed, one might have second thoughts about being transported to the seventeenth century if one had homosexual or kleptomaniacal tendencies, or if one were disposed towards religious or political radicalism. In this strict context one can speak of progress. This does not mean, however, that historical texts cannot deal with issues of content that may contribute directly to an ongoing discussion in the present. The issue of sovereignty as it is explored in many (and perhaps all) of Vondel's plays is a good case in point. If one approaches it in classical hermeneutical or exegetical terms, one would have to specify how Vondel's explorations were

¹⁸ For different recent attempts, see Cox, *Between Earth and Heaven: Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, and the Meaning of Christian Tragedy*, or Hunt, *The Paradox of Christian Tragedy*, and Bouchard, *Tragic Method and Tragic Theology: Evil in Contemporary Drama and Religious Thought*. Perhaps the best, but also the most confusing study is Pranger, 'The Artifice of Eternity'.

¹⁹ To get just one impression of the enormous discussion surrounding the appearance of Palmen's *Lucifer*, see <http://www.nrcboeken.nl/leesclub/connie-palmen-lucifer>.

particular to his times, how they built upon specific works and thoughts and were followed by others. In my own work, I decided to take another approach by placing Vondel's works within a discussion that transcends history, as a result of which it is *present* in an ongoing discussion. This possibility exists because of two elemental aspects of history.

The first elemental aspect is that any cultural organization has certain structuring characteristics. The issue of sovereignty, for instance, presents a fundamental problem that shows a clear development in European and Western history as a result of the clashes, fusions and encounters between distinct cultural bodies and coinciding political organizations. It bears the marks of classical antiquity (Greek and Roman), of the peoples inhabiting or invading Europe (in relation to this specific theme: Germans, Franks), of Judaism, or of Christianity (in its different modalities). It is not coincidental that one of the most influential studies on this issue, by Giorgio Agamben had a Roman concept in its title: *homo sacer*. Up until this day several problems posed by the idea of sovereignty have not been resolved, such as the question as to what grounds sovereignty, or what the relation between the sovereignty of the ruler and the sovereignty of the ruled may be, or whether sovereignty requires a centre or not. In relation to these questions it is of interest to see how Vondel dealt with them in his plays, to see what his explorations contribute to the ongoing discussion. In that context it is possible and valid to confront his works with the work of contemporary – both modern and postmodernist – theoreticians.

It goes without saying that I still consider Vondel's works in their historical specificity. It is a principally dialogic way of dealing with the object, although it is a different type of dialogism than proposed by New Historicism. Whereas the latter approach would remain within the confines of a historical period to show its fundamentally dialogic structure, here the dialogue transcends time. Historical texts are taken seriously now whilst their meaning is not exhaustively explained or framed by their own historical context. This possibility of reaching through time depends for a considerable part on the fact that we are dealing with a work of art, the potential of which is not restricted to the times of its production. As we know, in different times and differing historical circumstances, a work of art can be opened up anew, and its manifold potential is developed in different directions.²⁰ The work

²⁰ For an overview of editions and performances, see the contributions by Mieke B. Smits-Veldt and Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen in this volume.

keeps speaking, as a force in the present. If it stops doing that, people will probably lose interest in it. It may get lost at a certain moment, or it will become a historical curiosity.

Tradition, or History's Resilience

Nothing could seem to be more common than saying that we have to read or understand something within a tradition. In the case of Vondel, for instance, we would have to read his work in the tradition that was shaped and defined by the sociocultural organization of the Netherlands. Although this appears to be quite straightforward, there is ample historical evidence that tradition can be very hard to define, and appears to be flexible as well. There is no such thing as a tradition that is solid and stable through time. Tradition is constantly being made.²¹ Obviously we cannot reconstruct it from scratch. There are pre-given elements with which we have to work. Tradition is analogous to history, here, in a fundamental way, since there is no way we can reconstruct history from scratch. In history, there is a principal path dependency in operation, which causes some possibilities to be opened up and others to be closed. If, for instance, Europe would not have been successful in its process of colonization and subsequent colonialism, we would have lived in a completely different world. But as it is Europe was successful in conquering large parts of the world. In other words, there is something in the past that determines our current situation, whereas we have the power to reconstruct history at the same time. We are able to present our view on it, another view, to pay attention to something that has been neglected so far, to explore possibilities that were there but not realized, and so forth.

When studying Vondel's play *Palamedes* I was fascinated by a passage that may illustrate the issue. This play is an allegory that was meant to accuse Maurits, the Stadtholder of the States, of having murdered Oldenbarnevelt, Grand Pensionary of the States General and the most powerful political figure in the Dutch Republic. The accusation had to be an allegory, since a blunt accusation would have brought Vondel before a court that most surely would have sentenced him to prison or to death. In order to avoid such a grisly fate, he wrote a play in which the characters are taken from a classical story about a miserable set-up,

²¹ On this dynamic, see Bal's chapter 'Tradition' in *Travelling Concepts*, pp. 213–52.

and he presents them as masks for contemporary players. Right in the middle of that classical, allegorical play, we suddenly encounter another character, however, from another time and another place. The chorus after the second act describes him as follows:

That the African both cruel and strong
 Built a church from people's heads,
 And that his temple priest had
 A skull for his censer:
 And before he said prayers,
 Lit a torch of human fat,
 And with pretense of holiness poured
 Purple human blood instead of wine:
 And sacrificed, as a burnt offering to the gods
 Human entrails half alive:
 While a human intestine fastens
 Round his body his tough human skin,
 His sacrificial robe and festival adornment:
 And sang, and screeched without measure,
 From parchment full of blood-red script,
 Maddened by an inner rage:
 And had a chorus of savage
 Murderers echo each verse
 Whose weapon was neither sword nor cutlass,
 But jawbone or thighbone:
 That Tantalus still spattered with filth
 Of fresh murder, dared to serve up
 His son's flesh at Jove's table:
 Has not happened by chance:
 But was inescapable fate!²²

What we see is a strange mixture of so-called traditional material. Tantalus fits in with the classical tradition from which the allegory has acquired its material. In this particular case the text is not inspired by

²² *Palamedes* ll. 697–721: 'Dat d'Africaen soo wreed als sterck, / Van menschen hoofden boude een kerck, / En dat sijn tempelpriester had / Een doodshoofd tot sijn wieroockvat: / En eer hy noch gebeden sprack, / Een menschenongeltoorts ontstack, / En plengde met een heylgen schyn / Paers menschenbloedt in plaets van wyn: / En offerde, den Goon tot brand / Halflevend menscheninghewand: / Terwyl een menschendarrem sluyt / Om't lijf syn taeye menschen huyl, / Syn offerkleed en feestcieraed: / En song, en schreude sonder maet, / Wt parkement vol bloedrood schrift, / Verruckt door innerlijcke drift: / En deë weergalmen op elck vaers / Een rey van woeste moorde-naers / Wier wapen, swaerd noch kortelas, / Maer kakebeen of schinckel was: / Dat Tantalus noch vuyt bemorscht / Van versche moord, opschaffen dorst / Het vleesch sijns soons op Iovis disch: / Niet by geval gebeurt en is: / Maer onontworstelbaer bescheer!'

the classical tradition, however, although A. Geerts stated that this African had to be the Egyptian king Busiris, who was well known from Greek mythology and from Seneca. Geerts has a point. Busiris indeed sacrificed people, but did so with a reason and limited himself to foreigners. His sacrifices were ordained by an oracle, to be sure. But that oracle told him to fend off famine by sacrificing others. The issue of sacrificing others is of interest. Still, if Vondel can introduce Tantalus explicitly, why would he not mention Busiris by name as well? It makes more sense to consider the description of this African in the Western tradition of racial stereotyping. In fact we see Vondel working on the installation of that tradition, whilst complicating it as well.

The figure of the African as depicted here relates to some stories and reports that were produced due to the rapidly developing contacts between Dutch traders and their African partners. In the background there is the history of the slave trade. This trade was, at the time of the publication of *Palamedes*, predominantly in the hands of the Portuguese in Western Africa. Yet their position was looked upon with envy by the Dutch.²³ The history that ensued would cause 'a rift in the soul' even as Africa and the Americas were being 'stitched together', as Derek Walcott described it in *Omeros*. When Toni Morrison coined the term 'Africanism' (a sister concept of Orientalism) she was not immediately thinking about seventeenth-century Dutch literature.²⁴ Nevertheless, the characteristic features that she described could hold for that literature as well. When we use her conceptual tools, we are able to get a sharper view of the construction of a tradition that would prove to be a persistent one.

When we use modern theory and insights in order to revisit historical texts, this is again a form of anachronism. Because of Morrison's work, the presence of Africans or African elements in art and thought can be described in functional terms in three ways: (1) the African is a surrogate who is not presented for his own sake, but is taken up in order to enable white writers to think about themselves; (2) the African functions as the primitive, who can, as such, be the negative of the positive of white, European or Western modernity; (3) the African functions as a pivot in the construction of history in which the African is

²³ In Allison Blakely's *Blacks in the Dutch World: The Evolution of Racial Imagery in a Modern Society*, Blakely presents an overview of the deep-rooted cultural structure of racial prejudices in the (European) West.

²⁴ Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*.

relatively history-less or context-less whereas the white subject has history and is put 'in place'. As I stated elsewhere, it is as if *Palamedes* aims to substantiate these claims, since 'the African appears here from nowhere. And he will disappear just as suddenly and without trace as well'. At the same time, however, the African can also be read as a figure pointing to Stadtholder Maurits.²⁵

In relation to the African it is relevant to note that there is a strand in the European tradition in which 'black' is considered positively. *Moriaen* is a famous medieval, Arthurian novel in the Netherlands, with a black protagonist and hero. The figure of Moriaen was probably inspired by St. Maurice, a medieval saint whose name can still be traced in city names such as Sankt Moritz. It is this positive hero that is re-inscribed negatively here, with the African referring to Maurice. What makes this example complex, then, is that the white Maurice is not contrasted with the cruel African, but that the positive of St. Maurice is turned into a negative in order to be able to indicate Stadtholder Maurits, who is described as cruel *himself*. This does not lift the racial stereotyping, but *complicates* it in fact.

As scholars, we can resist or reshape those elements of a tradition that we consider to be disadvantageous, but of course we can only go so far. We may be helped by the fact that there is always more to history than we think there is, as if history is a magical attic where there is always one more box to open. This discarded set of boxes was, in fact, the set that New Historicism was after. Despite history's complexity, however, nobody can reshape history any which way she or he would like. History resists. The presence of the African in European or Western literature is both the result of history's contingency and the determined path history took, with the coinciding development of certain traditions. Any presence of Africans in art or literature, then, is a case of history in the present. It carries a charged history with it, and immediately infuses the present with that history. Again, this does not mean that we simply have to accept any pre-existing structures, but we cannot ignore them either.

When I discussed the controversy concerning the status of Zheng He as a discoverer above, I did not mean to imply that all participants in a debate have equally sound arguments, or use equally sound methods. With regard to history, however, the principal point is that we all

²⁵ Korsten, *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, p. 121.

have to build our case on some kind of historical records (whether these consist of writings, artefacts, or any other remnants of the past). These records have to be defined as such, their trustworthiness has to be assessed, they have to be interpreted, and need to be brought into some kind of (narrative and argumentative) connection. This is surely cause for much manipulation, and it cannot be otherwise. Although manipulation may be well known for its negative connotations, originally it means nothing more or less than handling a matter, or the skilful treatment of some matter. Such handling does always take place in a present.

Caught in History or Opening it Up: Pain and Love

One of the most famous plays written by Vondel is *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (1637). In this play, one of the best known *dicta* in the history of Christianity is being reshaped. It concerns Tertullian's dictum 'semen est sanguis Christianorum'.²⁶ One might ask what kind of seed (*semen*), or whose. This becomes clear if one takes a look at the context in which Tertullian puts forward this phrase. He is discussing the function martyrs have had for the constitution of the church. As a result his dictum was better known in later times as 'sanguis martyrum semen christianorum', or 'ecclesiae': the blood of martyrs is seed for the Christians, or the church in which they are gathered. That is to say, it is the blood of martyrs that stands at the basis of the future growth of the church. Put like this it seems as if there have to be martyrs, who stand at the basis of the glorious church that is to be established. That, however, is just one way of looking at it. Another option is that if the church wishes to grow, it will constantly need new seed, new martyrs, and, consequently, new pain.

This second option is explored in Vondel's play, especially in a chorus that has an opening line that gained a life of its own in Dutch literature, and as such acquired a deeply ironic meaning. The chorus starts with: 'O Christmas night, more splendid than the days' (l. 903).²⁷ Considered on its own, this line describes Christmas as, indeed, the most splendid of nights, or as the source of all light. But in the continuing lines this is not at all what the chorus elaborates. It describes the

²⁶ Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 50, 13.

²⁷ 'O Kersnacht, schooner dan de daegen', l. 903.

slaughter of the children of Bethlehem ordered by Herod, who was afraid that the prophecy about a Hebrew infant usurping his throne would come true. In this context the splendour of Christmas Eve is intrinsically connected to the slaughter of innocent children. The chorus then invokes the biblical figure of Rachel, Jacob's second wife, who begot Joseph. Her tomb lies next to the road to Bethlehem. Upon being summoned, her ghost starts to roam the fields in order to witness the pain that is being inflicted. Seeing all this pain, Rachel starts to cry. Then the chorus asks her to stop crying, since:

Your children die as martyrs
 And firstlings of the seed
 That starts to grow from your blood
 And gloriously will flower to God's honour
 And that will not perish by whatever cruelty.²⁸

The passage offers an obvious allusion to Tertullian's dictum, but it is indeed an allusion rather than a citation. Here the seed will grow out of Rachel's blood – and Rachel is emphatically not a martyr (the comment in the *Collected Works* makes Rachel out to be a personification of the Jewish people here, but this is highly ironical since Rachel is a non-Jew, bought from Laban by Jacob).²⁹ Most important, however, is the fact that the seed is not human *semen*, but the seed of flowers. These flowers not only seem to form a marked contrast with cruelty, they are able to resist it. In no case is there any cruelty needed to let them grow. What causes this particular twist?

The answer is that the play explores different ways of making history. The first way of making history entails that subjects remain somehow caught in history. As has become clear in the broadly developed field of trauma studies in the last decades, the infliction of pain may lead to traumatising, which in its turn leads to a certain stasis.³⁰ Traumatized subjects remain 'caught in history', as the title of one important study has it.³¹ That is to say that the moment of trauma stretches out over

²⁸ *Gysbreght*, ll. 946–50: 'Uw kinders sterven martelaeren, / En eerstelingen van het zaed, / Dat uit uw bloed begint te groeien, / En heerlijk tot Gods eer zal bloeien, / En door geen wreedheid en vergaet.'

²⁹ Bringing in Rachel, the text alludes directly to *Matthew* 2:18, which in turn is a direct allusion to *Jeremiah* 31:15.

³⁰ Some important studies in the field were Cathy Caruth's *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, and Kali Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*.

³¹ Van Alphen, *Caught in History*.

future developments, as a result of which traumatized subjects are not able to live relatively independently in the present, but have to live in a present that is the recurring present of the moment of traumatization. They are somehow robbed of their relatively autonomous power to actively use memory. Instead of being the subject of memory, then, they are the objects of some kind of memory. History is not something of the past, but remains painfully present, enforcing its presence. So, in the Christian context, painful infliction serves to propel history towards the glorious future of the Church, but at the same time painful infliction serves to keep that history the same, as a history that has frozen active memory in order to remain closed, or at least in order to preserve the shape and status of the church.

This is one option, both shown by the play and consequently rejected. At the end of the play, it seems as if Gijsbreght wants to become a martyr. His city had been beleaguered, has been taken by means of a ruse, and has, by then, been conquered almost in its entirety, in an atrocious way, with people being raped and slaughtered. Gijsbreght, however, refuses to surrender, pledging to fight to the end, offering his own blood for – indeed, what for? His wife Badeloch, aided by an angel who suddenly appears and tells Gijsbreght to listen to her, asks her husband to save his life, and to save the lives of those who have survived. They have to flee elsewhere, in order to start a new life. History can be opened up, a new start can be made.

Interestingly enough, there is the possibility of a history in the present here as well. Hannah Arendt, in her reading of Augustine, developed the notion of *natality* in relation to politics, which, in contrast with pain, emphasises love as a driving force.³² In relation to Christmas Eve the notions of love and natality surely have their distinct thematic connotations, but the implications are pivotal. In relation to the Roman Empire, Christianity offered a new kind of history, an opening up of history, a new community. For Augustine, that new opening was immediately meant to be the very last one. For Hannah Arendt, however, natality is the constant potential present in politics. It can be seen as the opposite of traumatization. History, with its many roads and possibilities, constantly keeps alive the recurrence of an opening up. In the case of *Gysbreght* that opening up is revealed when in the end the love

³² Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*. The concept of natality is explored further in Markell, 'The Rule of the People: Arendt, Archê, and Democracy'.

between man and wife fuels the possibility of life. Instead of choosing to become martyrs, a band of survivors escapes through the one opening left to them: the harbour and the sea, at the other side of which there lies a new land, and a new history.

Narrativism and Nomadic Thought

When Frank Ankersmit developed his controversial notion of narrativism in the early nineties of the twentieth century, his idea was to present an alternative to what he called historicism. He was not alone in this endeavour. One of his major sources of inspiration was the American scholar Hayden White.³³ Both argued against the option that it would somehow be possible to approach history by assuming that it is possible (a) to have access to a history that exists independently and (b) to represent that access in such a way to historians and other readers that this access is 'transferred'. White and Ankersmit rightly pointed to the fact that the element of representation is not just operative in relation to the way in which transference to others takes place. Instead, history comes into being on the level of representation. Confronted with a number of often disparate sources and facts, any historian has to start by connecting them. She has to produce a coherent whole of chronological, causal connections. With respect to these, Ankersmit came up with his notion of narrativism, which was a confusing notion in the sense that it also had to capture argumentative elements in the text. Each sentence being a proposition, the narrativism consisted in the fact that all these propositions were eventually caught in a narrative frame.

Ankersmit's notion was discussed at length because it seemed to imply that history did not exist as an independent entity that could be studied and represented, as Leopold von Ranke argued, in order to 'simply show how it actually had been'. However, as became clear in the course of the discussion, Ankersmit did consider history as an independent entity, be it as an entity of disparate elements. There is no coherence in history, the writing of history produces coherence – on

³³ After White's *Metahistory, Tropics of Discourse, or The Content of the Form* and Ankersmit's *Narrative Logic, or The Reality Effect in the Writing of History* in the early seventies and eighties of the twentieth century respectively, a debate ensued on the issue that lasted for at least two decades. An overview and response was Ankersmit and Kellner's *A New Philosophy of History*.

the level of representation. In this way it is possible that an ever-increasing number of such productions, in being combined, increasingly approximates what one could call history as that which had taken place. It is fairly safe to say that Ankersmit's way of saving the independent status of history distinguishes him as a historian from more radical positions taken up elsewhere in the humanities. These would hold that even the choice of sources, or the qualification of a source as a historical one, is an act framed by representation. Nonetheless, Ankersmit's option was distinctly anti-hermeneutical, something that was emphasized once more when he published his study on historical sensation, and intrinsically linked up that sensation to the notion of the sublime.³⁴

The more radical positions taken up in the humanities can be described shorthand as nomadic, or as schizo-analysis, and the major source of influence is Gilles Deleuze.³⁵ The central tenet of this type of analysis is that there is no pre-given or pre-ordained theory or method that one can use in order to deal with any historical artefact. A good example here may be the play *Adonias*. In this play, Solomon is the newly appointed king. He is appointed by David, who preferred the younger Solomon over the older son who was first in the line of succession: Adonijah. This distribution of power goes against what in the preface Vondel calls natural law (according to which the eldest born is entitled to succeed to the throne) and defines the power struggle that the play explores. This power struggle develops in relation to two female characters: Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, and Abishag, the latest wife of David and a beautiful young woman who is now widowed (and perhaps the reader needs to be reminded that David, like Solomon, had many wives). At the beginning of the play Adonijah sets out to ask Abishag to marry him, in order to underpin his claim to the throne. This act throws Abishag into the midst of a political battle that damages her so much that in the end, when Adonijah seeks refuge with her, she rejects him, although she does direct him to a hiding place in the woods and promises to send people to pick him up in the night.

Any classical reading of this play would have to stick to the fact that Solomon's reign is seen as a pre-figuration of Jesus. Solomon is the one who establishes an empire of peace and who builds the temple – just as

³⁴ Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*.

³⁵ The essay volumes called *Critique et clinique* and *Labécédair de Gilles Deleuze* can be considered paradigmatic.

Jesus will install an empire of peace and stands at the basis of the Church. Such a reading has much that it must reinterpret, but it also has much that it must ignore, or it has to state recurrently that we have to see things 'in the light of'. It considers Solomon and Adonijah as the natural protagonists of the play and considers Bathsheba and Abishag as, at most, sidekicks.

A nomadic reading of the play must in the first instance pay attention to the nomadic elements in the text of the *Tanakh* itself and the Christian Bible. All its inconsistencies, the stories that are told in different versions, the traces of other religions, the signs of internal controversies and discussions are not reinterpreted in order to get to a final meaning (as Jewish and Christian allegoresis aimed to do, in order to get to a final meaning), but they are seen for what they are: elements that turn the text into a collection of travelling thoughts and issues. That collection of nomadic elements is not restricted to the text itself, for the text links itself to many different users through time, and in the present. In my case, for instance, I was puzzled by the qualification of this play – not just in its subtitle but also in its reception – as a tragedy. That led me to the question of whose tragedy this is.

There is no room here to pay closer attention to the complex issue of Christian tragedy. For now, I would like to make clear that a tragedy needs a character that is the subject of that tragedy. In the case of *Adonias*, the supposed protagonist, Solomon, can hardly be defined as a tragic character. He finds himself in a power struggle with his brother and he solves that struggle as he should, in both the Jewish and Christian frame of history. He has to build the temple, the prefiguration of the Church. At the end of the play, his power is affirmed and prosperous times are to begin. The court priest ends the play by saying: 'It pleases me to meet in Solomon the king of peace / who at the altar of his feet sees all archenemies / lying in the dust, and sees them bow before God's throne. / I expect in Solomon another son of David' (ll. 1884–87).³⁶ This is hardly tragic – quite the contrary. Since Adonijah ends up dead, he might seem to be a more likely candidate for the tragic role. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the play Adonijah sets out on his endeavour knowing that it may cost him his life. He gets the punishment he already expected, which also is hardly tragic. If there is one

³⁶ 'Het lustme in Salomon den vredevorst tontmoeten, / Die alle erfvyanden, aen 't outer van zijn voeten, / In stof ziet leggen, en zich buigen voor Godts troon. / 'K verwacht in Salomon een' andren Davidszoon.' ll. 1184–87.

tragic figure in this play it is Abishag, who starts out as a grieving widow, is then used in the power games of others and ends up with a tarnished reputation as a result of which, for centuries to come, as she puts it, people will put the blame on her.

To see Abishag as the subject of this tragedy would be impossible in any classical, hermeneutical approach to this text. In fact I could be accused of anachronism since Vondel, framed by the Christian patriarchal world-view, would not have been able to think of a woman as an autonomous subject, let alone as a tragic or somehow heroic subject. Even if I would agree with this, I would be able to point to the fact that the text does not coincide with Vondel's thoughts, that the text is itself a collection of travelling elements, and that it started to travel through time afterwards. Puzzled, I followed some of its traces, and came to the conclusion that Abishag is the only character that can be called tragic. Is this a wilfully anachronistic interpretation? It is, but not in the form of a deliberate mismatch. The anachronism resides in the sense of an unavoidable misreading – which is not meant to indicate a wrong reading, but the principal inability to ascertain the right one.

Preposterous History, Allegory and Appropriation

History seems to be defined chronologically by the prepositions *pre* and *post*. Yet this seemingly natural order of things is not that solid. The point was put forward convincingly by Mieke Bal, who coined the term *preposterous history* in order to indicate how past and present are caught in an embrace that confuses chronological order.³⁷ In the case of Bal, in her *Quoting Caravaggio*, she considered the way in which many postmodernist artists reworked material from the Baroque. Usually this would be seen as a matter of influence, or of chronologically hierarchized intertextuality. Bal's point was that it works the other way around. We now read baroque works of art through the pre-position of postmodernist art. In the case of literature I could say, for instance, that we now read the *Iliad* as much through Derek Walcott's *Omeros* as we read *Omeros* through the *Iliad*. But, as the term 'preposterous' suggests, there is more to it than this simple reversal. Taking her cue from anthropologist Johannes Fabian, Bal is talking about 'shared time', of a coequality between scholar and historical subject.³⁸

³⁷ Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*.

³⁸ Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*, p. 7.

Using Bal's term, preposterous history can be done and must be done from the present – from any present. It is not possible to get back to Vondel's present, but it is possible to consider it *as* a present, in relation to a history. Subsequently the same dynamic of preposterousness comes to the fore, especially in relation to allegory. Such an approach is deeply historical because it encompasses chronological order into a larger dynamic of times crossing each other. The play *Leeuwendalers* is a good case in point. Written to celebrate the ending of eighty years of war and civil strife in the Netherlands – the last thirty years of which have become known as the Thirty Years' War in Europe – the play was a comedy. In it, the Christian God did not play a role; the classical god Pan, however, did. In the classical hermeneutical reading, this god is supposed to stand for the Christian God. In a sense we are not supposed to take the figure of Pan seriously, because we have to read him as 'God'. But even classical, hermeneutical readings of the play have encountered great difficulties in doing this. The reason is that allegory is perhaps meant to be a means to solve discrepancies in texts or in history, but it is also a means that cannot succeed in doing this. Allegory's metaphorical structure does not allow one meaning to be replaced, but produces new meaning, or an interpretative oscillation between signifiers and signified.

In terms of preposterousness, the classical material, in this case embodied by Pan, pre-dates Christianity. The latter is the heir of classical antiquity, and also thinks of itself as such: it comes after the Roman empire in order to succeed it and bring it to a higher level. So, in being its heir, it supersedes it at the same time. Classical antiquity should be read, then, through the lens of Christianity. Here the scales are reversed. Consequently the *post* becomes *pre*, and as a result classical material can and should be read differently, with hindsight. In the case of *Leeuwendalers*, Pan came first but should retrospectively be read first, as God. This is the major reason why history becomes preposterous here – as all the readings of this play in one way or another testify. Nobody is able to grasp the dynamic installed by the play. It escapes, exceeds and transgresses because of the confusion of shared times.

Preposterousness is distinctly different from appropriation, precisely because the dynamic concerned does not solve contradictions and tensions by incorporating everything, or by removing traces of what could not be incorporated. These are all goals of appropriation – something that may partly be the goal of Vondel's Chinese play mentioned earlier.

In this 1667 play, Vondel introduces a company of Jesuits that happens to be present when the last Ming Chinese emperor falls due to internal strife and a Tartar invasion. Vondel's sources on the issue may have been manifold (see W.A.P. Smit on this),³⁹ but the most important ones came from Jesuits who had had mission posts in China since the sixteenth century. Studies by Martinus Martinius in particular were important. One appeared in 1654 through the famous Antwerp publisher Plantijn, *De bello Tartarico Historia*, which was published in Dutch in 1664, as an additional description in Blaeu's *Atlas*, entitled *Historie van den Tartarischen oorlog (History of the Tartar War)*. This was three years before Vondel wrote his play. But perhaps even more relevant were the reports by Joan Nieuhof (1618–1672), who had worked by commission of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) as part of a mission from Batavia to China. In 1665 his report was published.⁴⁰

As may be clear, Vondel's sources were serving distinct interests of particular organizations, in this case the Roman Catholic Church and the Dutch East India Company, but more generally the interests concerned the 'body' of European Christianity as a whole, and the emerging world powers constituting it. Within that context one can see the play as a way to appropriate the downfall of the Chinese emperor and read it as a historical event that was preordained in order to prepare the ground for the Christianization of the Chinese empire. However, W.A.P. Smit has rightly pointed to the fact that the Jesuits in the play have no part whatsoever in the unfolding of its history.⁴¹ It is as if they are thrown in either as commentators (taking the part of the classical chorus), or as a foreign cultural body that carves out its own path through the events. Appropriation fails, then. If one takes a look again at the sources Vondel may have used, one explanation of this failure may be the sheer immensity of the history and might of the Chinese empire.

The tendency to appropriate is not something restricted to Vondel's times. As a tendency it is part and parcel of doing history, and of

³⁹ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 3.

⁴⁰ Sources mentioned by Smit are: Martinus Martinius, *Sinicae Historiae Decas prima*; Joan Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandische Oost-Indische Compagnie, aen den Grooten Tartarischen Cham, den tegenwoordigen Keizer van China*. Nieuhof used other studies in order to add to the history of China as it was known then.

⁴¹ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 3, p. 491 and ll. 497–98.

writing it. Although it may seem to fit in with the anachronism of which I talked earlier, it does not – and in scholarly circles it is something to be addressed, to be both done and avoided. I agree, principally, with Quentin Skinner when he states that we should not consider historical actors in the light of what came afterwards.⁴² In fact, Skinner shows himself the heir, in this respect, of a fundamental change in the European conceptualization of the past. As Paula Findlen has argued, the value of the past as something different to – as ‘other than’ – the present is an invention of the Renaissance.⁴³ Consequently, the past is a foreign country, the otherness of which needs to be respected. But anachronism in the theoretical sense that I discussed does not deny the principal otherness of history (its *Alterität*, as Jauss would call it).⁴⁴ In fact, it renders it central. Appropriation would lift the tension and the awkwardness that is intrinsic to the notion of anachronism. As that notion highlights there are two different times coming together, and they cannot be made one, as a result of which the anachronism would be lifted. Historical material, historical actors are *different*. The point is that their difference can only be felt from within a certain present. History persists in the present, in the sense that it is from within the present that its difference is felt and is constituted.

I conclude by saying a little more, very briefly, about this dynamic in relation to Vondel's relevance for us, today, in the context of which appropriation can acquire a positive meaning.

Why Vondel Matters

After nigh on total silence during the 1960s, '70s and '80s, the Dutch theatrical scene has recently seen a growing number of performances of plays by Vondel.⁴⁵ Apparently there is renewed interest in scholarly circles too. As for my own scholarly work on Vondel, I was interested in his treatment of sovereignty because of the principal discussions on this issue both in society and in scholarly circles. One pivotal element was, and still is, the relation between religion and politics, but also

⁴² Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Regarding Method*.

⁴³ Findlen, 'Historical Thought in the Renaissance'.

⁴⁴ Jauss, *Modernität und Alterität*.

⁴⁵ For an overview of that growing number of performances, see the contribution by Smits-Veldt.

between religion and philosophy. I consider Vondel's plays to be important and highly complex statements on these issues.

These statements cannot be easily divulged. In Vondel's case, for instance, its language will be a major stumbling block for a modern audience. There is a distinct difference here to the work of Shakespeare. Seventeenth-century Dutch is nowadays nearly incomprehensible to the general audience. Whereas in recent decades there has been an important movement towards performing classical music as much as possible in the way in which it was done in its own time, the theatrical approach has to be distinctly different. The reason for this may be fairly basic – in terms of interest too. Apparently, a large audience is able to enjoy music when it is being performed as close to its original form as possible (on original instruments, for instance, and with the original setting of the orchestra). In the case of the theatre, however, only a very small portion of the audience is able to enjoy plays that are staged as they have been in their own times. Plays need to be updated in terms of content, in terms of form, and in terms of language.

With respect to this, there is also a distinct difference to paintings. Although people from very different times and cultures may not be able to understand everything in a painting by Rembrandt, they are able to recognize the picture. To be sure, with Rembrandt as well, a modern, by and large secularized audience will miss much of the major concerns of the seventeenth century. It is hard to sense nowadays how volatile, uncertain, tough, dangerous, gritty and at the same time spiritual, brilliant and exuberant life in the Dutch Republic was. However, this may also be a reason why Vondel still fascinates, because his work testifies to its baroque era to such an extent.

Ultimately the immense difference in appreciation between Rembrandt and Vondel, or between Shakespeare and Vondel, may be the result of their status and skill as artists. It may also be the result of the way in which they have been dealt with by the powerful forces of art's institutions. Whatever the case, much more effort is needed to bring Vondel across the footlights than Rembrandt.

Why make such an effort?

Perhaps the most powerful argument is given by Jürgen Pieters when he states that historical texts 'speak back' and have an independent power to allow us to look at ourselves anew, in another way, slightly alienated from ourselves and our own times.⁴⁶ A good case in point

⁴⁶ Pieters, *In denkbeeldige tegenwoordigheid*.

may be the performance by Theater Nomade of *Gysbrecht van Aemstel* under the direction of Ab Gietelink in the season of 2008–2009. They performed the play not in average theatres, but on location, in churches, city halls, castles, bunkers and so forth. The actors were dressed both in medieval clothes and as present-day soldiers, and the theme of the play could be read against what happened at present in the province of Uruzgan, Afghanistan, where Dutch soldiers were engaged in a war against Taliban fighters (as the political underpinning of the mission had it).⁴⁷ *Gysbrecht*, with its consideration of violence, pain and martyrdom, but with its love of life as well, and with its possibility of fleeing, responds to what a Dutch 'we' are doing 'there.' We may start to read, inevitably, Vondel's *Gysbrecht* through this performance. But it works the other way around as well. *Gysbrecht* apparently still has the power to speak to our present situation, and through it. For the average modern audience there may be no need to go back to the original text. The performance will be enough in itself. That performance was based, however, on a careful study of the original text, considering it as an independent comment on current needs and interest. Vondel is still speaking, and we are still listening to this voice, so strange, so ambitious, so baroque and rigid, and, at the same time, so Dutch and un-Dutch, so alienating, so irritating and so touching.

⁴⁷ On this see http://www.abgietelink.nl/Projekten/gijsbreght/gijsbreght_frameset/gijs.htm. Meanwhile, the Dutch government in the course of 2010 decided to withdraw the troops.

PART I
VONDEL'S LIFE, WORKS AND TIMES

CHAPTER FOUR

VONDEL'S LIFE

Mieke B. Smits-Veldt and Marijke Spies

Vondel between Religion and the World

Joost van den Vondel was born in Cologne in 1587, where his parents, who had fled Antwerp on religious grounds, or perhaps for financial reasons, had found temporary refuge.¹ In the 1590s Cologne became too dangerous and the family moved on, first to Utrecht and then to Amsterdam, the city that was doing its utmost to overtake Antwerp as the commercial heart of the Low Countries.

For the rest of his life, Vondel lived and worked in Amsterdam. He went to school there, possibly attending lessons from Willem Bartjens to whom he would later write an ode.² Finally, at the age of ninety-one, he was carried to his grave in the city's 'Nieuwe Kerk' ('New Church') by fourteen poets and lovers of poetry. During those years Amsterdam developed to become the wealthiest city of the Republic of the United Netherlands, and Vondel, the greatest poet of that Golden Age, was the Dutch poet who came closest to embodying Amsterdam. His work continually testifies to his commitment to the welfare of the city and to his involvement in the politics of the city council, be it in the form of criticism or, as was increasingly the case, propaganda.

'Liefde verwinnet al' ('love conquers all') were the words with which Vondel signed his earliest poems in 1605–07. Mottos of this kind were customary at the time. As a believing Mennonite he was no doubt

¹ Translated by Liz Waters. The translation of this chapter was made possible in part by a financial contribution from the Vertaalfonds KNAW/Stichting Reprorecht.

² Non-Dutch readers, and indeed most younger Dutch readers, will not have heard of Willem Bartjens, who would be familiar to older Dutch natives from the expression '*volgens Bartjens*' ('according to Bartjens'), meaning that a conclusion had been reached in a manner that was reliable and accurate. Bartjens' method, expounded in his book *Cijfferinghe (Arithmetic)*, formed the basis for arithmetic in Dutch primary schools for two centuries. For the ode, see WB 1, p. 136.

referring to the love of and for Christ, of which he writes in his *Nieuwjaars lied* ('New Year's Song') of 1607: "The Child [i.e. the Christ Child] holds dear the Love that conquers evil / Every kind affliction: choose my simple being."³ When he wrote these lines he was twenty years old and lived with his parents in a house called 'The Righteous Faith' on the Warmoesstraat in Amsterdam, where his father had a silk business. After his father's death the following year, he would be brought in as a partner in the business by his mother. A year earlier, in 1606, he had been baptised and confirmed as a member of the Waterland Mennonite community. Presumably he led the life of a typical Mennonite, with emphasis placed on fulfilment of faith within daily life and on rejection of too great an attachment to earthly pleasures. Until the early 1620s this 'imitation of Christ' is central to his work, and increasingly so.

Yet the first three poems he published, *Dedicatie aan de jonkvrouwen* (*Dedication to the Maidens*), *De jacht van Cupido* (*Cupid's Hunt*) and *Oorlof-lied* (*Valedictory Song*), all three of which appeared in the anthology *Den nieuwen verbeterden lust-hof* (*The New Improved Pleasure Garden*, 1607),⁴ are full of classical mythology and mild eroticism in line with the latest literary trend. Both the *Oorlof-lied* and the *Dedicatie* are clearly influenced by Karel van Mander, a poet and painter and a fellow Mennonite, who in 1604 had included an 'Explanation of Ovid's Metamorphoses' in his *Schilderboek* (*The Book of Painters*). It is also possible to discern in the *Dedicatie*, and even more so in *De jacht van Cupido*, the tone of the playful Cupid emblems of the young Leiden professor Daniël Heinsius, whose 1601 collection *Quaeris quid sit amor?* (*You Ask What Love Is?*) was reissued by the same publisher as *Den nieuwen verbeterden lust-hof*, and in the same year, under the title *Emblemata amatoria* (*Emblems of Love*).

These three poems also mark the commencement of years of cooperation between Vondel and publisher Dirck Pietersz. Pers, who was launching a career of his own in publishing with new editions of the anthologies *Emblemata amatoria* and *Den nieuwen verbeterden lust-hof*. The texts and illustrations had been purchased from the list of works owned by the widow of publisher Hans Mathysz., who had died young. But as the title suggests, *Den nieuwen verbeterden lust-hof* was a thoroughly revised version. The anthology, which initially comprised

³ Vondel, WB 1, p. 134: "Het Kind bemint de Liefd', die 't kwaad verwint, Elk noodt minoot: kiest mijn eenvuldig wezen."

⁴ Vondel, WB 1, pp. 140–49.

works by second-rate rhetorician poets, had been expanded by Pers to include twelve songs by major writers including Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft and Karel van Mander, as well as the three aforementioned poems by Vondel.

At any rate there is no reason to see these works as reflecting personal details of the poet's life. That would not be consistent with the purpose of the volume in which they were included – a songbook, intended for use in social intercourse. Nor would it be consistent with the purpose people ascribed to poetry in those days, namely to express in a congenial manner *general* ideas and maxims, in any field. In a wedding poem for a local Mennonite girl the ideas expressed would be those of Christian conjugal ethics, and a songbook for young people fond of singing would include eroticism dressed up as mythology. As a poet Vondel did this as well as possible, on a par with the finest and most modern poets of his time, with a Karel van Mander, a Daniël Heinsius. A young poet with no more than a general secondary education, he conformed to the example set by those in command of greater literary erudition.

From 1609, for over a decade, much of Vondel's work is characterized by a religious and moralistic tenor far removed from this kind of Renaissance-style playfulness. During this period Vondel was a member of 'Het Wit Lavendel' ('The White Lavender'), the *rederijkerskamer* (chamber of rhetoric) for immigrants to Amsterdam from the Southern Netherlands set up in 1598. His first play, *Het Pascha* (Passover), performed by this chamber in about 1610, attests to a biblically inspired poetic craftsmanship of the kind advocated in such circles. The history of Moses's liberation of the Jews from their Egyptian bondage is presented in *Het Pascha* as a 'prefiguration', or prophecy, of Christ's delivery of humankind from the slavery of sin. It is an interpretation of the Bible that was particularly popular with – but not exclusive to – the Mennonites in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Vondel even came up with a third parallel, in a poem appended to the published version of the play, a *Verghelijkinghe vande verlossinghe der kinderen Israels met de vrijwordinghe der Verenichde Nederlandtsche Provincien* (*Comparison of the Delivery of the Children of Israel With the Liberation of the United Provinces of the Netherlands*), in which he asserts that the Prince of Orange, as a second Moses, is a kind of second Christ, the liberator of the fatherland and champion of evangelism.⁵ The idea

⁵ Vondel, WB 1, pp. 261–64. The play itself on pp. 159–260

behind such parallels was to show the universal validity of God's plan of salvation, as well as (especially when applied to the Dutch Revolt) divine endorsement of the war against Spain. It goes without saying that the exhortation to be a good, God-fearing Christian was part of the message. Current events, placed in a religious perspective, were Vondel's main concern in this period.

Vondel's religious faith was characterized by Mennonite penance and a sense of sinfulness, from which stems a spiritual rebirth, occasioned by faith, into a life of love for God and one's neighbour. He was far from otherworldly. In his *Hymnus over de scheeps-vaert* (*Hymn about Shipping*) he wrote with obvious pride about Dutch maritime achievements in war and peace, but ultimately his concern lay with the proper Christian attitude to life, which entails an obligation to use any riches one might earn to help the poor and so be assured of a place in heaven.⁶

Nonetheless, equally obvious throughout this early period of Vondel's literary life is a commercial tendency. Around 1610 at the request of Pers he edited the texts for a publication called *Den gulden winckel* (*The Gold Emporium*), a kind of mythological-historical illustrated collection of anecdotes with a moral purport.⁷ Pers had managed to get hold of the plates of the engravings used in the collection, which had originally been published in Antwerp in 1579 under the title *Microkosmos: Parvus mundus*, with Latin texts by Laurentius Haectanus. Pers had already produced an edition of the Dutch translation by Jan Moerman – originally published in 1584 – in 1608, and evidently he now deemed the time ripe for a modernized version. Vondel turned it into something more of a collection of emblems, a genre in which an image is, in symbolic fashion, interpreted morally, creating a double meaning, and in which instruction (as it were) lies concealed behind pleasure. Biblical quotations reinforced the correct interpretation. Here too we have a similar parallel-effect to the one highlighted above in response to *Het Pascha*. It is a technique we will come across frequently in Vondel's later work.

Even though this was a matter of editing a pre-existing collection and the editing was commissioned by the publisher, it remains Vondel's work. His own contribution is considerable and of a quality superior to

⁶ Vondel, WB 1, pp. 427–45.

⁷ Vondel, WB 1, pp. 265–426.

that of his predecessors. The scholarship it expresses is rather less specifically Mennonite than in some of Vondel's other works, but the explicit ethic of simplicity, humility, obedience and active practice of virtue it exudes is certainly a Mennonite ethic too. The same can be said of the next collection, comprising animal fables, that he edited for Pers, the *Vorsteliicke warande der dieren* (*Regal Hunting Grounds of the Animals*), published in 1617.⁸

Thoroughly religious once more are the final three great works of Vondel's Mennonite period: the play *Hierusalem verwoest* (*Jerusalem Destroyed*); an epic poem by Du Bartas, which he translated from the French as *De heerlyckheyd van Salomon* (*The Glory of Solomon*); and *De helden Godes des Ouwden Verbonds* (*God's Heroes of the Ancient Covenant*),⁹ a collection of descriptive characterizations of figures from the Old Testament, again using existing images. All three were published by Dirck Pietersz. Pers in the early months of 1620. Even his most minor works from the years after 1616 are entirely religious in nature. This is far from surprising. In 1616 Vondel had become deacon of the Waterland Mennonite community, and without wishing to assert that such a step would necessarily entail a more intense religious life, this does seem to have been the case with him. Even the change in his motto supports this conclusion. In place of 'Liefde verwinnet al' ('Love conquers all'), or, as between 1609 and 1616, a mere signature with his name or initials, from 1616 onwards he used the slogan 'Door Een is 't nu voldae'n' ('By One all is now fulfilled'), which alludes to a sense of being secure in God's mercy, to a 'rebirth' occasioned by faith, as it was perceived in Mennonite circles.

As far as his general education was concerned Vondel had to rely on translations and on whatever more-or-less scholarly works were published in the vernacular. Thus in his *Hymnus over de scheeps-vaert* of 1613 he drew upon the 1610 Dutch translation of the *Naturalis Historia* by Roman writer Pliny the Elder. He also made use of the *Politica* by Leiden professor Justus Lipsius (who later moved to Leuven), a Dutch translation of which had been published in 1590, as well as the Dutch translation (also from 1610) of a short work by Hugo Grotius about Holland in the time of the Batavians. Finally, he used Emanuel van Meteren's Dutch-language work on recent national history in the

⁸ Vondel, WB 1, pp. 498–767.

⁹ Vondel, WB 2, pp. 74–215, 223–98 and 300–91 resp. On *Hierusalem verwoest*, see also the chapter by Jürgen Pieters in this volume.

editions from 1608 and 1609. For literature as such he looked primarily to the modern French Protestant writers and their Dutch imitators. This is true above all of the work of Du Bartas, particularly in regard to his epic portrayal of the story of Creation and the early history of mankind in *Les semaines* (*The Weeks*).¹⁰ *Het Pascha* alone was teeming with elements reminiscent of this poet, and Vondel's 1620 play *Hierusalem verwoest* was clearly influenced by the biblical plays of French Protestant poet Robert Garnier. In *Hierusalem verwoest*, besides French influence, we see for the first time the influence of classical literature.

In this regard, if Vondel was to avoid getting stuck at the level of second-hand scholarship he would need a good reading knowledge of Latin, particularly in view of the didactic and erudite poetry he aspired to produce. In the years between 1613 and 1620 he was tutored by a teacher from the Latin school, the city's grammar school, and by 1620 he had mastered the language to such an extent that he was able to read the most important of Latin writers, particularly Virgil and Seneca, the forefather of early-Renaissance drama. The structure of *Hierusalem verwoest* resembles that of Seneca's *Troades* (*The Trojan Women*), a play Hugo Grotius regarded as the 'queen of tragedies'.¹¹ But at the same time, owing to its biblical content, it strives to provide a Christian (which in those days meant 'better') alternative to the Latin play. Where Seneca uses the fall of Troy to evoke the transient nature of all earthly greatness, Vondel presents the destruction of Jerusalem as God's punishment for mankind's malevolence. Against the classical notion of fate he set the Christian – perhaps we may even say Mennonite – sense of sinfulness.

It would be one of the last times that this resounded with such clarity in his work, one of the last times too that he would use the motto 'Door Een is 't nu voldaan' ('By One all is now fulfilled'). Between 1623 and 1629 he underwent a profound ideological reorientation, at the same time making new acquaintances beyond the milieu of fellow Mennonites and members of 'Het Wit Lavendel', amongst whom he had blossomed up to this point.

¹⁰ Vondel must have come into contact with Du Bartas through Karel van Mander, who at various points shows that he knew the Frenchman's work, borrowing a number of passages from him, for example, in his poem *Olijffberg, ofte Poema van den laesten dagh* of 1609, which is imbued with Mennonite convictions. See *Twee Zeevaartgedichten*, ed. Spies.

¹¹ Vondel, *De Amsteldamsche Hebuca*, Dedication to Mr. Anthonis de Hubert, WB 2, p. 533.

Years of Reorientation

Shortly after 1620 Vondel made the acquaintance of the poet Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft. In 1622 and 1623, along with several other writers, they regularly discussed matters literary at the residence of the poet Roemer Visscher (who had died in 1620), where his daughters Anna and Maria Tesselschade still lived at that time. It was also in 1623 that Vondel published, for the first time since 1620, a work of considerable length: the 478-verse poem *Het lof der zee-vaert* (*The Praise of Seafaring*).¹² Not a word here about an awareness of sin, about disengagement, or about giving riches away to the needy poor. The philosophy now propagated by Vondel advocates a peaceful world based on reason, in which everyone will benefit as long as the principles of justice are upheld and not violated. This was certainly the outlook on life held by Hooft and the people around him, with whom Vondel had been associating for some time.

What had happened? Around 1620, his seventeenth-century biographer Geeraardt Brandt tells us, Vondel suffered 'a long, languishing sickness, which greatly weakened him, exhausting his spirits and making him long for death'. In October of that year he resigned as deacon of the Mennonite community, since he 'complained of great awkwardness in serving further because of his melancholia'. We must assume that Vondel was suffering from 'melancholy', a disease caused, according to the medical beliefs of the time, by a failure of the spleen adequately to control levels of what was known as 'black bile', one of the four humours in the human body. The psychological consequences were listlessness and feelings of anxiety and suspicion, culminating in weariness of life. It was generally believed that scholars and artists were most susceptible to this affliction. The melancholic was sombre and studious by nature, and Brandt says this was true of Vondel too. Exactly what afflicted him in terms of today's pathology is unclear. In any case he seems to have recovered with time. In 1626 he experienced another attack, but after that we hear no more of it.

Aside from an excess of black bile, however, there were more external factors in both 1620 and 1626 that may help to explain Vondel's depression. For a start there were political developments. In 1618 long-standing tensions erupted between the two extreme wings of the

¹² Vondel, WB 2, pp. 431–55; Vondel, *Twee zeevaart-gedichten*, ed. Spies.

Reformed Church, the relatively liberal Remonstrants and the far stricter Counter-Remonstrants. As is common in such disputes, other issues were bound up with the religious differences. Conflicts had developed between advocates and opponents of a lasting peace with Spain, between Holland and Zeeland, between those who approved of the trade monopoly held by the Dutch East India Company and those who wanted to end it, and so on. All this resulted in greater polarisation. In 1618 the stadtholder, Maurits of Nassau, travelled to the most important Dutch cities on behalf of the States General to remove opponents of the Calvinist Counter-Remonstrant faction from the municipal councils. Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, Grand Pensionary of Holland – the highest ranking state official after the stadtholder – now over eighty, was arrested. In 1619, after a long trial for high treason and abuse of power, he was sentenced to death and executed. A number of his supporters who were arrested with him, among them the municipal pensionary of Rotterdam Hugo Grotius, were sentenced to life in prison. Until well into the 1620s the Republic as a whole and the various cities of its most important province, Holland, were ruled by the Calvinists. Between 1611 and 1625 their leader Reynier Pauw was alternately, and sometimes simultaneously, active as burgomaster of Amsterdam and leader of the representatives of the province of Holland in the States General.

Vondel increasingly opposed what he regarded as a Calvinist dictatorship. At first his response to these events was rather detached. As a Mennonite he had little concern for the doctrinal quarrel between two theology professors from Leiden, the Remonstrant Arminius and the Counter-Remonstrant Gomarus, and their followers. In any case, Mennonites generally declined to interfere with affairs of state on principle. In 1620, however, the year in which he suffered his depression, he gradually became more engaged with the issue. Although his fierce *Geuze-vesper* (*Beggar's Vespers*), which hits out at Van Oldenbarnevelt's judges, was not written in 1620 but in the 1630s,¹³ it was at this stage that he wrote the poem *Op den burgher-krijgh der Roomeren* (*On the Civil War of the Romans*), as an introductory verse to the Dutch translation by Hendrik Storm of Lucanus's *Pharsalia*, which was printed that same year. The allusion to the national political situation in a poem about the seizure of power by Julius Caesar is veiled but unmistakable.¹⁴

¹³ Vondel, WB 3, pp. 339–40.

¹⁴ Vondel, WB 2, p. 396.

There is something else too. Together with three other introductory poems, written by Hooft, Samuel Coster and Nicolaas van Wassenaar, Vondel's poem is on a quarter sheet of paper that was added only at the last moment, after the rest had been printed. It is these poems that turn the publication into a freedom manifesto directed against the stadtholder, Maurits of Nassau or, in the case of Hooft's contribution, against the Calvinists. Everything suggests this was a pre-planned campaign by this group of poets and as such it is the first indication that Vondel was in contact with people who belonged to the top ranks of the bourgeoisie and had chosen to side with Van Oldenbarnevelt.

As far as the religious issue went, Vondel made it increasingly clear where his loyalties lay. In 1622 he wrote poems about Erasmus,¹⁵ a statue of whom was erected in Rotterdam that year, something that was not well received by the Calvinists. In the same year he offered shelter to the banished successor to Arminius, Coenraad Vorstius, for several days, and when Vorstius died in October he wrote an elegy for him. When his melancholy finally lifted he took a clear and completely un-Mennonite turn towards the world, the first sign of which was the poem *Het lof der zee-vaert* (*The Praise of Seafaring*), dedicated to Laurens Reael and published in the major new nautical pilot book *Zeespiegel* (*Sea Level*), by Willem Jansz. Blaeu. It ends with a direct reference to meetings at the house of Roemer Visscher:

*Wiens vloer betreden word, wiens dorpel is gesleten
Van Schilders, kunstenaers, van Sangers, en Poëten.*¹⁶

Whose floor is trod, whose threshold is worn down
By Painters, Artists, Singers, and Poets of renown.

In these circles the period from 1620 to 1623, as well as being a time of crisis and reorientation, was also a time of study, of an appropriation of classical culture and humanist learning. From this point on Vondel was able to find his way around the works of the most important authors of Ancient Rome – Ovid, Virgil, Horace – as well as the culture and literary scholarship of his day, including moral philosophy and logic. Even the latter was studied in order, as Brandt puts it, that he would 'have more means of assistance in progressing at art, which he threw himself into more and more as time went on'.¹⁷

¹⁵ Vondel, WB 2, p. 419 and pp. 414–17.

¹⁶ 'Het lof der zee-vaert', ll. 477–78; Vondel, WB 1, p. 19; WB 2, p. 455.

¹⁷ Brandt, 'Het leven van Joost van den Vondel', p. 25: 'om meer behulpmiddelen te hebben tot vordering in de kunst, daar hy hoe langs hoe meer op verslingerde'.

For *Het lof der zee-vaert* Vondel did not draw upon Dutch translations of contemporary and ancient learning as he had for the *Hymnus* but upon Latin studies such as *De re nautica libellus* by the Italian Giraldus and similar works by the German Jesuit Pontanus and the Protestant professor Bartholomäus Keckermann of Danzig, to name but a few.¹⁸ New friends helped Vondel to catch up on the schooling he lacked. In collaboration with Hooft and Reael he translated Seneca's *Troades* around 1625. It was published under the title *De Amsteldamsche Hecuba* (*The Amsterdam Hecuba*) in 1626.¹⁹ In that same period, probably with the help of Professor Johannes Meursius of Leiden, he worked on *Palamedes*, the play in which he addressed the Van Oldenbarnevelt controversy through a story from Ancient Greece. This work too continually testifies to the influence of Seneca, through several plays in addition to *Troades*.²⁰

Along with the classics, the poems of Hooft and the other literati associated with him had a rejuvenating effect on Vondel's poetry. Hooft, Heinsius and other modern poets not only wrote works of a more serious nature but also primarily composed lyric poetry of a light, mildly erotic character. The roots of this mode are to be found in Petrarch, whose poems for Laura had influenced Western European love lyrics for some hundred and fifty years, along with classical lyrical poets like Catullus, Propertius, and Theocritus, the last of whom had been the inspiration for Heinsius's Cupid poems. It can also be traced back to the pastoral verse of Virgil. All these movements had combined to create a new literary culture of song which, from its beginnings in Italy and France, poured out across Europe from the early seventeenth century onwards. Dutch poets joined in. Suddenly Vondel was writing songs again as he had not done since the publication of *Den nieuwen verbeterden lust-hof* in 1607.

These songs were a kind of social poetry, written as a gift for the children of a highly esteemed acquaintance. All his life Vondel created poems and songs of this kind, to mark weddings, births or deaths, to celebrate a portrait or a publication, or simply for their own sake. In later years especially, they were often meant for official personages or institutions and probably quite often written in the hope of some kind of reward, but in the years between 1623 and 1626 they were above all

¹⁸ See Vondel, *Twee zeevaart-gedichten*, ed. Spies, *passim*.

¹⁹ Vondel, WB 2, pp. 529–612.

²⁰ Vondel, WB 2, pp. 615–753. See also the contribution by Nina Geerdink.

intended to help maintain his new personal contacts. It seems his new literary network took on a social role for him that was previously fulfilled by publishers like Pers and De Koning.

Socially Engaged Poet, Court Poet, or City Poet?

The changes of the years 1620–1623 are unlikely to have meant that Vondel immediately turned his back on the Waterland Mennonite community. In 1624 he issued the playful poem *Stryd of Kamp Tusschen Kuyscheyd En Geylheyd* (*Fight or Struggle between Chastity and Lewdness*) as a separate book for the daughters of Laurens Baeck.²¹ It was published by Jacob Aertsz. Calom, a fellow Mennonite who had joined the Waterland community in 1622. Calom remained his publisher for the next two years, Dirck Pietersz. Pers not having published anything by Vondel since 1622. Calom produced *Palamedes* in 1625, followed in 1626 by *De Amsteldamsche Hecuba* (*The Amsterdam Hecuba*). Further evidence that Vondel still had ties not only with Calom but also with the Waterland community is provided by the long poem *Antidotum. Tegen het vergift der Geest-dryvers* (*Antidote to the Poison of the Zealots*), published in 1626,²² in which Vondel takes sides in a fierce argument among Mennonites in these years on whether the Bible was the only basis for faith, a debate in which Calom was actively involved. Thereafter, apart from a few occasional poems written for Mennonite acquaintances in later years, there is no further sign of Vondel's involvement with the Mennonite community. Perhaps his aversion to such quarrels was the deciding factor. Vondel's peace-loving nature has been emphasised repeatedly since Brandt's biography, but the peace-loving Vondel nevertheless managed to attract conflict time and again.

At around the same time as the argument within the Waterland community, the row regarding *Palamedes* was erupting at the level of municipal politics. Vondel had disguised his views on the arrest and conviction of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt as a story taken from classical antiquity, but this did not stop the Calvinist clergy feeling that the play was addressed to them. It had barely been printed before charges were brought against the playwright. Afraid he would be arrested and transferred to The Hague, where the Calvinists were still in full command of

²¹ Vondel, WB 2, pp. 486–94.

²² Vondel, WB 2, pp. 808–12.

the national government, Vondel took refuge with the Baeck family. The Amsterdam city council refused to extradite him, satisfying itself with a substantial fine and a ban on the play. For the printer the ban was actually beneficial. Public interest was aroused and one print run after another sold out rapidly. Vondel had little to gain by this; authorial copyright did not yet exist. Nevertheless, its success seems to have persuaded him to throw off any remaining hesitancy about presenting himself as a socially engaged poet. To be sure, the *Palamedes* controversy was followed by another bout of melancholy, but in the years that followed he published one poem after another about public affairs.

To this end, political developments were not unfavourable now. The tendency that had first emerged in Amsterdam developed at national level too. Maurits of Nassau died in 1625. His half-brother and successor Frederick Henry was expected to act so as to reconcile differences. Unified under the House of Orange, the Dutch could now resolutely resume the war against Spain, which had not gone well for them since the truce ended in 1621. Vondel was among those who made his thoughts known in this regard, but ultimately he seems to say more about his own ideals and (to some extent) those of the Amsterdam magistrates than those of the new stadtholder; the Dutch were right to pursue the war, but only in order to bring peace so that trade could flourish again. These were not so much the political opinions of Frederick Henry as the views of the Amsterdam regents whose mouth-piece Vondel would increasingly become in the years that followed.

In 1626 this faction did not yet form a majority in the municipal government. When in that year or thereabouts Vondel denounced the selfishness and greed of the regents in his *Roskam (Curry Comb)*, he undoubtedly had his eye on the opposing party,²³ but the shifting balance of power was already evident from the uninhibited way in which he dared to assert his voice. He even refers directly to the execution of Van Oldenbarnevelt.

Illustrative of Vondel's definitive break with his Mennonite past and his identification with the liberal milieu of the Amsterdam *haute bourgeoisie* – and perhaps to an even greater degree of the status he sought to achieve with his work – was his choice of publisher. In 1626 he began to publish with Willem Jansz. Blaeu, continuing to do so until 1638, when Blaeu died. Blaeu had developed his business into the most

²³ Vondel, WB 3, pp. 300–06.

important publishing house in Amsterdam, not only for works on seafaring and for navigational charts and maps but also for literary publications. He had at his disposal the technical means needed to present Vondel's work in an appropriately attractive material form, publishing it in substantial volumes on high-quality paper in a clear, modern typeface.

In the laudatory and epinicial poems that Vondel wrote for Frederick Henry and his family between 1626 and 1632 he developed a style that could justifiably be called lofty. It is narrative, rich in imagery, packed with mythology and extended comparisons, buoyed by figures of speech and sound effects, and carried along by the majestic rhythm of his alexandrines. Such a style, derived from both classical Latin and Neo-Latin poetry, was regarded at the time as a supreme literary achievement. It was an expression of the lofty social significance people attributed to this kind of poetry: trumpet of princes, mouthpiece for governments. At that time, no one besides Vondel possessed such a mastery of versification of this sort. His poem celebrating the first great victory by Frederick Henry, who did indeed bring about a political breakthrough as people had hoped, the *Verovering van Groenlo* (*Conquest of Groenlo*) of 1627, has the character of a minor epic.²⁴ Alongside the airy tone he gave to his songs, the elevated style of his heroic poems was his great literary achievement of the 1620s. A third achievement would shortly announce itself in the brutal ferocity of his satirical verse.

The relative leniency with which the city council had treated Vondel in the case of *Palamedes*, and the fact that publisher Calom had been given a chance to put so many illegal copies of the controversial play on the market, were early signs of a change in Amsterdam's political climate. The elections of February 1627, which had placed the party of the 'moderates' in a majority position, facilitated a definitive change of course; the regime of Reynier Pauw was over, and the liberals had won.

The extent to which Vondel could identify with this new policy as a result of his aversion to religious fanaticism and his desire for a rational, harmonious society became clear in 1628, when he first acted as official spokesman for the city and its government in his poem *Amsteldams wellekomst* (*Amsterdam's Welcome*), written for Frederick Henry's visit.²⁵ Besides praising the new stadtholder, from whom the magistrates expected mediation in their problems with the clerics, Vondel

²⁴ Vondel, WB 3, pp. 124–52.

²⁵ Vondel, WB 3, pp. 182–86.

dedicated laudatory verses to burgomasters Pieter de Vlaming and Jacob de Graeff through the mouth of Amsterdam's *stedenmaagd* ('city maiden'). In Vondel's view they were now the godlike rulers of the 'widely renowned mercantile city of Amsterdam' ('wijdberoemde koopstad Amstelredam'). Henceforth he would support the policy of these men, who would surely place the crown of Europe on the head of this flourishing commercial city, through poetry.

The new municipal government openly joined battle against the Calvinist preachers and all ex-politicians who wanted to regain their hold on the rudder of the civic ship. Vondel's satirical pen now became a formidable weapon in that struggle. The Calvinist preachers were the target of a number of satirical verses by Vondel, some of which could be sung to popular tunes. He denounced their far-reaching intolerance of dissent, especially their hostility towards the Remonstrants, to whose clandestine religious services the city council was now turning a blind eye. However, the time when preachers were said to have one foot in the pulpit and the other in the Town Hall, concerning themselves with both ecclesiastical and secular matters, was over. Another reason for Vondel to rejoice was the inauguration of the first Remonstrant church building in Amsterdam, in September 1630. His poem on the occasion of this *Inwyng van den Christen tempel t'Amsterdam* (*Consecration of the Christian Temple of Amsterdam*) included praise for 'Amstel's wise Council' ('Amstels wijzen Raad'), which had granted the oppressed Remonstrants their new freedom of worship.²⁶

Almost all these poems were distributed on loose sheets, without the name of either the author or the printer, but Vondel had become a public figure to such a degree that he was easily recognisable to his opponents. In this period he held an important official literary position, namely that of dean – perhaps even head or 'prince' – of 'Het Wit Lavendel'. Since 1628 an important change of course had occurred within the policy of this Brabant-based chamber of rhetoric. It once more tended towards a politically-engaged position, which found expression in (for example) a sensational poetry competition in which Vondel asked for poetic answers to a series of provocative questions directly inspired by the politico-religious situation of the moment. It prompted so many bitter reactions in verse, some of them aimed at

²⁶ Vondel, WB 3, pp. 322–28.

Vondel personally, that the magistrates decided the chamber had overstepped the mark.

After 1631 Vondel no longer had reason to sharpen his satirical pen in opposition to the situation in Amsterdam. Both a merchant and a poet, he was a resident of a rapidly growing mercantile city. Along the new canals to the west of the city centre, mansions were being built that testified to the wealth and élan of a great economic power. In a city where freedom of conscience was recognised as an inalienable right, there was now room for academic freedom too. Despite strong opposition from the university in Leiden, Amsterdam established its own institution for higher education, the Athenaeum Illustre, in January 1632. The famous scholars Gerard Vossius and Caspar Barlaeus, both allied to the Remonstrant cause, became its first professors, and eager audiences were able to attend public lectures in history and philosophy, although they would need to understand Latin. Both professors also taught students at their homes. Vondel would remain in close contact with both men, especially with Vossius. He would translate several poems by the Neo-Latin poet Barlaeus into Dutch, while Vossius's erudition and extensive private library would provide him with an inexhaustible wealth of knowledge, which he would draw upon when writing his later tragedies.

Faced with the burgeoning return of freedom and harmony, Amsterdam also had urgent need of a general peace, i.e. an end to the war with Spain that was still dragging on. It had been important to conquer 's-Hertogenbosch to secure the 'garden of Holland' ('Hollands tuin'), but once this was achieved the city's merchants had a direct interest in peace or in a truce based on the status quo. Pursuing the conflict would mean continuing to have to bear the crippling financial burden of warfare and above all it would entail risks: the territory of the Republic might be extended to include Brabant and Flanders which would lead to the reopening of the port of Antwerp, a potential rival to Amsterdam. Amsterdam's municipal authorities did not listen to the protests of the Calvinists who bore a fierce grudge against Catholic Spain but pursued a resolute policy aimed at achieving the longed-for peace in meetings of the States General from 1631 onwards.

Vondel identified with this peacemaking policy. As ever he followed the conduct of the war on the borders of the Republic closely, but at the end of Frederick Henry's campaign along the River Maas, with the seizure of Maastricht in August 1632, he no longer saw reason to compose a victory ode such as he had written after the victory at

's-Hertogenbosch. He did still regard the stadtholder as the promised avenger and redeemer, as is clear from his *Stedekroon van Frederick Henrick* (*City Crown of Frederick Henry*), but now he called upon him to close 'the gate of the abominable war' ('de poort van 't gruwlijk oorlog').²⁷ It would be the last poem Vondel ever dedicated to the Prince of Orange, whom he had once applauded so vehemently. After the failure of the formal peace negotiations between North and South, begun in the spring of 1633, Frederick Henry once again went into battle, and from that moment on his war strategy alienated him permanently from both Amsterdam and Vondel.

Theatre of Life

In these years, 1632 and 1633, Vondel had to prove that with his poetry he was able to sublimate his own personal suffering through stoical acceptance of an inescapable fate that ultimately strikes us all. In his simple, 'childlike' verse *Kinder-lyck* (meaning both Child-like [sic] and Child's corpse – cf. the obsolete English word 'lych'), he expressed his resignation in the face of the death of his newborn son Constantijn.²⁸ The death of the baby boy, who becomes an angel in heaven, is part of a universal, divine policy: 'Eeuwich gaat voor oogenblik', or 'eternity takes precedence over the moment.' There was no room for such comfort in Vondel's bitter lament at the death of his eight-year-old daughter Sara not long afterwards, under the title *Uitvaart van mijn Dochterken* (*Funeral of my Little Daughter*).²⁹ Just over a month later he was able to write a consolatory poem for his new friend Vossius, whose gifted son Dionys had died of smallpox at the age of twenty-one.³⁰ Two years later, however, he would suffer another deeply personal blow with the death of his wife Maaïke, after whose loss he had to mobilise all his poetic gifts to lend form to his melancholy.

In his poem for Maaïke, Vondel portrays his late spouse as another Creusa, wife of the Trojan Aeneas, the hero of Virgil's epic. He describes how Maaïke urged him in a dream not to cease his 'heroic

²⁷ Vondel, WB 3, pp. 384–86.

²⁸ Vondel, WB 3, p. 388.

²⁹ Vondel, WB 3, pp. 396–97.

³⁰ *Vertroostingje aan Geeraerd Vossivs* (*Consolation to Geeraerd Vossius*) Vondel, WB 3, pp. 400–01.

work' on any account.³¹ He was referring to the major poem on which he had been labouring for several years, an epic about the first Christian Roman emperor, Constantine the Great, after whom he had named his son. With this *Constantinade* Vondel aimed to accomplish an unprecedented feat. It was to be a Christian-classical epic in emulation of the classical poet Virgil and the Christian poet Tasso. His meeting with Hugo Grotius – who, in the hope of rehabilitation, returned from exile in France to his native country in late 1631 – had a decisive influence on his decision. Grotius's religious ideal was the restoration of Christian unity by means of a return to the situation of the early church in the first few centuries AD. Vondel was now at last able to hold personal conversations with the scholar he so admired, and Grotius must have indicated to him that Constantine would be a worthy hero for a Christian epic. Grotius's arguments for a general reconciliation between Christians, based on law and ecclesiastical history, will also have given additional substance to Vondel's pleas for peace.

After Grotius was forced to leave the country again, he continued to encourage Vondel's literary work with useful advice sent in letters. Five cantos had been completed when Vondel's wife died. The poet left off his great work at that point, possibly for lack of creative energy as a result of his loss, but Grotius continued to provide advice for new work, and with the help of old friends Vondel set about translating Grotius's recently published Latin tragedy *Sofompaneas*, the Dutch version of which would become famous under the title *Jozef in 't hof* (*Joseph at Court*). Blaeu brought out the translation, dedicated to Vossius, not long after Maaïke's death.³² Vondel's principal goal was to make Grotius's poem widely known. It must have been clear to him that Grotius had seen a parallel with his own fate in this biblical episode in which the initially humbled Joseph becomes chief advisor to the Egyptian pharaoh. After all, following fourteen long years in Paris as a jobless citizen dependent on others, Grotius would now be accepting an honourable appointment as Swedish ambassador at the French court. Thus Grotius portrayed Joseph as the wise and just ruler of a nation, a stranger to all forms of tyranny, carrying out his responsible task as a holy duty. This was how Grotius saw himself and how Vondel saw him – as an example

³¹ *Lyckklaght aan het Vrouwekoor, Over het verlies van mijn Ega* (*Dirge to the Chorus of Women, On the Loss of my Spouse*), Vondel, WB 3, pp. 421–22.

³² Vondel, WB 3, pp. 431–82. See also the chapter by Mieke Bal, Maaïke Bleeker, Bennett Carpenter and Frans-Willem Korsten on the Joseph plays.

to the humanist Christian regents of his day. It was therefore to Grotius that Vondel dedicated his *Gysbreght van Aemstel* in 1637, written for the opening of the new Amsterdam Schouwburg (Amsterdam's municipal theatre) on the Keizersgracht.³³ This play would establish his reputation as a tragedian for centuries to come, not so much because it was his most successful piece of work in a dramatic sense as because he had given the people of Amsterdam their own national drama. In the play, Gijsbreght and his wife end their lives as exiles, but as predicted by the archangel Raphael the devastated city will rise again, greater and more prosperous than before. Exiled Grotius, who was never able to see a performance of the play, regarded this 'beautifully embellished history' as an immortal work.

Had it been left to the clergy, however, *Gysbreght* would never have seen the light of day. Before the first performance of the play, which is set in the Catholic Middle Ages, on Boxing Day 1637, members of the church council became extremely agitated by rumours that it included scenes showing 'papist superstitions, such as Masses and other ceremonies'.³⁴ A delegation sent to the Town Hall to protest against the depiction of Roman Catholic degeneracy was successful to the extent that the director of the play was forced to omit one or more of the tableaux vivants that – as was customary in those days – had been interspersed throughout the text.

When, despite these disputes, *Gysbreght van Aemstel* was staged on 3 January 1638, it was not simply an opening performance. Richly costumed, it inaugurated a unique Amsterdam building, the Schouwburg designed by the classicist architect Jacob van Campen. The prestigious project had been financed by the city's two charitable institutions, the Municipal Orphanage and the Home for Elderly Men and Women, which would continue to receive a substantial share of the proceeds from performances. Incidentally, the fact that a great deal of money had been invested in the preparation and decor for this grand opening performance was one practical reason to ensure it went ahead. The magistrates were also well aware that the Schouwburg gave them an excellent means of guiding public opinion and that it formed a counterweight to the pulpit. Just how closely bound up with municipal

³³ Vondel, WB 3, pp. 514–600. In this volume, the play is discussed by Marco Prandoni and Peter Eversmann.

³⁴ See Vondel, WB 3, p. 515: '... superstition vande paperye, als misse ende andere ceremoniën.'

politics the theatre's policy was is clear from the way in which its top managers, whose responsibilities included the choice of repertoire, were selected by the burgomasters, having been nominated by the governors of the charitable institutions involved, who were themselves appointed by the burgomasters too. Vondel never became head of the Schouwburg, but over the next thirty years he was a central figure in the theatrical life of Amsterdam, as a poet for the stage. After *Gysbreght* he would write another twenty-two original plays and translate five Greek tragedies by Sophocles and Euripides. From 1639 onwards he was in fact permanently present in spirit, since the interior of the theatre was decorated with lines he had written, including the famous:

*De weereld is een speeltooneel,
Elck speelt zijn rol en krijght zijn deel.*

The world's a stage for playful art,
Each plays his role and has his part.

Classical Tragedies and the Turn towards Catholicism

In the period between 1637 and 1641 Vondel completely 'reverted to tragedies', as he wrote to Grotius.³⁵ The new theatre, with which he felt Van Campen had imitated 'great Rome in miniature', must in his view have required as illustrious a repertoire as the classical tragedians had provided for their audiences in ancient times – illustrious in the Christian sense of representing the most essential religious values. It was no longer the epic but the tragedy that Vondel now deemed the most important classical genre, and he wanted to pursue it in the footsteps of the writers of antiquity. Through his humanist friends he became acquainted with the Greek tragedies, which in their opinion surpassed those of Seneca. An initial challenge to make the spirit of these tragedies his own was a translation of the masterpiece by the author most admired by scholar of Greek Daniël Heinsius, Sophocles's *Elektra*. Since Vondel's knowledge of Greek was scant, he would continue to depend on Latin translations, and in translating *Elektra* he was assisted by a younger brother of the late Dionys Vossius, the equally gifted Isaac. His *Elektra* was printed in 1639 by Abraham de Wees, who

³⁵ See Vondel, WB 3, p. 889: 'Ick ben aen de treurspelen vervallen.'

became Vondel's regular publisher after Blaeu's death. Through Sophocles, Vondel's attention was drawn not only to the power of a tight, soundly composed tragedy but to the emotional effect of the 'churning' of different passions in the protagonist's inner self. In translating *Elektra* – more so than in writing *Gysbreght* – he obtained a view of human history in its own right, with characters placed in atrocious situations and called upon to act. As a Christian poet, however, he would also continue to express the meaningfulness of God's rule in his dramas of this period. In the same year as *Elektra* (1639), Vondel's martyrdom tragedy *Maeghden (Maidens)* was published, in which he dramatised the story of St. Ursula, a tale closely bound up with Cologne, the city of his birth.³⁶ In this tragedy, Ursula and her virginal handmaids die as martyrs, meeting a gruesome end, killed by an aggressor's sword, but from the outset Ursula adopts an exemplary attitude towards the situation in which she finds herself, guided by her faith in the incomprehensible will of God. Vondel's *Maeghden* was certainly no crowd-puller. It was not performed until 1650 and after being staged four times it disappeared from the repertoire for good.

With *Gebroeders (Brothers)*, 1640), dedicated to Vossius, a new period in Vondel's work as a dramatist began.³⁷ It was the first of his tragedies to be written entirely after the Greek model and a play that was a success with both scholars and the general public. Based on his assessment of *Gysbreght*, Grotius had already predicted immortality for Vondel, and now Vossius concurred by answering Vondel's dedication of the work to him with the pronouncement 'Scribis aeternitati', 'You are writing for eternity'.³⁸ Men of letters must have especially admired the successful Christian imitation of Sophocles. Vondel depicts David's internal conflict, torn between human empathy and obedience to God, when he is ordered by the high priest to have Saul's seven sons put to death. In contrast to Elektra's experience, justice manifests itself to David in an incomprehensible, unacceptable form. When he finally resigns himself to God's decision, he, like Ursula, demonstrates unconditional faith in the meaningfulness of divine rule, the demand that Vondel believed was made of every Christian.

Although Vondel had demonstrated an 'inclination' towards Catholicism even as early as *Gysbreght van Aemstel* and certainly in

³⁶ Vondel, WB 3, pp. 708–80.

³⁷ Vondel, WB 3, pp. 797–876.

³⁸ Vondel, WB 5, p. 108; Brandt, 'Het leven van Joost van den Vondel', p. 46.

Maeghden, it was 1641 before he officially converted to the Catholic faith. In those years many Amsterdam intellectuals were returning to the bosom of the mother church, prompted in part by the powerful propaganda of Father Marius of the Begijnhof (Beguinage). In Vondel's case, however, the influence of Grotius's thinking certainly played its part too.³⁹ Furthermore, Vondel had seen in Mennonite circles the degree to which the conviction that only the Bible can be a source of faith led to differences in interpretation and therefore to religious strife. He was now joining a united community of believers for whom ecclesiastical authority was binding. Many distinguished figures still belonged to this community, which the magistrates just about tolerated (contravening the express wishes of the States of Holland in doing so), including members of what had once been regent families with important connections in government circles. Around 1650, Catholics made up at least eight per cent of Amsterdam's population. Their numbers would increase markedly in the course of the century.

Vondel's need to assert his Catholic conviction found expression in various literary genres in this period. In the year of his conversion he once again wrote a tragedy, this time setting it in the era of the early Christians. Nonetheless, the play, *Peter en Pauwels*, which took as its subject the martyrdom of God's explicitly appointed representative, the Apostle Peter, and that of St. Paul, was never performed.⁴⁰ With *Brieven der Heilige Maeghden, Martelaressen* (*Letters of the Holy Maidens, Martyrs*), he also deployed the genre of the literary epistle, so popular during the Renaissance, in the service of his religious convictions.⁴¹ This was actually an attempt to provide a religious counterpart to Ovid's famous *Heroides* which, as a kind of rehearsal, he first translated under the title *Heldinnebrieven* (*Heroines' Letters*).

In his next tragedy, *Maria Stuart*, in which he drew upon recent history for the first time, Vondel's Catholicism was given a political dimension.⁴² By presenting Mary Stuart, the Catholic Queen of Scots, as the innocent victim of bloodthirsty aggression by Protestant Queen Elizabeth I, he was in some sense passing judgement on the current political situation in England. *Maria Stuart* met with fierce

³⁹ On Vondel's conversion to Roman Catholicism, see also the contribution to this book by Judith Pollmann.

⁴⁰ Vondel, WB 4, pp. 219–94.

⁴¹ Vondel, WB 4, pp. 428–522.

⁴² Vondel, WB 5, pp. 162–238. See also the chapter by James Parente and Jan Bloemendal in this volume.

reactions in the form of pamphlets produced by the Calvinists (Counter-Remonstrants as well as Remonstrants), who abhorred its glorification of Catholicism, as well as from those who did not wish to equate Cromwell, seen as a rebel, with Elizabeth, their one-time ally in the war against Spain.

Controversy and Success: The Struggle with Authority

It seems Vondel had manoeuvred himself into a rather isolated position by openly switching religious allegiance. On the one hand he was generally acknowledged as the greatest of poets. This was underscored once more in 1644 with the publication of his uncollected poems at the instigation of a number of admirers, under the title *Verscheide gedichten* (*Various Poems*), in which he had not wanted his satirical verse to be included. On the other hand it was probably precisely because of the widespread recognition of his artistic prowess that young Remonstrant poets such as Geeraardt Brandt resented the fact that he had placed his talent at the service of his religious zeal. Possibly a degree of professional jealousy may have played its part in the case of another poet and dramatist, Jan Zoet, who had established a powerful reputation at the Amsterdam Schouwburg in 1640–1641.

It was in this period that Vondel published a fairly literal although not entirely accurate prose translation of the three great works of Virgil – the *Eclogues*, the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid* – which he dedicated to his fellow poet Constantijn Huygens. He sent a copy to P.C. Hooft as well. These gestures were also clear attempts to restore contacts that had been broken off partly because of his conversion. Hooft's reaction was extremely cool. Huygens' response to the translations of Virgil is unknown, but we do know what Barlaeus thought of them: he found this Virgil 'bloodless, without marrow, and with broken limbs'.⁴³

In 1647 Brandt and the Hague poet Jacob Westerbaen launched an attack, partly out of bitterness at Vondel's annexation of Grotius as a crypto-Catholic. They confronted the public with this other Vondel, whom the poet would have preferred to abandon to obscurity. In a so-called 'part two' of *Verscheide gedichten* they published almost all his 'green and unripe verses' – as Vondel had called them in a letter to

⁴³ WB 5, p. 7: "Gij hebt Vondels Virgilius gelezen, [...], of ten minsten gezien, maar zonder leven, zonder mergh, en de lenden gebrooken?"

Grotius – that had been excluded from the original collection of 1644 together with a couple of anti-Catholic poems that were not by Vondel at all. In an ironic preface they denounced his change of faith. As quickly as possible, in 1650, Vondel arranged for a new edition of his non-dramatic poetry, *Poëzy of verscheide gedichten* (*Poetry or Various Poems*) in which he presented himself with the full weight of his poetic authority. The special introduction he added to this collection is one of the few extant seventeenth-century Dutch texts on theoretical aspects of literature. Like Horace – who gave practical advice to emerging poets in his famous letter to the Piso brothers, known to us as *Ars poetica* – Vondel offered aspiring Dutch poets a smoothly integrated series of recommendations as to how they could become proficient in their craft in his *Aenleidinge ter Nederduitsche dichtkunste* (*Introduction to the Dutch Art of Poetry*).⁴⁴ ‘Nature gives birth to the poet, art nurtures him’ (‘Natuur baert den Dichter, de Kunst voedt hem op’) was Vondel’s basic principle. Like Horace he emphasised that, although talent was the prerequisite for artistry, without knowledge of the rules and systematic practice of poetic skills, talent alone would not suffice to make a person a good poet. And just as Vondel had trained himself by studying the work of classical and contemporary predecessors he admired, so too would his poetry have to be able to stand as an example to future generations, as he was probably aware. In 1653, aged sixty-five, he was crowned with a laurel wreath at the festival of St. Lucas by Amsterdam poets and painters, to signify their recognition of his uncontested mastery of the art of poetry.

By 1647 the peace with Spain longed for by the residents of Amsterdam for so many years had almost become a reality. The death of Frederick Henry in May of that year drew no reaction from Vondel, but the real prospect of the peace fought for so diligently certainly reinforced his sense of commitment to the well-being of his city and to the felicitous policy of its rulers. In August 1647 he paid homage to the burgomasters in a song of praise, *De getemde Mars* (*Mars Tamed*), calling them ‘fathers of peace, fathers of the fatherland’ (‘Vredevaders, Vaders des Vaderlands’) for having helped, in their wisdom, to curb the violence of the god of war ‘to whose heart no desire for peace could adhere’ (‘op wiens hart geen vredewensch kon hechten’).⁴⁵ The official

⁴⁴ Vondel, WB 5, pp. 484–91; Vondel, *Aenleidinge ter Nederduitsche dichtkunste*, ed. Utrechtse werkgroep.

⁴⁵ Vondel, WB 5, pp. 250–57.

peace treaty, due to be signed in Munster on 30 January 1648, would naturally have to be celebrated in the Amsterdam Schouwburg, like all other momentous events of the time. Guarini's pastoral tragicomedy *Il pastor fido*, which was extremely popular in the Dutch Republic as elsewhere, inspired Vondel to write *Leeuwendalers*, a 'landspel' (pastoral play) structured according to the latest theoretical insights as formulated in Vossius's recently published *Institutiones poeticae* (*Institutes of Poetics*).⁴⁶ The pastoral, which – in contrast to Guarini – Vossius took to be a play set not among shepherds but among farmers tilling the land, was exceedingly well suited to Vondel's purposes. With a tragedy, which Vossius felt should always have historical subject matter, he would once more have run the risk of being accused of making references – pro-Catholic and therefore possibly pro-Spanish – to current affairs. With a play set in a dream world that danger could be avoided. At the same time, as a tragedy with a happy ending the pastoral was a sufficiently dignified genre for a momentous event of this kind.

In his dedication of the work to Michiel le Blon (the Queen of Sweden's envoy to England) Vondel also demonstrated for the first time his deepened knowledge of the structure of Greek tragedy by explicitly mentioning his use of 'recognition' and 'peripety' ('herkennisse' and 'overgang'). He was referring to two central concepts in Aristotle's *Poetics* – *anagnorisis* and *peripeteia* – upon which the action turns. The former refers to the protagonist's overcoming of initial ignorance and attaining to an understanding of the situation that he or she faces (in this case insight into the true parentage of the orphan Hageroos); the latter refers to a reversal of circumstances (in this case from misfortune to happiness but usually the opposite way around). In his dedication for *Maria Stuart* Vondel had touched upon another Aristotelian requirement, which by his own admission he had violated, namely the prerequisite that, if the action was to arouse 'terror and empathy', the protagonist should be neither entirely good nor entirely bad. Clearly when writing *Gebroeders* and the tragedies that followed he was not yet aware of these demands; conversations with Vossius during the writing of the latter's *Poeticae institutiones* must have opened his eyes to them.⁴⁷ From this point on, then, Vondel would follow

⁴⁶ Vondel, WB 5, pp. 261–353. See also the contribution by Stefan van der Lecq.

⁴⁷ See also Vossius, *Poeticae institutiones*, ed. Bloemendal, pp. 40–42.

the path shown him by Vossius. So in the biblical tragedy *Salomon*, which immediately followed *Leeuwendalers*, the main character was no longer an innocent hero set against wickedness as a shining example of virtue (as in the Joseph plays) but a weak character caught between the representatives of good and evil, who each in turn try to win him to their side.⁴⁸ The old King Solomon eventually allows himself to be dragged down by his heathen wives, abandoning himself to idolatry.

When *Salomon* was added to the Schouwburg repertoire in February 1650 it was a popular success, as Vondel's early works for the stage had been. It ran until 1659, and it was the first play since *Gysbreght* to have a performance graced by the official attendance of the burgomasters. In the years that followed, Vondel would once more show himself to be a public poet, placing his ripe and animated talent at the service of the city of Amsterdam and its distinguished representatives. In 1649 the death of Vossius, the supreme representative of the classical scholarship that had now also blossomed in Amsterdam partly as a result of his efforts, had already inspired Vondel to write a beautiful elegy. Many occasional poems would follow, mostly commissioned by prominent individuals, including birth poems, wedding poems, elegies, and poems to paintings.

Two years after the Peace of Munster in 1648, the Amsterdam burgomasters proved in Vondel's view that their divine duty had rightly been conferred upon them. Some years later Vondel would continue to recall in verse that eventful night of 29 July 1650 when the youthful stadtholder William II attempted to storm the walls of Amsterdam with his armies, to force the city to support his policy of a renewed war against Spain. The attack failed because of a combination of circumstances, but the two leaders of Amsterdam's resistance to the stadtholder's authority were forced to withdraw from public office. They were quickly restored to their former governmental positions, however, when William's sudden death in November of that same year changed the political situation in Holland radically.

Vondel's glorification of the authority of the burgomasters reached its peak in the most beautiful ode to Amsterdam ever written: *Inwydinge van 't stadhuis t'Amsterdam* (*Inauguration of the Amsterdam*

⁴⁸ Vondel, WB 5, pp. 373–449. The play is discussed in this volume by Yasco Horsman.

Town Hall).⁴⁹ The construction of the majestic Town Hall on Dam Square designed by architect Jacob van Campen, celebrated at its opening on 29 July 1655, had not been without its problems. Neither had there been any shortage of critical diatribes, with the authorities being accused of profane conceit for the construction of such an extravagant prestige object, which ultimately would cost eight million guilders. Vondel described the erection of the vast, expensive building as a glittering triumph of the economic power of Amsterdam, which saw itself as the centre of the world and therefore as the successor to ancient republican Rome. Except that whereas Rome's power had been founded on military violence, Amsterdam, in his view, was enjoying a reign of peace based on its flourishing trade. Just as sculptors, painters and poets had testified to Rome's greatness, so too in Amsterdam artists of all kinds glorified the honour of the municipal authorities that had given their city its prestige. Architects built a temple to house impressive displays of justice and civilian government, visual artists gave meaningful expression to the eminent responsibility of the government by means of mythological, allegorical and historical works, while poets such as Vondel sang the praises of this eighth wonder of the world.

Vondel's *Inwydinge* was not only a panegyric, it was primarily a defence of a breathtaking status symbol. By showing that the Town Hall being a worthy seat of authority was the result of a carefully considered decision by the municipal council, in line with the needs of its citizens, he rebutted all criticism and was able to end his poem with the image of a city adored by all regions, ruled in peace by Wisdom itself.

In 1654, a year before *Inwydinge*, Vondel had emphasised the inviolability of the Christian authorities, as direct representatives of the highest King, in the dedication to his tragedy *Lucifer*: 'The worldly Power, which creates its light out of God and represents Divinity.'⁵⁰ The rebellion and fall of the 'power-hungry' ('staetzuchtigh') archangel Lucifer, God's representative, who had the audacity to oppose God's decision to place man above the angels, was to him the celestial exemplar of all arrogant creatures who dared to rebel against the powers set above them by God. *Lucifer* is regarded as Vondel's masterpiece, both for its expressive depiction of exalted, superhuman characters in a developing primal conflict and the rising tensions that result, as well as

⁴⁹ Vondel, WB 5, pp. 856–904; see also Spies, *Vondel en Amsterdam*.

⁵⁰ The play in Vondel, WB 5, pp. 601–96; the quotation on p. 604: 'de weereltsche Mogentheit, die haer licht uit Godt scheidt, en de Godtheit afbeelt.'

for its linguistic power, expressing the most elevated thoughts with controlled simplicity.

In Vondel's time the performance of *Lucifer* must have had a dazzling impact, not only because it presented a heavenly subject but also because of the impressive staging. To this end, costly scenery depicting heaven with clouds and stars had been painted. There was also elaborate stage machinery about which audiences were increasingly fanatical, which could be used in all kinds of ways. Vondel had wanted to conclude with a dance by the lamenting angels, but Schouwburg governor Jan Vos instead developed a fantastical pantomime with allegorical figures who came dancing onto the stage, by turns joyful and sorrowful, accompanied by appropriate music. In February 1654, however, after two performances to a packed theatre, *Lucifer* unexpectedly had to be removed from the repertoire. Protestant preachers had railed so vehemently from the pulpit against what they saw as a sacrilegious play that the remaining performances had to be cancelled and, by order of the burgomasters, the printed text would be impounded. This time, then, the magistrates did listen to the views of the church, although only with one ear. That same year the play went through seven reprints.

In Defence of the Theatre: Creativity in Old Age, and Death

Vondel hastened to make amends for the financial damage the Schouwburg had suffered. He did so by the only means available to him: he wrote a new tragedy, which could be performed using the same decor as *Lucifer*. *Salmeoneus*, about a mythological prince who insults the gods, was not performed until 1657, however, and it was less than successful.⁵¹ From this time onwards Vondel would lose the rapport he had reestablished with the Schouwburg audience, even when he used biblical subject matter, which had always met with approval before. Only *Gysbreght van Aemstel* and the Joseph dramas would continue to be staged. Of the series of biblical tragedies he went on to write, several were not performed at all.

Even the tragedy *Jeptha*, in which he dramatised the Old Testament story of Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter, was performed only a handful of times, in 1659.⁵² Yet Vondel himself, in his 'Berecht aen de

⁵¹ Vondel, WB 5, pp. 708–90.

⁵² Vondel, WB 8, pp. 769–850; the 'Berecht' on pp. 773–79.

begunstelingen der toneelkunste' ('Foreword to the Beneficiaries of the Dramatic Arts'), commended the play as a model tragedy in which he had complied with all the requirements of Aristotelian theory. Furthermore, he proudly declared that in a technical dramatic sense he had succeeded in outstripping the famous work on which it was based, the Neo-Latin tragedy *Jephtes* by the learned Franco-Scottish writer George Buchanan. Unlike Buchanan, he pointed out, he had managed to comply with two demands that were difficult to reconcile in this case: the theoretical requirement of the 'unities' (here specifically the unity of time) and the Christian-inspired requirement that a biblical tragedy should never depart from its sacred subject matter.

This Aristotelian tragedy, which he had come to know through interpretations by Heinsius, Grotius and especially Vossius, was an example of *aemulatio* (the surpassing of a work recognised as a masterpiece), something theoreticians believed should be seen as the greatest of poetic achievements. The Schouwburg audience, however, wanted to be enthralled by visual effects. Vondel's plays, which now concentrated on a single central act, scarcely met the growing demand for fast-moving, spectacular plays with changes of scene and astonishing technical tricks aimed at producing an entertaining spectacle. The outward theatrical effect of the action he depicted now relied – as in *Lucifer* – almost entirely on impressive acting, attractive staging, the costumes worn by the characters and their entourages, and on the addition of special displays. Brandt writes that in these later years Vondel complained about the fact that roles in his plays were given to inexperienced actors, decked out in 'old, threadbare and inappropriate clothing' ('oude versleete en wanschikkelyke kleederen').⁵³ This complaint is probably authentic. Most of Vondel's subsequent tragedies existed purely in written form.

We can be certain that Vondel deplored the lack of response from Schouwburg audiences. It leaves a slightly bitter taste to know that it was precisely in this period that he felt forced to set himself up as a champion of the stage, arguing resoundingly in its favour in response to attacks from the clergy. He did so for the first time in his 'Berecht aen alle Kunstgenooten, en Begunstigers der Tooneelspelen' ('Foreword to all Companions in Art, and Supporters of Stage Plays'), which was printed at the front of editions of *Lucifer*.⁵⁴ In it he defended the

⁵³ Brandt, 'Het leven van Joost van den Vondel', p. 68.

⁵⁴ Vondel, WB 5, pp. 607–14.

usefulness of 'elevating and entertaining plays', especially those with biblical subject matter. Vondel evidently understood even before its performance that *Lucifer* would offend the clergy. When this assumption was borne out, he issued another apology for the stage, this time in a 'Berecht aen alle kunstgenooten en voorstanders van den Schouburgh' ('Foreword to all Companions in Art and Advocates of the Schouwburg') published in the edition of *Salmoneus*.⁵⁵ In this he added new arguments to his defence of dramatised Bible stories, and once again formulated what he believed the essence and goal of a tragedy to be in terms derived from Aristotle and Horace. Like painting, drama imitated human action, uniting instruction and delight. A tragedy deals with the fate of eminent persons and its purpose is to move and to portray passions. Even more insistently than Vossius, Vondel emphasises the didactic purpose of the tragedy, which, he writes:

teaches, according to circumstances, to tighten or let loose the reins of the State, and take warning by the misfortune of others. It offers a lively portrayal of wisdom, comprising dignified (i.e. estimable) examples taken from history, for in histories one unceasingly sees the wheel of fortune turning, and how people here treat one another.⁵⁶

Immediately after the banning of *Lucifer*, Vondel had rounded on the preaching of Petrus Wittewrongel, ridiculing him a number of times in verse. The orthodox Calvinist preacher regarded anything that had to do with the Schouwburg as born of Evil, especially, of course, Vondel's *Lucifer*. In 1661 Wittewrongel hit back with a powerful attack in book form, *Oeconomia Christiana ofte Christelijke Huishoudinge* (*Oeconomia Christiana or Christian Housekeeping*), in which he advanced a gamut of dogmatic objections to the stage and to Vondel's play set in heaven. The poet returned fire immediately. In the same year he published *Tooneelschildt oft Pleitrede voor het toneelrecht* (*Shield of the Stage or Defence of the Rights of Theatre*), which he ended by expressing his belief in the city's rulers' wisdom and their love of art and freedom; they would never allow the Schouwburg to be closed the way the Puritans in England had closed the theatres.⁵⁷ Yet that is exactly what

⁵⁵ Vondel, WB 5, pp. 710–18.

⁵⁶ Vondel, WB 5, p. 715: '[...] leert naer voorvallende gelegenheit de toom des Staets vieren of aenhaelen, en elck zich zacht aen een anders ongeluck spiegelen. Zy beelt levendigh de wysheit uit, die in deftige voorbeelden, uit de historien getrocken, bestaet; want in de historien ziet men geduurigh het radt van avontuure draejen, en hoe de menschen hier met elckanderen omspringen.'

⁵⁷ Vondel, WB 9, pp. 380–90.

happened in 1672, for a period of five years, though in part due to the pressure of political circumstances.

Meanwhile, great changes had occurred in Vondel's private life. Until 1652 he had lived and worked continuously in 'De rechtvaardige trouw' ('The Righteous Faith'), the business that bought and sold luxury stockings and other silk goods, begun by his father. In 1652 he transferred both the business and the family home to his son. Not long afterwards he went to live with his daughter Anna in a rented dwelling on the Prinsengracht, close to the Berenstraat. Even at this point the business was probably not all that healthy. The First English War (1652–54), which caused great poverty in Amsterdam, was undoubtedly detrimental to the trade in luxury articles such as silk stockings. Within a few years Joost, who seems to have been a prodigal, went bankrupt and his father had to take over his debts.

A nephew interceded for him with the wife of one of the burgomasters and in January 1658 Vondel, now seventy, was given a job as bookkeeper at the municipal pawnbroking bank. He earned a fairly decent salary, more than most clergy of the time, but it was no sinecure. As time went on he seems increasingly to have neglected his duties, which consisted of recording details of the pawned goods. Finally, when he turned eighty, Brandt writes, 'the Gentlemen Burgomasters, knowing how little service the bank was obtaining from him, dismissed him from his duties, with the retention of his salary'.⁵⁸ Joost Jr. had been dead for eight years by then. In late 1659 his father had asked the burgomasters to force him to leave for the East Indies, the customary 'solution' for wayward sons. He had died at sea.

Looking at the amount Vondel wrote in these later years, his creative industry is impressive: ten original tragedies and three major religious works (two didactic poems and a biblical epic). He also wrote a large number of occasional poems in this period, mainly for the burgomasters and their relatives, sometimes on behalf of the municipal authorities to mark all kinds of official events, as on the occasion of the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. In 1660 his verse translation of the complete works of Virgil was published, in 1671 those of Ovid, and meanwhile he published no fewer than four translations of Greek tragedies.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Brandt, 'Het leven van Joost van den Vondel', p. 64: 'Toen hebben de Heeren Burgermeesters, weetende hoe weinig dienst de bank van hem trok, hem van zyne bedieninge ontslaagen, mits behoudende zyn wedde.'

⁵⁹ Vondel, WB 7 and 10.

Even more impressive than the quantity of his output is its creative elasticity, which is particularly in evidence in his original work. In his tragedies he continued to tap into new themes. In the three plays of 1660 – *Koning David in ballingschap* (*King David Exiled*) *Koning David herstelt* (*King David Restored*) and *Samson* – the central subject is that of a 'change of state' ('staetveranderinghe'), the reversal of fortune from happiness to unhappiness that had dominated *Jeptha*, for instance, although from *Adonias* onwards the theme of justice and injustice comes to the fore as well.

It has often been claimed that practically all Vondel's plays of the early 1660s are connected to his sorrow over his son. Indeed it seems inconceivable that such emotions could fail to have influenced his in-depth exploration of the countless father-son relationships he portrays in them. Yet his concentration on the father-son issue in this period does not detract from the fact that here too Vondel elevates matters above the level of the personal and the incidental, both in a purely literary sense – as in the David plays and *Samson*, where he experiments with the structural possibilities of the tragic 'change of state' – and in terms of content. In *Adonias*, and particularly in *Batavische gebroeders* (*Batavian Brothers*) of 1663 and *Faëton* (*Phaeton*) of the same year, he successively explored various aspects of the basic themes of guilt and punishment, and of justice as their ultimate foundation.⁶⁰

In this same period Vondel also produced a far more important literary novelty, namely the first original biblical epic in Dutch literature, *Joannes de Boetgezant* (*John the Baptist*), published in 1662.⁶¹ More than any other genre, the epic in its traditional form has been forgotten, and nothing is so remote from contemporary taste as its then customary mythological phraseology, its extended comparisons, and its relentless, thumping alexandrines. In the seventeenth century, however, it was regarded, along with the tragedy, as the highest form of literature. As we have seen, the great exemplars were Virgil's *Aeneid* and, among contemporary works, *Gerusalemme liberata* by Torquato Tasso (1575). In France Du Bartas had written an epic about the creation of the world and in England Milton's topic was the battle between heaven and hell, to name but two. Yet in the Dutch Republic the genre barely existed as yet. Vondel had already used the technique and style of the epic in his *Verovering van Grol* (*Conquest of Groenlo*) of 1627, in order

⁶⁰ Vondel, WB 9, pp. 898–971 and WB 10, pp. 31–93.

⁶¹ Vondel, WB 9, pp. 673–794.

to lend his subject the necessary appeal and universal depth, something he would continue to do in many of his more official occasional poems, but in the late 1630s he had abandoned his true epic work, *Constantinade*.

With *Joannes de Boetgezant* Vondel produced both the first successful and the first biblical epic of the Dutch Republic. It would become the model for a long series of such heroic poems in the eighteenth century. He gave the epic a new form that was entirely his own, one that departed from the usual Virgilian-Tassonian model in its strong didactic bias. It is less narrative, more aimed at convincing and teaching, and as such it is more in keeping with his great religious didactic poems, with one of which, *De Heerlyckheit der Kercke* (*The Glory of the Church*) of a year later, it is also connected in terms of its content.

Christ's baptism by John, the climax of the first half of the epic, marks the true beginning of the Christian Church, although in *De Heerlyckheit der Kercke* it is referred to as such only in passing. John's story is linked with that of Jesus in the second half of the epic too. His death is placed in the context of Satan's battle with Christ and interpreted as a foreshadowing of the crucifixion. Vondel lends form to this interpretation not only in his story of John's life but also by repeatedly framing John's biography with metaphysical events, as was customary in an epic. Since this was a biblical epic, those events were not mythological in nature but Christian. A 'council of heaven' is set against a 'council of hell', the former being convened by God.

Taken as a whole, *Joannes de Boetgezant* can be seen as a portrayal of the age-old duality between good and evil, a motif characteristic of the epic ever since Tasso, and one that had already been used by Vondel in his epic poem *Verovering van Grol*. In the years that followed he went on to make this duality the central theme of his final three tragedies, *Adam in ballingschap* (*Adam Exiled*) of 1664, and *Zungchin* and *Noach*, both published in 1667.⁶² In doing so he returned to what he had done in earlier works, although he now managed to harmonise his theme with that of the 'change of state', achieving a synthesis of everything that had inspired his work in previous years. The reversal of fortune from happiness to unhappiness sits comfortably with the battle between

⁶² Vondel, WB 10, pp. 94–170, 323–90, and 391–454 resp. See also the contributions by Jan Bloemendal (on *Adam in Ballingschap*) and Wiep van Bunge (on *Noach*).

good and evil, with the universal solace that good will ultimately prevail. This is the 'lesson' of *Noach*, Vondel's final play.

After his honourable dismissal from the pawnbroking bank Vondel's life gradually ebbed away. He no longer wrote long poems, although he did produce dozens of shorter occasional poems, mainly for relatives and acquaintances. Among the longest is a poem of forty-eight verses about *De slapende Venus van Filips de Koning* (*Philips de Koninck's Sleeping Venus*), published on a loose sheet in 1670 by 'the widow of Abraham de Wees, bookseller on the Middeldam', his publisher to the last. As Vondel wrote a relatively large number of poems inspired by paintings, it may be regarded as one of the kinder twists of fate that there are several drawings of him in his final years by Philips de Koninck, who was among his closest friends. They are moving in their depiction of his slow drift towards death. 'His age was his sickness', writes Brandt, one of those who still visited him regularly. 'The wick of life lacked oil; the lamp was extinguished for want of nourishment.'⁶³

⁶³ Brandt, 'Het leven van Joost van den Vondel', p. 73: 'Zyn ouderdom was zyn ziekte. Het pit des levens ontbrak oly: de lamp most uitgaan by mangel van voedzel.'

CHAPTER FIVE

VONDEL'S RELIGION

Judith Pollmann

No subject in Vondel's biography has attracted as much scholarly interest as his religious convictions. Brought up as a Mennonite, the poet spent many decades in the circles of Arminian 'Remonstrants', before converting to Catholicism around 1640. Scholarly fascination with the subject of Vondel's conversion peaked between 1860 and 1960, when cultural critics and scholars devoted many gallons of ink to the details of Vondel's religious development.¹ From the mid-nineteenth century, Dutch Catholics, on the wings of their political emancipation, were busily reclaiming a space for themselves in the cultural history of the nation. Since this was widely acknowledged to have been at its apogee in the seventeenth century, Catholics were particularly keen to emphasize their contribution to this greatness. What better way to do so than to appropriate the greatest poet of the Dutch Golden Age?

The Catholic Vondel scholarship that resulted from this interest was underpinned by what we might call a hermeneutics of Catholic experience. Catholic Vondel scholars believed that their own Catholicism enabled them to better understand Vondel. Since they also had a clear sense of what a conversion should involve, and what a convert should experience, they felt very confident that they could recognize the symptoms of Catholicity and conversion pains in the literary output of their seventeenth-century coreligionist.² Inevitably, non-Catholic Vondel scholars – liberals, moderate Protestants, and even socialists – riposted with their own readings, and continued to foreground the Protestant side of Vondel. Thus there were efforts to bring out the Remonstrant in Vondel, while in 1935 W.A.P. Smit made an attempt to show that, at its core, Vondel's religiosity had always remained that of the Mennonite

¹ Spies, 'Nederlands vele Vondels'.

² Reflections on this hermeneutics can be found in (for instance) Drabbe, *Vondel's overgang tot de katholieke kerk*. Other examples include: Brom, *Vondels bekering*; Molkenboer, 'Wanneer werd Vondel katholiek?', pp. 6–7.

doopsgezinden.³ Secularists, in the meantime, argued that Vondel's religious development was really not to be taken too seriously. The socialist scholars Jan and Annie Romein even talked of his 'alleged' conversion.⁴ One way or the other, it was the ideological preferences of the authors, rather than those of Vondel, that coloured most of the work on Vondel's religion.⁵

The highly ideological character of the discussion explains why in the 1960s interest in Vondel's religion suddenly collapsed. The secularization process that overwhelmed the Netherlands in that decade turned the poet in general, and his religious affiliation in particular, into a deeply unfashionable topic. For decades, silence surrounded the subject. The latest Vondel biographer, Piet Calis, does no more than carefully adjudicate on the findings in the older literature.⁶ Frans-Willem Korsten's recent study of sovereignty in Vondel's work consciously steers away from an attempt to connect Vondel's views of the divine with a confessional position.⁷ New insights into the religious culture of the Dutch Republic, however, mean that we should be in a much better position to contextualize and compare Vondel's religious sentiments with those of his contemporaries than we used to be. The aim of this chapter is to suggest ways of rethinking Vondel's religious development by reexamining and recontextualizing some of the core evidence on his religious views, without reading between the lines in his dramatic work. In effect, I shall try here to explore Vondel's religion as one might attempt to do for any other seventeenth-century believer, in the hope that a more sober assessment of the evidence can help others towards a new look at the role of religion in his work.

Choice and Certainty

From the age of eight, when his family moved from Cologne to the Dutch Republic, Vondel lived in a polity that did not have a state

³ Leendertz, 'Is Vondel remonstrant geweest'; Smit, 'Vondel en zijn bekering'; Kühler, *Geschiedenis van de doopsgezinden in Nederland*, pp. 41–42

⁴ Jan and Annie Romein, 'Joost van den Vondel'.

⁵ It is no accident that the most clearheaded summary of Vondel's religiosity to date appeared in Melles, *Joost van den Vondel*, pp. 130–32, whose primary aim was to reconstruct Vondel's finances.

⁶ Calis, *Vondel*, p. 201.

⁷ Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, p. 106; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, p. 95. He does so by invoking my *Religious Choice in the Dutch Republic*, but I did not argue that seventeenth-century Netherlanders were uninterested in doctrinal issues, just that their decisions to convert were not necessarily inspired by dogmatic issues alone.

church. The Calvinist Reformed church was known as the 'public church' – it had the monopoly on religious worship, its ministers were paid for by the secular authorities, and it had the use of the old church buildings. The church was expected to offer prayers for the nation, and to take the lead on days of public penance or thanksgiving. Consistories of the church advised the authorities in matters of morality, education and charity. The church was required to offer some religious services to all comers. Anyone could be baptized in the Reformed church, and the churches also married the non-Reformed (although those non-Reformed who could afford it preferred to use the provision for civic marriage that existed in many places). Anyone could be buried in the church buildings and cemeteries around them. Anyone was free to attend sermons. Yet membership of this church was not compulsory – quite the opposite, the Reformed churches claimed and retained the right to admit to communion only those who, as adults, had made a confession of faith and who were prepared to submit to church discipline.⁸ Many Dutch believers did not want to do so. By 1600 perhaps only one in ten residents of Amsterdam was a member of the Reformed church; a century later the Reformed still only made up just under half of the urban community – Calvinist church members were always a minority, even if they were the most privileged, among many other minorities.⁹

The fact that such other minorities could continue to thrive was because the Republic guaranteed 'freedom of conscience' to its citizens – no one could be taken to task for his religious beliefs (although in practice, an exception was sometimes made for Socinians and 'atheists'). While, formally, freedom of conscience did not in any way involve freedom of worship, in practice its existence did leave the road open to small religious gatherings in private homes. Especially in cities like Amsterdam, these could develop into semi-legal church communities, which usually paid for the privilege of being left undisturbed.¹⁰ As a consequence, Amsterdam had a series of well-established Mennonite communities, as well as an emerging underground Catholic subculture, by the time the Vondel family settled there in 1596. In the course of the seventeenth century, many other minority groups also set up their own churches there. Among these, it was especially the Arminian

⁸ Van Deursen, *Bavianen en Slijkgeuzen*.

⁹ Spaans, 'Stad van vele geloven, 1578–1798', p. 401.

¹⁰ Van Nierop and Po-Chia Hsia, *Calvinism and Toleration in the Dutch Republic*.

Remonstrant community that was to be important for Vondel. After 1610 a schism emerged in the Dutch Reformed church over the doctrinal issue of double predestination. Followers of the theologian Jacobus Arminius lost their battle for control of the Reformed church, and the so-called Counter-Remonstrants succeeded in imposing their take on the issue of double predestination. The Synod of Dordt of 1618–1619 forced all ministers of the church into line, and expelled all Arminian theologians who refused to abide by its canons. After a few years the Arminians regrouped as the ‘Remonstrant brotherhood’.

Geeraardt Brandt, Vondel’s contemporary and first biographer, described Vondel’s early religious commitments as follows:

In matters of religion he had accepted the doctrine of the Mennonites, according to his parents’ teaching, and had, among their many branches, opted to join the community of the *Waterlanders*, and had served as a deacon among them. Yet when the quarrels among the Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants had arrived at their peak, and the former had been condemned [...] he took the side of the underdog, and the injustices that had, so unfairly in his view, been visited upon them, kindled in him a great zeal to defend their cause [...] This caused everyone to say that he had become altogether Remonstrant, although he never took communion with them [...].¹¹

One of the key characteristics of Netherlandish religious life was its confessional fluidity. In the sixteenth century, many people had developed an interest in dissident ideas without necessarily breaking away from the old church. Often it had been the punitive measures of the Habsburg authorities that had forced confessional choice upon those who were forced to recant their beliefs, or to flee into exile and into the arms of refugee communities where a fully fledged form of Protestantism was taught. Because the Dutch Republic did not force its citizens to join the public church, and because many Dutch believers did not seal their religious convictions with church membership, the culture of religious fluidity could continue to exist throughout the Golden Age. By the mid seventeenth century, there were still many believers who refused to become communicant members of a church, and all churches were used to the presence of non-communicant *liefhebbers* or ‘sympathizers’.¹²

¹¹ Brandt, ‘Het leven van Joost van den Vondel’, pp. 17–18.

¹² Pollmann, ‘From Freedom of Conscience to Confessional Segregation?’.

After his conversion to Catholicism, Vondel himself described his former Mennonite faith as 'inherited doctrine'.¹³ With two Mennonite parents, who were prepared to migrate for their faith, he was raised a Mennonite as a matter of course. Yet both in Mennonite and Reformed circles, church membership was not automatically transferred to younger generations. Each generation decided for itself when to join formally – by accepting adult baptism in the Mennonite case, or by making one's confession in the Reformed and Remonstrant communities. Many children, even when brought up in a household in which the parents shared one religion, took their time over committing themselves. Thus Vondel's own daughter, Anna, was still unbaptized when she joined the Catholic church at age 30 – she had apparently felt free to postpone this choice and had thus never become a communicant Mennonite.¹⁴ Other members of the Vondel family also ignored family commitments when deciding which of the Amsterdam Mennonite communities to join. Vondel was a member of the *Waterlander* Mennonite community of Amsterdam, yet in 1637, at the end of her life, his mother Sara just bequeathed a sum of money to the 'Flemish' Mennonite community, suggesting that she was a member of this group.¹⁵ It is possible that it was she who, later in life, decided to change communities – because Vondel and all his sisters were *Waterlanders*. An alternative explanation is that she and her husband had always belonged to the Flemish community, but that the children decided otherwise – as most historians have assumed. However that may be, there is no reason to believe that such choices were necessarily accompanied by 'an intense inner struggle', as a recent biographer surmises.¹⁶ The differences between the communities, however bitter, concerned church order more than doctrine.¹⁷ In early seventeenth-century Amsterdam there were also practical reasons that might inspire decisions to change community. For the Vondel children, this could have been marriage – Joost and his sister both married a brother and sister of the *Waterlander* De Wolff family. And it was by no means uncommon for *doopsgezinden*

¹³ 'Toetssteen' (1650), WB 5, p. 492.

¹⁴ 'Litterae Annuae missionis Hollandicae anno 1641' ed. by Van Lommel in his *De historische waarde der Litterae Annuae*, pp. 60–69, esp. 66. On the freedom to choose see Pollmann, 'From Freedom of Conscience'.

¹⁵ Sterck, *Oorkonden over Vondel en zijn kring*, pp. 322 and 328.

¹⁶ Calis, *Vondel*, pp. 61–62.

¹⁷ Zijlstra, *Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden*, p. 273.

to move from one community to another at some point in their lives.¹⁸ There is no reason to believe, therefore, that their support for a different 'flavour' of Mennonite community caused a breach between the Vondel siblings and their mother.

Until his late thirties, Vondel's religious trajectory was therefore uneventful. He accepted adult baptism, married a *doopgezinde* girl, Maaïke de Wolff, and from 1616 served as a deacon in his church. In 1620, and again a few years later, he suffered from debilitating attacks of 'melancholy', which for some time made him unproductive. Yet by the mid 1620s he suddenly resurfaced and took the stage with angry interventions in a series of public debates on religious issues. The first of these related to a conflict within his own community. In 1626, the Waterlander community was deeply divided over the value of Scripture as opposed to any revelations of the Holy Spirit that individuals might experience. Waterlander leader Hans de Ries thought that these were of value, and silenced his opponent Nittert Obbesz who argued that Scripture alone should be the anchor of the faith. In his *Antidotum: Tegen het vergift der Geestdryvers: Tot verdedigingh van 't beschreven woord Gods (Antidote to the Poison of the Zealots, in Defence of the Word of God, 1626)*,¹⁹ Vondel took the side of Nittert, predicting dire consequences if religion were to be based on random intimations of the spirit. Recalling the embarrassing Anabaptist bids in the 1530s to create a new Jerusalem in the cities of Münster and Amsterdam, he predicted that De Ries's stance 'would make a mockery of Christ, if anyone can believe what he wants and what mills about in his loose and brainless head, so that temples will stand empty and none of the laity will heed the Bible, but will consider Sunday preaching just *letterwerk*'.²⁰ Judging by this passage, Vondel's emphasis on Scripture was apparently coupled with a fear of disorder, and desire for certainty and stability in matters pertaining to the faith.

At the same time, Vondel did not like enforced uniformity. In 1619 the political protector of the Remonstrants, Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, had been beheaded for treason, and their preachers had been silenced or banished. When some of the Remonstrants were implicated in a coup against Stadtholder Maurits of Nassau in 1623, the magistrates in some cities in Holland again lashed out with unprecedented force

¹⁸ Kühler, *Geschiedenis der doopsgezinden*, pp. 5–6.

¹⁹ Zijlstra, *Om de ware gemeente*, pp. 280–81.

²⁰ WB 2, p. 808.

against the dissident Remonstrant communities. Many Waterlander Mennonites sympathized with some Remonstrant viewpoints, but sensibly decided not to become too closely associated with the controversy.²¹ Not so Vondel, however, who now came out in open support of his many Remonstrant friends. He protested against the Calvinist 'conscience-butchers, disguised in the robes of justice', calling upon them to give 'your fellow Christians' the free exercise of their religion. In 1631 he signed a petition to demand freedom of worship for the Remonstrant community.²² Apart from voicing his distaste of the forcing of consciences, he also proved strongly opposed to the Reformed take on double predestination. In his *Decretum horribile* (*The Horrifying Judgement*, 1631), he outlined the anguish of a young mother with her newborn twins, both cleansed by baptism 'in Christ's loving blood', who asks herself which of the two might be doomed to hell. The poem ends with his reassurance that God will protect both babies as a hen its chicks, and with a vision of paradise. Many Remonstrants before Vondel had been attacking the doctrine of double predestination with the argument that this might condemn innocent babes to hell, so there is no need to connect this to Vondel's biography.²³ Still, it is interesting to note that the baby twins in his vision had received infant baptism. It is unlikely that we should see this as a rejection of adult baptism, the single most important characteristic of the Mennonite community. Brandt thought that Vondel continued to live as a Mennonite at least until the death of his wife in 1635. But it does perhaps suggest that by the 1630s Vondel was no longer particularly careful to stick to the confessional culture in which he had been brought up. Yearning for certainty he might be, but he was also exercising his right to choose.

Sufferings

According to Geraardt Brandt, Vondel's distaste for religious persecution could be traced back deep into his family history. Brandt was a Remonstrant preacher, who himself knew the poet and who was well at home in at least some of Vondel's Amsterdam milieu. In the life of Vondel that he published in 1682, three years after the poet's death,

²¹ Zijlstra, *Om de ware gemeente*, p. 278.

²² Leendertz, 'Is Vondel remonstrant geweest'.

²³ 'Decretum horribile: Gruvvel de verwoestinghe' (1630), WB 3, p. 346. On earlier use of this argument, see Van Deursen, *Bavianen en slijkgeuzen*, pp. 282–83.

he drew on his own conversations with Vondel, as well as on information that he had gathered from his friends. After introducing his topic Brandt started his account of Vondel's life with a dramatic 'tale of origin':

His maternal grandfather Peter Kranen, a [...] resident of Antwerp, was, together with his spouse, committed to the most defenceless of all the reforming groups, the Mennonites, at the time of the fierce persecutions [...] when placards were in force of which it was said 'that they were written in blood rather than in ink', and he was attending their gatherings in the days when this could cost people their lives.²⁴

Indeed, Brandt continued, Kranen was betrayed, and while he himself escaped, his wife, many months pregnant, was arrested and jailed. Although she was briefly allowed to leave prison to give birth, she was again interned and was tried for heresy. Fortunately a cousin had come to her rescue:

When he heard from the Margrave [of Antwerp], that she 'had been condemned to the fire, and would die together with some preacher', he was deeply worried, begged for a reprieve and asked 'if one might not save her by having one of her children baptized as a Catholic by a priest'. The reply was 'perhaps'. And in this hope they hastily called one of the children (who had fled to Cologne with their father) back to Antwerp, where the child was baptized according to the customs of the Roman church: and afterwards the mother, through much begging and pleading, was at last released, having promised to continue to live as a Catholic.

She then went to Cologne to join her husband and children, where they found their refuge, and the daughter who had been baptized by a priest to save her mother was named Sara Kranen, and was later to be the mother of Vondel, our poet. Because the milliner Joost van den Vondel [...] who was also a keen follower of the Mennonites, also went into exile in Cologne because of the persecution, and married that girl [...].²⁵

Cross-checking with other records has shown that Brandt's tale had a basis in reality. Peter Craanen was indeed indicted for attending Mennonite meetings in 1571, and in July 1571 one of his daughters was actually baptized in Antwerp's cathedral aged three and a half, in the presence of a high-ranking Catholic priest.²⁶ Yet it is also worth examining this passage as a tale of origin – a tale that was transmitted by the

²⁴ Brandt, 'Het leven van Joost van den Vondel', p. 7.

²⁵ Brandt, 'Het leven van Joost van den Vondel', p. 8.

²⁶ De Valk, 'Vondel's grootouders onder Alva om het geloof vervolgd'.

descendants of Sara Craanen and Joost van den Vondel senior and that, by the time it reached Brandt, had probably been told and retold many times. Unsurprisingly, the story had changed shape in the process. Thus it was not in fact Sara, Vondel's mother, 'who had been baptized by a priest to save her mother', but his aunt Anna.²⁷ It is also unlikely that Vondel's father, the milliner Joost senior, left Antwerp because of persecution. In 1582, when he departed, Antwerp was fighting on the side of the Revolt and not persecuting Mennonites – like so many others, Joost probably left the city because of the economic downturn. His religious commitment was to be tested, but that happened twelve years later, when Joost senior was harassed and fined for attending Mennonite gatherings in Cologne. At that point he decided yet again to migrate, and took his wife and children to the Dutch Republic, reputedly suffering the discomfort with such patience that their coachman compared the couple to 'Joseph and Mary'.²⁸

Stories like these were familiar enough in the Republic. Both in Mennonite and in Reformed circles, tales of martyrdom, persecution and flight figured prominently. As a form of 'imitatio' of the passion and a simile to the history of Israel, they resonated strongly in contemporary piety. Martyrdom and suffering among one's ancestors conferred status on their descendants. It was especially among the tens of thousands of Southern Netherlanders who had come to the Republic rather than abandon their Protestant faith that such tales lived on. For the many families of Brabantine and Flemish extraction, stories of victimhood fulfilled an additional function as a 'tale of origin' and for many it formed the start of their family histories. Moreover, stories like these legitimized and even sanctified their presence as aliens in the Republic.²⁹ It is no wonder, then, that in families like that of Vondel such tales were carefully transmitted, and perhaps also adapted in the retelling so as to conform even more closely to expectations or to achieve greater symmetry.

There is one unusual trait in the tale Brandt tells. In the martyrological tradition, for a believer to cave in like Vondel's grandmother Clementia had done, and to allow the Catholic baptism of her daughter, was not necessarily considered a good outcome. True steadfastness

²⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 98–99.

²⁸ Brandt, 'Het leven van Joost van den Vondel', p. 11

²⁹ Pollmann, *Het oorlogsverleden van de Gouden Eeuw*. http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/rome002erfl01_01/rome002erfl01_01_0014.htm

in the Mennonite tradition would have prescribed choosing death rather than make such a compromise.³⁰ It is interesting, therefore, that Clementia's concession had remained part of the story – or perhaps re-entered it once many in the Vondel family had converted to Catholicism. At the same time, Vondel's respect for the sacrifices of his ancestors was apparently unaffected by his conversion. Brandt reported that the poet:

considered non-Catholics to be heretics but had a good feeling about his grandfather Kranen, and, because of his simple piety, expected the best for him, despite the fact that he had died a non-Catholic.

It may seem surprising that Vondel managed to square his attachment to a family history of suffering and Mennonite piety with a conversion to the same church that his ancestors had abandoned and rejected at such a price to themselves and their family. In the Dutch Republic, stories of the sufferings under Habsburg rule were frequently used to remind people of the iniquities of Rome. There was a powerful discourse that used the memories of the inquisition and Spanish rule to associate Catholicism with violence, and its adherents with enemies of the Netherlands. As we shall see, some of Vondel's friends were to use these arguments to criticize him for his conversion. Yet the Catholic minority in the Netherlands did not fail to point out that Catholics had suffered their own martyrdoms in the Dutch Revolt, and that in the Republic they were being persecuted rather than being the persecutors. Throughout his life, the themes of persecution, exile and sacrifice remained of enormous interest to Vondel, but he was not inclined to see them as a vindication of one brand of Christianity alone.

Conversion

Many scholars have regretted that Vondel did not describe a conversion experience, and some have tried to reconstruct an alternative for it from his *Altaergeheimenissen* (*Secrets of the Altar*) of 1645 or other texts. In his omission to tell us of his experience of conversion, however, Vondel was entirely typical of most sixteenth- and seventeenth-century converts. There are early modern, emotive conversion narratives in the tradition of Saint Augustine.³¹ Yet in most instances

³⁰ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, pp. 112–87.

³¹ Fredriksen, 'Paul and Augustine'.

when early modern people described a 'conversion experience' in that classic sense, they were not talking about a change of denomination, but about a transformation in their relationship with God. Early modern believers who changed religious confession were more often than not silent about their motives for doing so. There are, admittedly, exceptions. In Catholic circles, there was a genre of printed conversion narratives that served propaganda purposes.³² Protestants might account for their conversion when they found they needed to justify or explain themselves. Thus both the conversion narratives of Luther and of Theodore de Bèze were written to explain to their readers how it was possible that the religious ideas and sentiments in their later oeuvre differed from those they had expressed earlier.³³ It was in this tradition that we should place Vondel's *Toetssteen* (*Touchstone*, 1650), which formed part of the introductory matter to his collected poems:

If any verse Romish or not
edifies or annoys the reader
please excuse my pen for those passages
and judge the matter by the time in which it was written
Saint Paul followed the trails of his ancestors
Saint Augustine the Manicheans
before the bright light appeared to them
through which the dark mist disappears.
My youth was bound by inherited teachings
to a sect, and one alone,
until I, by a clearer sight
of things secular and ecclesiastical
discovered, at a better day
the pearl that had been hidden,
and for which all is profitably lost.
Happy is he who chooses the best.³⁴

While this account of what had made him change religions is very pithy, it is worth noting that it was framed in terms of discovery,

³² Luria, 'The Politics of Protestant Conversion to Catholicism in Seventeenth-century France.'

³³ Pollmann, 'A Different Road to God.'

³⁴ WB, 5, p. 492: 'Indien hier Roomsch of Onroomsch dicht / Den Lezer sticht, of hem ontsticht; / Men schell' mijn pen die vlacken quijt, / En toets' de stof naer heuren tijt. / Sint Pauwels volght der Vadren zeên, / Sint Augustijn de Manicheên, / Eer hun het heldre licht verschijnt, / Waer voor de donkre mist verdwijnt. / Mijn jonkheit bondt door errefleer / Zich aen een Secte, en geene meer, / Tot datme, door een klaerder blijck / Van 't Weereltlijck en Kerckelijck, / Ontdeckt wiert, in een' schooner dagh, / De Perle, die verborgen lagh, / Waer voor men 't al met winst verliest. / Geluckigh die het beste kiest.'

enlightenment (bright light vs. dark mist) and choice. Forty years earlier, the Mennonite schoolmaster Israel van der Meersch had described his own conversion to Calvinism in terms that were somewhat more emotive, but that also referred to the light that brought truth and that was like a 'pearl'.³⁵ Believers like these did not describe a conversion as a personality change, but as a process in which they exercised their judgment: 'happy is he who *chooses*'.

That is not to say, of course, that this choice had been made completely individually. Other people were instrumental in Vondel's choice. Catholic scholars have expended much energy and anger on the question as to who might be credited with having pointed the great poet in the direction of the light. The Jesuits claimed this scalp in 1641, in one of their annual reports to Rome, but since the eighteenth century there has also been a camp that has argued in favour of the vicar Leonard Marius as Vondel's true guiding light.³⁶ Not much has been made of the role of Vondel's daughter Anna in this process. Yet it was she who in the Jesuits' report is highlighted as the driving force:

Among the converts were [...] Joost van den Vondel, a poet renowned for his vernacular tragedies, an excellent man and one-time buttress for the Arminian sect, who – when he saw that his only daughter, blessed with an excellent mind and also thoroughly versed in Latin literature, had abandoned Menno at the age of thirty plus, to embrace the camp of the true faith, and, once she had been cleansed by the waters of baptism, also to serve this with perpetual virginity – followed her soon afterwards, together with another child.³⁷

Beyond this passage, we know little about Anna – Brandt confirms that she was intelligent, and we also know that she left most of her money to a Catholic charity in Amsterdam. The passage in the 'Litterae Annuae' suggests that Anna may have opted to become a *klop* or 'spiritual maiden', like many other Catholic women in the Republic did. These lay sisters, of whom there were thousands, formed an important mainstay for the church.³⁸ Yet Anna also kept house for her father, and was to extract him from the financial difficulties he experienced later in life, when his hapless son Joost had gone to seed. The chances are that she

³⁵ Pollmann, 'From Freedom of Conscience'

³⁶ For a taste of the discussion see Van Lommel, *De historische waarde*.

³⁷ 'Litterae annuae', p. 66. Only Brom, *Vondels bekering*, devoted significant attention to her role.

³⁸ Spaans, 'Orphans and Students'.

was as important as any priest in suggesting Vondel take a fresh look at the Roman faith.

Nevertheless, there is also evidence of altogether different motives for Vondel to convert. Perhaps because this was one subject upon which he had never dared or wanted to quiz Vondel himself, when coming to the subject of Vondel's conversion, Geraardt Brandt reverted to third-party information. 'A certain reliable jurist' had told him that Vondel had been considering remarrying, and had cast his eye on

a wealthy widow of the Romish persuasion and had started to consider whether he could, in conscience, follow her in this. That he had, in conversation about this matter with this jurist and others, first cast doubt on everything, and said in the end that there was no certainty to be had about religion, unless one were prepared to accept an infallible judge and explainer of all disputed points, and acknowledged on earth one Stadtholder of Christ, and that this led to the Pope as the successor of Peter, and the Roman church with its authority, and all the more so because some priests and other religious, hoping to gain a man of such renown, did their best for it.³⁹

For obvious reasons, Catholic scholars have never liked this story.⁴⁰ Of course it may well have been true; it was not unknown for people in the Dutch Republic to convert in order to please their spouses, although that would not explain why Vondel proceeded to also dedicate so much of his subsequent literary output to Catholic themes. Alternatively, it may well be that in this story we simply have the gossip that Vondel's Remonstrant friends used to rationalize what to them was an unimaginable choice for Rome. While they knew and acknowledged that Vondel was not himself a Remonstrant church member, they had long seen Vondel as their hero. Their dismay at his conversion is therefore easily understandable, and all the more so since Vondel now seemed to confirm the old Reformed charge that Arminians were 'crypto-Catholic'. After Vondel had flaunted his new allegiance by publishing his *Secrets of the Altar*, a number of Remonstrants decided to take the poet to task. In a pamphlet entitled *Kracht des geloofs van [...]Joost van Vondelen* (*The Power of the Faith of Joost van den Vondel*), his former friend Jacob Westerbaen lashed out against the convert. How could someone who had fought against the tyranny of Geneva now sell out to

³⁹ Brandt, 'Het leven van Joost van den Vondel' pp. 45–46.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Wijnman, 'Cherchez la femme bij Vondel's overgang tot het katholicisme'.

the Roman yoke, he asked? He discredited Vondel by suggesting that he was fickle and easily influenced – all that was needed for him to become Jewish (*joots*), he sneered, was for him to swap the last two letters of his name.⁴¹ Another poet, hiding behind the single initial P., wrote:

If a righteous man lives by faith
How much better off, then, Mr. Vondel, you are than others
When your old [faith] gives out, you just get yourself a new one.
Those beasts thrive best that often change their pasture.⁴²

No wonder, then, that Brandt felt he needed to offer a rationalization of Vondel's conversion. He added that his friend had been so busy with his poetry that he was simply a bit ignorant about religion.

Yet before dismissing the passage about the rich Romish widow altogether, it is worth considering the line of reasoning that Vondel is alleged to have used: 'that there was no certainty to be had about religion, unless one were prepared to accept an infallible judge and explainer of all disputed points, and acknowledged on earth one Stadtholder of Christ, and that this led to the Pope'. Vondel's argument proceeds from what was a very modern viewpoint, rather Hobbesian in flavour, that there is no clear basis on which people can ever agree on religion. For the 'Vondel' in Brandt's account, as for Hobbes, this creates an unacceptable situation, which demands the acceptance of one 'infallible' arbiter. Very much unlike Hobbes, 'Vondel' then concludes that this arbiter might as well be the Pope. In many ways this account actually fits quite well with what we know about Vondel's interests in religion, and with those of many Protestant contemporaries. The passage chimes with Hugo Grotius's project to reunify the churches, in which Vondel had been extremely interested. And although Vondel's later claim that Grotius had considered opting for Rome himself was spurious, it is quite possible that for Vondel, it was a Grotian quest to try and define core values in Christianity that resulted in his choice for Rome.⁴³

This reported conversation is therefore well worth taking seriously – even if it is difficult to say whose narrative we have here. Was Vondel

⁴¹ [Jacob Westerbaen], *Kracht des geloofs van den voortreffelijcken ende vermaerden Nederduytschen poeët, Joost van Vondelen, te speuren in de Altaer-geheymenissen, by sijne e. ontvouwen in drie boecken &c* (Schiedam, 1648).

⁴² P., 'Toegift aen Sr. Joost van Vondel op sijne e. spreucke, ghestelt op den tijtel Altaer-Geheymnissen' in [Westerbaen], *Kracht des geloofs*, unpaginated.

⁴³ Nellen, *Hugo de Groot*, chapters XV–XVI, pp. 581, 587; Calis, *Vondel*, p. 129.

trying to explain his conversion in terms his friends would understand? Or was this really the route by which he had arrived at his choice? Although it is impossible to decide this with any certainty, it is worth noting that he was not the only Dutch convert to Catholicism who explained his decision with such arguments. His acquaintance and fellow convert Maria Tesselschade Roemers was also pushed by disapproving Protestant friends to explain herself. One of these, the Arminian theologian Caspar van Baerle, reported to a friend:

She has got it into her head that only a few articles are needed for the faith, and that what she has from the Roman church is in accordance with the ceremonies and customs of the ancients – the rest is not for a laywoman to worry about and investigate. The errant [woman] really likes Grotius's declaration, and, using his authority, is difficult to shift from her proposition.⁴⁴

By claiming that as 'a laywoman' she did not have to worry about theological niceties, Tesselschade was neatly playing the gender card. Yet this was clearly also nonsense. If she had the ability to read and sympathize with Grotius's proposals for unity, she was also well up to making a reasoned decision to convert to Catholicism. And what she gave by way of explanation is very similar to the one Vondel was alleged to have given: 'only a few articles are needed for the faith' and Rome has the best claims to antiquity and thus to authority.

In Vondel and Tessel, then, we can detect the outline of one route by which moderate Protestants in a multiconfessional society might end up converting to Catholicism. Like many Protestants before them had done when confronted with the disagreements between the churches, they thought that one might reach consensus about a core of essential beliefs.⁴⁵ However, whereas this moved some Christians to argue that no one could decide for another person what the truth in religion was, Vondel and Tessel were yearning for authority and unity, and were prepared to grant this to Rome.

By making this decision, Vondel exercised the right to choice that he had valued for a long time. It gave him the certainty that he had long considered essential in the faith. The decision did not require him to change his social network – quite the opposite, he maintained his many

⁴⁴ Letter from Caspar van Baerle to Constantijn Huygens, 8 June 1642, in Worp, *Een onwaerdeerlycke vrouw*, p. 264.

⁴⁵ Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, pp. 127–43.

contacts in the Mennonite and Remonstrant communities. Neither did it mean that he abandoned his commitment to the Republic or its values – rather, because he was steeped in a confessional culture that privileged histories of suffering and sacrifice, he could easily transmit his loyalty to a Catholic community which cherished its own victimhood as a clandestine minority religion in a Reformed country. Seen from this perspective, it was perfectly plausible for the Mennonite Joost van den Vondel to have moved to new Catholic pastures, and to have done so ‘in conscience’.

CHAPTER SIX

VONDEL AND AMSTERDAM

Eddy Grootes

Many of Vondel's poems demonstrate that he felt deeply involved with the changing fortunes of Amsterdam, his home for more than eighty years. He was proud of the city. He wrote in celebration of practically every important event in its history, its economic well-being and municipal building activities, the successful policies of the city council, and its cultural revival. He was a fierce opponent of all those he regarded as a threat to the prosperity and freedom the city had achieved. Yet Vondel was not a native to Amsterdam. His parents were among the large number of immigrants who had fled the Southern Netherlands for religious, political or economic reasons to create a new life for themselves elsewhere. They came from Antwerp, where they had been part of a small Mennonite community that found itself subjected to severe oppression, especially in the ten years after the arrival in the Low Countries of the Duke of Alva, who acted as governor from 1567 onwards on behalf of the devoutly Catholic king of Spain, Philip II. Almost a hundred Mennonites and Anabaptists were executed in Antwerp under his rule.¹

It was probably in the early 1580s that milliner Joost van den Vondel left Antwerp and moved to Cologne, where his son and namesake, the future poet, was born in 1587.² In 1595 the Mennonites of Cologne received notification from the municipal authorities that they must leave the city within fourteen days. The Vondel family was set adrift, staying in Frankfurt, Bremen, Emden and Utrecht before finally deciding to settle in Amsterdam. The city was experiencing a spectacular economic renaissance, its population growing from around 30,000 to

¹ Marnef, *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation*, p. 159.

² The key facts about Vondel go back to the first biography, published in 1682: Brandt, *Het leven van Joost van den Vondel*. Modern biographies include Barnouw, *Vondel* (in English) and Calis, *Vondel: het verhaal van zijn leven* (which includes an extensive bibliography). An excellent overview of his life and work can be found in Smits-Veldt and Spies, 'Inleiding'. For facts about Vondel I rely mainly on Calis.

105,000 in just twenty years. The choice of Amsterdam became final when Joost senior, after swearing the burgher oath and paying eight guilders to the treasury, acquired Amsterdam citizenship on 27 March 1597. This gave him the right to set up in business. He opted for the silk trade and opened a shop in the Warmoesstraat, which was then one of the city's principal streets. The trade in silk fabrics and stockings would eventually be taken over by his son.

The successful integration into Amsterdam life of Vondel senior and later his son is no doubt attributable in part to the social networks they were able to draw upon for support, most importantly that of their fellow Mennonites. The fact that even in Amsterdam this religious minority was barely tolerated reinforced its mutual solidarity, especially among those of shared extraction. Nor was Joost senior the only textile trader whose origins lay in the Southern Netherlands. He chose marriage partners for his children accordingly. Both young Joost and his sister married into families of Mennonite cloth merchants who like them lived in the Warmoesstraat. The presence of a familiar circle of their own people must have given them a footing in a mercantile city that was increasingly cosmopolitan.³

Among those of Amsterdam's newcomers who were foreign immigrants, people from Antwerp probably formed the largest contingent. Their accents must have been heard all over the city. Natives of Amsterdam loved to make fun of linguistic eccentricities specific to the Southern Netherlands. They themselves, in most cases at least, spoke a North Holland dialect. In his popular comedies and farces the Amsterdam poet Gerbrand Bredero (1585–1618) used this form of speech brilliantly to bring the common people to life. But by the late Middle Ages, alongside the various Dutch dialects, a literary language had developed. It was coloured slightly differently depending on the writer's regional origins, but it could nevertheless be regarded as common to the leading authors of North and South. From around 1550 there were regular pleas for the purification and further development of the Dutch language, and objections were raised against the affected French borrowings popular in the poetry of the time, with loan words chosen primarily for the way they sounded. From his earliest poetic endeavours the young Vondel, who probably spoke the dialects of

³ On integration, networks, and the choice of marriage partners: Kuijpers and Prak, 'Gevestigden en buitenstaanders', pp. 205–12.

Antwerp and Cologne until he turned ten, endorsed the ideal of pure Dutch. His oldest known work dates from 1605, a wedding verse written for a neighbour.⁴ Loan words from French and Latin are conspicuous by their absence. Even at this stage Vondel was approaching the ideal of linguistic purity advocated by (for example) the influential older poet Hendrik Laurenszoon Spiegel. In the mid-seventeenth century Vondel noted that a correct form of Dutch had developed in the intervening decades, spoken in cities like Amsterdam and The Hague by ‘people of good upbringing’. It was clearly distinguishable from the traditional vernaculars of Amsterdam and Antwerp.⁵ He himself strove all his life to use pure, clear, smoothly flowing language.

From the age of ten Vondel would have been trained in correct Dutch and perhaps in the writing of poetry at one of the Amsterdam schools, probably the establishment close to his parental home that was run by Willem Bartjens, author of a much-used arithmetic book, whose name has remained proverbial to this day in the context of flawless calculation. Vondel must have learned good French as well, to judge by the long French dedicatory verse that accompanies his play *Het Pascha* (*Passover*) of 1612. Sons of the mercantile middle class were not usually sent to the Latin school; their school careers were limited to what was known as the French school. Vondel did not master Latin until later, under his own tuition.

Willem Bartjens may also have been a bridge to a form of education of a different kind, provided by the chambers of rhetoric. In the Netherlands from the fifteenth century onwards, especially in towns and cities in Flanders, Brabant, Zeeland, and Holland, the chambers of rhetoric had developed into urban societies in which people studied and composed poetry together, wrote and performed plays, and contributed to the festival culture of the municipalities, with its processions and tableaux vivants. In doing so they could usually rely on assistance from the authorities. Rivalry between towns was channelled into contests in which rhetoricians could win prizes for various aspects of their performances.⁶ The culture of the chambers of rhetoric flourished in Antwerp. Although generally speaking the Mennonites

⁴ All the Vondel texts named below can be found in the standard edition (in ten volumes with an alphabetical index in a separate volume): Vondel, *De werken* (1927–1940).

⁵ Vondel, *Aenleidinge ter Nederduitsche dichtkunste* (1650).

⁶ On the rhetoricians in general see Van Dixhoorn, *Lustige geesten* and Van Dixhoorn, *The Reach of the Republic of Letters*.

disapproved of worldly entertainment of any kind, including theatrical events, by no means all of their number distanced themselves from the activities of the chambers, in which, incidentally, there was a strong emphasis on religious and ethical teaching. Vondel's grandfather on his mother's side, who died before he was born, had been a member of a chamber of rhetoric in Antwerp, so it is no surprise to come across the youthful Vondel (who, according to his seventeenth-century biographer, took to writing verse at a very early age) in this environment. The chambers of rhetoric offered an opportunity to rehearse the various poetic genres systematically, with the help of reciprocal criticism. The most important genre was the 'ballade', a stanzaic poem, usually with copious rhymes, in which the 'Prince' of the chamber was addressed in the final stanza. Vondel's early wedding poem takes this form, although its ponderous formulations demonstrate that the seventeen-year-old poet was not yet in full command of his craft.

Amsterdam had had a chamber of rhetoric of its own since the late fifteenth century, the *Eglentier* (Eglantine).⁷ From 1561 to 1578 its activities were suspended, but at the end of that period, when the city changed sides to join the Revolt against Spanish rule, the chamber was revived. In the late sixteenth century its members were a rather select group and the entrance fee was steep. It may have been this, along with a desire to perpetuate in Amsterdam the flourishing rhetorical tradition of their own native region, that encouraged immigrants from the Southern Netherlands to found their own chamber. In 1598 the 'Brabant chamber' was established, under the name 't Wit Lavendel' (The White Lavender).⁸ We know that Vondel was a member by 1606, if not before, since it was then that he took part in an allegorical procession staged by the Brabant chamber to mark the start of a major rhetoricians' contest in Haarlem. At the end of that same year he wrote a New Year song addressed to the Haarlem rhetoricians. To the overlapping social spheres in which the young silk merchant and poet moved – natives of Antwerp, family members, neighbours, his religious community, his school, fellow textile merchants – a society of lovers of literature and the stage had now been added.

The fact that Vondel's early development as a dramatist took place within the framework of the chambers of rhetoric was of crucial importance. After all, until the 1630s these amateur associations were the

⁷ Spies, 'The Amsterdam Chamber De Eglentier'.

⁸ Smits-Veldt, 'Het Brabantse gezicht'.

only platform available for the performance of plays, and their prevailing conventions and configurations, in particular the possibilities and limitations presented by the specific layout of the stage, determined the form a dramatist could choose for his work. By closely analysing the few facts available about the Brabant chamber, W.M.H. Hummelen has been able to shed some light on this matter.⁹

In early 1610 the municipal authorities in Amsterdam made the attic of a former monastic church available to 't Wit Lavendel. This enabled it to compete on an equal footing with the *Eglentier*, whose performances were held in the attic of the nearby Meat Hall. In contrast to earlier plays performed in the open air, an entrance fee could now be charged. This made it possible to pay more attention to costumes and stage sets. The frontispieces to several published play scripts give an impression of what these were like. A permanent decor was probably used for a diverse range of plays. In theory the openings to the various acting spaces had a neutral character and could change function within a single play, and the stage was 'polytopic', meaning that several sets were visible at the same time. At the centre of the rear wall was a relatively large opening, which gave access to a 'compartment' known as the rear stage that could be closed and then opened to reveal a tableau vivant, for example, or to represent an inner room.¹⁰ In his first theatrical work, *Het Pascha*, Vondel made use of this device by directly following a scene in the Pharaoh's throne room with a discussion between the Israelites who had been chased out of it. *Het Pascha*, printed in 1612, was probably performed in this attic theatre.

For several years beginning in 1616, the Brabant chamber was housed in the attic space of one of the city gatehouses and thereafter at a location that has not been identified. In 1617 the Amsterdam physician and playwright Samuel Coster arranged for a wooden theatre to be built for a new company, the *Nederduytsche Academie* or Dutch Academy. Developments in political and religious relations in the city that worked to the disadvantage of Coster and his associates were no doubt among the reasons why this theatre was sold in 1622. It was bought by the municipal orphanage, which would henceforth profit from its income, and the Brabant chamber became its resident acting company. The stage at the Dutch Academy (the name was retained)

⁹ Hummelen, 'Types and methods' and Hummelen, *Amsterdams toneel*.

¹⁰ Hummelen, 'Het tableau vivant'.

offered slightly more space, especially in its broader central compartment, but its potential applications were essentially the same. It is unclear whether or not Vondel was actively involved in the theatrical life of Amsterdam in this period. He translated several dramas by Seneca and in 1625 he published *Palamedes*, a drama à clef about the execution of Oldenbarnevelt (for several decades the most powerful politician in the Republic), any performance of which was unthinkable given its explosive political tenor. *Hippolytus*, a translation of Seneca's *Phaedra*, was alone in being staged ten times in 1629.¹¹ The following year Vondel seems to have been involved with the leadership of the Brabant chamber, which had now developed into something akin to a professional company of players, with a varied repertoire and performances several times a week.

Vondel's position in Amsterdam theatrical life changed markedly in 1637, when the Academy theatre underwent thoroughgoing alterations to become the 'First Amsterdam Schouwburg'. From then on Amsterdam had a well-equipped professional theatre that occupied an important place in the cultural life of the city, under the leadership of directors appointed by the municipal authorities. Vondel developed into an influential playwright in the field of tragedy modelled on classical drama. His *Gysbreght van Aemstel* was staged to mark the festive opening of the new Schouwburg on 3 January 1638.¹² Among Vondel's dramas it is alone in being set in Amsterdam. Vondel chose as his theme for this occasion an episode from Amsterdam's early history. The tragic demise of the thirteenth-century precursor of the city he knew is mitigated by the fact that the play closes with the prophecy that it will flourish in the seventeenth. In his foreword to the printed edition Vondel calls his own time 'most fortunate' and praises the wisdom of the Amsterdam burgomasters, who have placed the general good above self-interest and are actively striving for peace. A remarkable future on the Amsterdam stage awaited *Gysbreght van Aemstel*. Until the late 1960s it was performed annually in the Amsterdam Schouwburg, almost without exception, to usher in the New Year.

Its success is attributable in large part to a couple of spectacular scenes. Towards the end the archangel Raphael, equipped with the wings of a swan, descends from heaven to announce his prophecy of

¹¹ Oey-de Vita and Geesink, *Academie en Schouwburg*, p. 47.

¹² Smits-Veldt, '3 januari 1638: Opening van de Amsterdamse Schouwburg.'

seventeenth-century prosperity. This was accomplished using a machine installed above the central compartment at the back of the stage.¹³ And although Vondel adhered to classical precepts in having the murder of the nuns in their convent described by a servant, the audience got its money's worth when the curtain across the central compartment was drawn back to reveal a 'living painting' portraying the scene. In most respects the stage at the Schouwburg was essentially the same as that of the Dutch Academy. With its broad platform it might be described as 'democratic', since it offered the entire auditorium a good view without greatly advantaging the elite seated in the middle, in contrast to the perspectival stage of Italian-style court theatre. The interior of the Schouwburg is familiar from contemporary engravings of the stage, auditorium and floor plan.¹⁴ The relatively inflexible character of the stage layout demanded creative solutions from the poet if the plots of his dramas were to be acted out in a convincing fashion.¹⁵

In 1665 the Schouwburg was rebuilt as a 'modern' theatre with wings, but by then Vondel's heyday as a playwright had passed and variety and spectacle were more popular than his classical plays on biblical themes. The majority of his later works were rarely if ever performed. Of Vondel's original and translated dramas, thirty-three in total, barely half were staged at the Amsterdam Schouwburg during his lifetime. *Gysbreght van Aemstel* is the notable exception, with 110 performances between 1638 and 1665, but apart from the three popular *Joseph* dramas (with 27, 17, and 41 separate performances respectively and 23 of the trilogy as a whole), only *Elektra*, *Gebroeders*, and *Salomon* were performed more than thirty times in the same period. Other plays got no further than a short run at most, within a single year.¹⁶

Handwritten notes by Vondel in a copy of the first edition of *Gebroeders* (*Brothers*, 1640) show that the author was involved with decisions about how his plays were to be staged. He made suggestions concerning the costumes of Old Testament characters and some of

¹³ Hummelen, '1637: Jacob van Campen bouwt de Amsterdamse Schouwburg', p. 198; Smits-Veldt, '3 januari 1638: Opening van de Amsterdamse Schouwburg', pp. 205, 207.

¹⁴ Brandt and Hogendoorn, *German and Dutch Theatre*, pp. 357–61; Hummelen, '1637: Jacob van Campen bouwt de Amsterdamse Schouwburg'.

¹⁵ Smits-Veldt, 'Vondel en de Schouwburg van Jacob van Campen'.

¹⁶ Oey-de Vita and Geesink, *Academie en Schouwburg*.

the props.¹⁷ He also set himself up as a defender of the stage, arguing against the Calvinist clergy who were opposed to theatrical performances of any kind and who regularly urged the municipal authorities to ban them.

Gysbreght van Aemstel is by no means the only work in which Vondel extols the flourishing Amsterdam of his day. He had already depicted the city in many poems, long and short, most of them full of praise and admiration, although where he saw matters and developments of which he disapproved he did not hesitate to express criticism. He took very seriously the task of defender of the common interest and instructor in public morals that Humanism attributed to the poetic life in its ideal form. This can be explained as one result of Vondel's reversal of orientation in the 1620s. Whereas previously he had moved mainly in the more inward-looking Mennonite milieu and his poetry had been above all religious and contemplative in nature, from about 1623 there is clearly a greater engagement with events in the wider world. As a poet this took him beyond his own religious community, drawing him above all towards the circles surrounding P.C. Hooft, undoubtedly the most prominent Dutch literary figure of the time, which inclined towards Humanism.¹⁸

The most important expression of Vondel's new orientation is his great poem *Het lof der zee-vaert* (*In Praise of Seafaring*, 1623).¹⁹ Hugely erudite, it celebrates overseas trade, the basis of Amsterdam's prosperity. In Vondel's view such trade is a highly commendable activity, as long as it is pursued through peaceful cooperation with other peoples. Here the poet was taking sides against those who proposed engaging in military action to establish a trading monopoly in the East Indies. With even greater fervour he became involved in the conflict between orthodox Calvinists and the more liberal Arminians, another issue that dominated the politics of the time. A long series of virtuoso satirical poems and songs, distributed on loose sheets, testifies to his views. We have already touched upon his drama *Palamedes*, published in Amsterdam after the death of Stadholder²⁰ Maurits of Nassau, the adversary of the executed Grand Pensionary Johan van Oldenbarnevelt,

¹⁷ Brandt and Hogendoorn, *German and Dutch Theatre*, p. 375; Porteman, '28 april 1641: In de Amsterdamse Schouwburg'.

¹⁸ Spies, 'Mennonites and literature'.

¹⁹ Vondel, *Twee zeevaart-gedichten*.

²⁰ For the function of the Stadholder in the Netherlands, see the excellent entry at <http://en.wikipedia.org>.

in which the execution of Oldenbarnevelt is presented, in classical guise, as a political murder. This created problems for Vondel. He was charged and brought before the High Court of Holland, but he benefited from the reluctance of the Amsterdam municipal authorities to extradite its own residents and got away with a lenient (though still considerable) fine. It seems that at this juncture he could rely on just enough support among members of the city council.²¹

In the years 1627–1628 a change took place in the balance of power in the Amsterdam municipal government. In elections for the burgomasters and aldermen in 1627 the strict Reformed lost their majority. The church council, despite fierce protests on its part, would in future have less influence with the magistrate while its opponents would be given greater scope.²² Whereas in previous years Vondel had expressed his unreserved appreciation only of tolerant ex-burgomaster Hooft (father of the poet P.C. Hooft), who had been sidelined, from this point on he could applaud the politics of the municipal authorities without hesitation. One example is his 1628 poem of welcome to Prince Frederick Henry, who had succeeded his brother Maurits in 1625 as Stadholder of Holland. At the request of the burgomasters, Frederick Henry came to Amsterdam that April to mediate in the conflict with the church council. In the poem, distributed in broadsheet, a female personification of the city welcomes Frederick Henry as the man who will silence the Reformed agitators. Vondel commends the wisdom of the burgomasters, identifying them by name. In future the poet would quite frequently act as a mouthpiece for the views of Amsterdam city council, whether or not at its own request. In the 1630s he wholeheartedly supported Amsterdam's peacemaking policy.

Vondel did not always bow down in the face of authority. This is clear from a fiercely satirical poem called *Roskam* (*Currycomb*), which denounces the hypocrisy of patricians, who are quick to speak of religion yet are governed by self-interest and avarice, abuse their power, and live in luxury at the expense of the common man. The 178-line poem was distributed anonymously and without a printing address; there has been some debate as to its date, with arguments for 1626, 1628 and 1630, of which the latter seems to have the best credentials.²³

²¹ Beekman and Grüttemeier, *De wet van de letter*, pp. 15–19.

²² Brugmans, *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam*, pp. 40–44; Hell, 'De Oude Geuzen en de Opstand', pp. 264–69.

²³ Smits-Veldt and Spies in their 'Inleiding', p. xx, opt for 1626; Bot, 'Het historische kader', offers arguments in favour of 1630.

It was in that year that Vondel was taken to task by the municipal authorities for publishing a poem on behalf of the Dutch Academy in which all Dutch versifiers are invited to answer leading questions about the danger posed to freedom by fanatical preachers. The prize on offer was a silver goblet. Some fifty entries were received. These poetic responses, and the counter-responses to them, created such unrest that the Amsterdam authorities banned them from publication in any form. The city government had no interest at all in allowing a fierce polemicist like Vondel to stoke the fire of a conflict of this kind. It continued to advocate a policy of toleration, however, as demonstrated when, in establishing an institution for university-level education, the Athenaeum Illustre, it took on two professors who had run into problems in Leiden because of their Arminian sympathies, Gerard Vossius and Caspar Barlaeus. Vondel became good friends with both men. Vossius, generally regarded as one of the greatest humanist scholars of his time and the owner of an impressive library, was to fulfil a particularly important function as Vondel's walking encyclopaedia in his studies of the classical and biblical sources for his dramas. The festive opening of the Athenaeum in 1632 was celebrated by Vondel with an elegant panegyric, the *Inwyding der doorluchtige schoole t'Amsterdam* (*Inauguration of the Illustrious School in Amsterdam*), dedicated to a member of the city council.

When in 1661 he presented his translation of Virgil to burgomaster Cornelis de Graeff, Vondel, now 74, looked back in all humility at what he had meant to his city. He readily admitted that none of the short works he had produced were in the same league as the great epic by the classical poet. However, he does believe himself to have contributed to the dissemination of the glory of Amsterdam. Here he is alluding to the lengthy poem he had written for the inauguration of the new Town Hall, to poems of welcome for royal personages such as Frederick Henry and Maria de Medici, to his plays and lyrics for lovers of song (who are always eager to hear something new), and to his hundreds of occasional poems: epigrams about important city buildings, laudatory poems, epitaphs and wedding verses. The Amsterdam elite knew they could always turn to him.

A highpoint is indeed his *Inwijdinge van 't Stadhuis t'Amsterdam* (*Inauguration of the Amsterdam Town Hall*, 1655).²⁴ In almost fourteen

²⁴ Vondel, *Inwijdinge van 't Stadhuis t'Amsterdam*. For Vondel and painting see also Bakker, 'Een goddelijk schilderij'; Weststeijn, *The Visible World*, pp. 256–57.

hundred lines of verse Vondel not only praises the splendour of the impressive (but still far from finished) building but also constructs a closely reasoned argument for the importance of such a prestigious seat for the municipal government. At the close Vondel extols the quality and wisdom of the city's burgomasters and aldermen. They offer leadership with a gentle hand, defend freedom, maintain order and peace, welcome strangers, support the needy, foster the arts and sciences, and strive for economic success in a peaceful manner without disadvantaging anyone. This idealised depiction was rewarded by the burgomasters, although in a modest fashion. They presented the poet with a silver cup or bowl. It is unclear whether or not they had commissioned the poem. If so, then the fact that in 1640 Vondel had converted to Catholicism, a denomination tolerated only in the sense that a blind eye was turned, had been without effect. However, his conversion had led to fierce attacks from the ranks of the Reformed, for example in response to his tragedy *Maria Stuart, of Gemartelde Majesteit* (*Mary Stuart, or Martyred Majesty*, 1646). For this publication, purportedly printed in Cologne, the city magistrates imposed a fine on Vondel, which was paid by his Amsterdam publisher.

There has been some discussion in scholarly art-historical publications as to whether Vondel was involved with the design of the interior of the city hall. He wrote the legends for a number of the paintings, but it is unlikely that his influence extended any further than that.²⁵ The question first arose in the context of research into the relationship between Rembrandt and Vondel. Rembrandt had been commissioned to deliver a painting depicting the oath of Claudius Civilis, an episode from the freedom struggle of the Batavians, who were regarded as the ancestors of the people of Holland. In the end the canvas was never hung in the city hall. It was cut into pieces; the only surviving fragment is now in Stockholm. It has been claimed that Vondel, with his preference for an idealising style of painting from which Rembrandt's later work clearly departs, had a hand in the rejection of Rembrandt's painting, but there is no basis for this belief. Questions about the relationship between Rembrandt and Vondel were not raised on a regular basis until some two centuries after the fact, when Rembrandt's reputation was at its absolute height. It had become hard for people to imagine that the greatest poet and the greatest painter of the Dutch Golden

²⁵ Van de Waal, 'Holland's Earliest History', notes 2 and 20.

Age could have lived so close to each other and yet have had little contact.

Vondel certainly was extremely interested in the fine arts. In the prefaces to several of his tragedies he reflects upon the relationship between the stage and historical painting,²⁶ and we know of more than two hundred 'image poems' written by Vondel in which he responds to paintings, especially portraits. These most commonly concern works by Govert Flinck and Joachim van Sandrart, but he was also a great admirer of Rubens. In the dedication of his *Gebroeders* to Vossius, Vondel imagines how Rubens, 'the glory of the brushes of our century', might have illustrated a dramatic moment in the play with a large historical painting.²⁷ There is no evidence, however, of any particular appreciation for his fellow resident of Amsterdam Rembrandt, however natural it may seem to us given their shared fascination for stories from the Old Testament. The poet produced no more than a few epigrams to portraits by Rembrandt. In the case of one, which refers to Rembrandt's portrait of the clergyman Anslo, various scholars have interpreted Vondel's response as unfavourable. The discussion on this point has been going on for more than a century. One problem is that Vondel's statement that the true quality of this particular clergyman lies not in his appearance but in what he has to say – something the painter cannot depict – could be regarded simply as a rather tired commonplace within the genre of the portrait epigram. Recently, however, there have once again been claims that the structure of the epigram, in which Rembrandt is addressed directly, and the fact that the painter altered his original composition of the work, indicate that Vondel did intend his comment as criticism and that Rembrandt interpreted it as such.²⁸

No less interesting is the fact that a number of sketches have survived in which Rembrandt portrays characters from Vondel's *Gysbreght van Aemstel*.²⁹ However, these demonstrate merely that the painter was interested in the actors as picturesque characters. It tells us nothing about what he thought of Vondel's play. The hypothesis put forward by Wytze Hellinga, that Rembrandt's *Night Watch* was inspired by the

²⁶ Konst, 'Een levende schoon-verwighe schilderije'; Porteman, 'Vondel schildert een Rubens'.

²⁷ Porteman, 'Vondel schildert een Rubens'.

²⁸ Schuss, 'De relatie tussen Vondel en Rembrandt'.

²⁹ Van de Waal, 'Rembrandt at Vondel's tragedy *Gysbreght van Aemstel*'; Smits-Veldt, '3 januari 1638: Opening van de Amsterdamse Schouwburg'.

opening scene of *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, is intriguing, but unfortunately the evidence is far from conclusive.³⁰

Nonetheless, there are clear signs of great admiration for Vondel on the part of other Amsterdam painters. In 1653, on the feast of St Luke, patron saint of artists, in a building belonging to the Amsterdam civic guard, a hundred painters, poets, and lovers of the arts gathered. They paid tribute to Vondel. A publication was produced to mark the occasion, two folio sheets called *Op de Vereenighing van Apelles en Apollo, of 't Jaar-gety van S Lucas. Geviert, door Schilders, Poëten en Liefhebbers der zelfder Konsten, op S Joris Doelen, den XX. October, 1653* (*To the Fellowship of Apelles and Apollo, or the Feast of St Luke. Celebrated by Painters, Poets, and Lovers of Those Same Arts, on St Joris Doelen, 20 October, 1653*). It describes the festive gathering. Vondel, then sixty-five years old, was greeted in song as 'the chief of poets'. Nine girls, representing the muses, placed a laurel wreath on his head and Apollo conferred 'immortal praise' on 'the great poet'. He was addressed in a sonnet as the 'great light' and 'our country's phoenix'.³¹ A year later, at the next festival of St Luke, Vondel marked the founding of a 'Brotherhood of Painting' with a short poem that crowns the art of painting as the tenth muse. There are various reasons to assume that Rembrandt was present on that occasion.³²

The 1650s can be regarded as the zenith of Vondel's success as the poet of Amsterdam. In 1650 he self-published his collected poems, a substantial volume of over six hundred pages. In the certainty of his by then generally acknowledged mastery of the art, he introduced the volume with a concise exposition of the demands that should be made of a good poet. His *Lucifer*, later at least regarded as the highpoint of his dramatic work, dates from 1654. In the genre of the civic ode, his *Inwijdinge van 't stadthuis* (1655) can be seen as another highpoint. Only in the *Zeemagazijn* (*Admiralty Arsenal*, 1658) did he ever approach the same elevated tone again. For this imposing naval depot at the Amsterdam docks Vondel once again pulls out all the stops, using the superlatives he loved to apply to the city he so admired. His status as a playwright reached a turning point in these years. Although several of his existing dramas continued to be staged, as we have seen

³⁰ Hellinga, *Rembrandt fecit 1642*.

³¹ Postma and Blok, 'Duidelijkheid over de Amsterdamse St. Lukasfeesten in 1653'; Grootes, '20 oktober 1653: De Amsterdamse schilders eren Vondel'.

³² Postma, 'Rembrandt en de Broederschap der Schilderkunst'.

the same cannot be said of his later plays. After *Lucifer* he produced a further thirteen dramatic works. They testify to an unflagging creative power, but they met with no success at all among theatre audiences. Nor did his personal life bring him much joy. His most important contemporaries had fallen away: Hooft, with whom his relationship had in fact cooled long before, was dead by 1647, Barlaeus committed suicide in 1648, and Vossius died a year later. Partly as a result of mismanagement by his son, Vondel's once flourishing silk business went bankrupt. He was in danger of falling into hopeless poverty. Acquaintances well-disposed towards him stepped in without his knowledge and negotiated with the municipal authorities, who gave the poet, now seventy, a post as bookkeeper with the municipal pawnbroking bank. He would serve in that capacity for another ten years. In 1668 he was dismissed at his own request. The city council continued to pay his salary until he died in 1679. After his burial in the New Church, on the main square of his beloved Amsterdam, each of the pallbearers was given a memorial coin showing the poet on one side and on the other the inscription *Landts oudste en grootste poëet*: the country's oldest and greatest poet.³³

³³ Calis, *Vondel*, p. 364.

CHAPTER SEVEN

VONDEL AS A DRAMATIST: THE REPRESENTATION OF LANGUAGE AND BODY

Bettina Noak

Introduction

In early modern culture, drama and power formed a structural alliance, as they do in Vondel's plays.¹ This might result in self-fashioning or alternatively, where the effect is subversive, self-destruction.² The nature and effects of this alliance are the main focus of this chapter, in which Joost van den Vondel's dramatic oeuvre is examined against the background of two concepts: performativity and theatricality. Both terms are employed in the sense in which they occur in New Historicism (Greenblatt) or in the approach to drama seen in cultural studies (Fischer-Lichte).³ An important starting point is the idea that the complex treatments of power and power structures found on the early modern stage indicate, among other things, the performative character of power displays. A reinforcement of the status quo might result from this association, since splendour and propaganda can be made to serve political ends, but at the same time, laying bare the mechanisms of power could have a subversive effect by unmasking its deceptive character. The latter aspect, as we shall see, was of great importance in the dramatic work of Vondel.

The recipients of early modern drama were provided with an important form of knowledge that cannot be acquired from books but

¹ See Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*; Pieters, *Moments of Negotiation*; Korsten, *Vondel belicht; Sovereignty as Inviolability*; Schößler, *Literaturwissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft*, pp. 79–100. On the relationship between power, religion and politics in literature see also Marotti and Bristol, *Print, Manuscript & Performance*; Tennenhouse, *Power on Display*.

² On the concept of 'self-fashioning' see Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. On New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, see, for instance, Healy, *New Latitudes*.

³ 'Performativity' is understood here as the representation of speech acts in early modern theatre and 'theatricality' as the representation and observation of physicality.

emerges from a process of interaction between characters on the stage and spectators in the audience. The theatricality of this kind of knowledge transfer lies in the fact that specific ideas are conveyed to readers or spectators not by language alone but by characters who act both linguistically and physically.⁴ The reciprocity between the two was recognized by Vondel, who used it as an argument with which to defend the theatre as a medium. Language and body become inextricably linked. Speech acts have far-reaching physical consequences, just as the deployment, injury, or usurpation of bodies can have profound implications for the power of the characters, for their positions in the power structure, and, as a result, for their linguistic capacities.

After a general introduction to the dramatic works of Vondel, I will elaborate upon this idea as it relates to three points. The first has to do with Vondel's theoretical writings and the importance he attributes to the theatre as a medium for the acquisition of knowledge. The second relates to the performative function of bodies on the stage, as well as to the language of power and its potentially self-destructive consequences, aspects exemplified in particular by the utterances of rulers. The third point concerns the relationship between language and body against the background of political action, conceived as a permanent act of sacrifice.

Vondel as a Dramatist

Joost van den Vondel created a dramatic oeuvre that makes him the most important seventeenth-century author for the stage working in the Dutch language and at the same time a dramatist of European stature.⁵ Between 1612 and 1668 he published a total of thirty-two tragedies, of which twenty-four were original dramas and eight were translations, mainly of classical works.⁶ The high point of his activity as a dramatist came in the 1650s and 1660s, when more than half his tragedies were completed. Generally speaking it is possible to identify three special qualities in Vondel's works for the stage. First of all, he goes his own way in his choice of familiar themes, since he draws on biblical

⁴ For the theoretical background see Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*; *idem*, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*.

⁵ In sum, see Konst and Noak, 'Belust op Bybelstof'.

⁶ I consider *Adam in ballingschap* a creative imitation, not a translation.

material for the majority of his works. Secondly, he emerges as a theoretician of the stage.⁷ Several of his tragedies are preceded by long forewords (*berechten*) in which he expands upon his views on poetry or discusses problems concerning the historical and theological embedding of his choice of subject-matter. Finally, he was one of the few authors anywhere in Europe to be powerfully influenced by Greek drama and by Aristotle's writings on drama from as early as the 1640s, as evidenced by his translations of three tragedies by Sophocles, *Electra* (*Elektra*, 1639), *Oedipus Rex* (*Koning Edipus*, 1660), and *Trachiniae* (*Herkules in Trachin*, 1668), and two by Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris* (*Ifigenie in Tauren*, 1666) and *Phoenissae* (*Feniciaensche of Gebroeders van Thebe*, 1668).⁸

Vondel scholarship has shown that the playwright's attention to Greek drama increased from about 1640. By contrast, his earlier plays – like those of most of his Dutch fellow poets – were strongly influenced by Seneca.⁹ Vondel translated two plays by the Roman author, *Troades* (*De Amsteldamsche Hecuba*, 1626) and *Phaedra* (*Hippolytus of Rampsalige kuyscheyd*, 1629). In about 1640 a new tone can clearly be detected in Vondel's work, coinciding with his in-depth study of Aristotle's *Poetics*. The Amsterdam poet did not receive any education in the classics as a child but mastered Latin and Greek as an autodidact, so for his studies of Aristotle he relied on the help of a friend, Gerardus Joannes Vossius (1577–1649), a polyhistorian and professor of classical philology at the Atheneum Illustre in Amsterdam.¹⁰ In the drama *Gebroeders* (*Brothers*, 1640), which he dedicated to Vossius, Vondel put on stage for the first time a protagonist wracked by doubts about how

⁷ See Vondel, *Poëtologisch proza*.

⁸ One of Vondel's forerunners in displaying an interest in Greek tragedy was George Buchanan (1506–1582). He too translated works by Euripides, into Latin. With his tragedy *Jeptha*, Vondel strove to emulate Buchanan's neo-Latin drama *Jepthes sive votum* (1554). See Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 2, pp. 240–306.

⁹ The literature on Vondel's dramatic oeuvre is of course extensive and here I name only a few studies containing the most recent research: Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*; Witstein and Grootes (eds.), *Visies op Vondel na 300 jaar*; Spies, 'Vondel in veelvoud'; Korsten, *Vondel belicht; Sovereignty as Inviolability*; Porteman and Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen*, pp. 379–86, 530–45. Quotations from the plays are taken from the WB edition: Joost van den Vondel, *De werken: Volledige en geïllustreerde tekstuitgave*. The volumes of this edition are available from the 'digitale bibliotheek van de Nederlandse letteren' at www.dbnl.nl.

¹⁰ For Vossius see Rademaker, *Life and Work of Gerardus Joannes Vossius*. His works on poetics have recently been published by Jan Bloemendal. In his *Poeticae institutiones* (1, 4, 33) Vossius states that he and Vondel discussed matters of poetics.

to make the right choice between alternative ways of acting. King David, the hero of the story, finds himself in a bitter moral dilemma that he resolves only with great difficulty. Here Vondel undeniably created an Aristotelian figure, but almost another twenty years would pass before the poet felt able to publish a true ‘model tragedy’ in the spirit of Aristotelian poetics.

In his foreword to *Jeptha of offerbelofte* (*Jeptha or the Sacrificial Vow*, 1659) Vondel explains to future poet-dramatists the characteristics of a well-composed tragedy, introducing important concepts from Aristotelian teachings on drama.¹¹ He believed these teachings demanded that particular attention be paid to characterization. Jephthah, the protagonist, ‘appears here neither as extremely pious nor as impious but as between the two’.¹² Here the author is referring to *hamartia*, the requirement that a play’s protagonist, despite committing serious errors, must not entirely lose the audience’s sympathy.

The foreword also addresses two important elements of the structure of the action, namely the *peripeteia* or sudden reversal and the *anagnorisis*, the denouement or recognition scene. These ensure that the audience as well as the characters in the play experience the ‘churning, tumbling and blazing’¹³ of the passions.¹⁴ Lastly, the Amsterdam poet writes that the aim of a tragedy is to bring about a *katharsis*, or purification. By evoking empathy and fear in its audience, a tragedy purifies and modifies the emotions. The tragedy, Vondel writes, must be capable of

evoking sympathy and terror if it is to achieve its aim and purpose, which is to moderate and curb both these passions in the feelings of the people, to purge members of the audience of shortcomings, and to teach them to endure the disasters of the world more good-naturedly and placidly.¹⁵

¹¹ On the Aristotelian character of Jephthah in particular see also Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 2, pp. 240–379. On the ‘*berecht*’, see Grootes, ‘Het Berecht voor Jephtha en de Prolegomena van Grotius’ *Phoenissae-vertaling*’.

¹² WB, 8, p. 775: ‘verschijnt hier nocte heel vroom, nocte onvroom, maer tusschen beide’.

¹³ WB, 8, p. 777: ‘het woelen, tuimelen en barnen’.

¹⁴ Vondel, *Jeptha*, WB, 8, p. 775: ‘De beide hoofcieraden, hier by een gevoeght, by de Latijnen peripetia, en agnitio, of staetveranderinge, en herkenninge genoemt, gaen in arbeit, om hunne kracht met eene maghtige beweeghenisse te baeren’.

¹⁵ *Jeptha*, WB, 8, p. 777: ‘medoogen en schrick uit te wercken op dat het treurspel zijn einde en oogherck moght treffen, het welck is deze beide hartstoghten in het gemoedt der menschen maetigen, en manieren, d’aenschouwers van gebreken zuiveren, en leeren de rampen der weerelt zachtzinniger en gelijckmoediger verduuren’.

Two important motifs in Vondel's work are mankind's lack of certainty and freedom of the will.¹⁶ In the three King David plays, *Gebroeders* (*Brothers*), *Koning David in ballingschap* (*King David Exiled*, 1660) and *Koning David herstelt* (*King David Restored*, 1660), as well as in *Lucifer* (1654), *Faëton* (*Phaeton*, 1663) and *Adam in ballingschap* (*Adam Exiled*, 1664), to name but a few, his concern consistently lies with doubt as a deeply felt moral dilemma. Many of his characters are tormented by the need to take a difficult personal decision of a far-reaching nature or, as Vondel puts it, to choose 'the lesser of two evils'.¹⁷ This strong emphasis on the motif of doubt and uncertainty in Vondel's Aristotelian period is partly responsible for the internal division seen in his most important characters and their position in between worldly and heavenly history. In fact they possess two bodies, one mortal, subject to all human passions, and one immortal, which allows them to take part in the story of God's deliverance of humanity.¹⁸ This dichotomous way of thinking can be seen as a characteristic of the early modern period, an attitude in evidence in Vondel's plays as it is elsewhere. In the analysis that follows, it will emerge as of great importance in several of his dramas.

Although doubt is a symptom of man's earth-bound nature, Vondel nevertheless gives his characters – and with them his audience and his readers – a means of overcoming their uncertainty and therefore of participating in the salvation that God has in store for man. The poet, who converted to Catholicism in about 1640, repeatedly emphasizes God's mercy and His gift to humanity of reason and free will:

You blended your bright radiance
 Into our soul, a majesty
 Of free will, immortality
 And reason, never clouded nor obscure.¹⁹

Vondel regarded drama above all as a means of promoting reasonable behaviour and of presenting to his readers or audiences the articles of

¹⁶ On doubt in Vondel see Noak, "Wanneer de hemel spreekt moet alle reden wijcken".

¹⁷ WB, 3, p. 848.

¹⁸ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*.

¹⁹ Vondel, *Adam in ballingschap*, WB, 10, p. 113: 'Gy dommelde uwen heldren luister / In onze ziele, een majesteit / Van vryen wille, onsterflickheit, / En reden, noit bewolckct noch duister.'

faith to which he so deeply subscribed.²⁰ He was keen to make use of the special opportunities afforded by the theatre in this regard.

The Stage as a Medium for Conveying Knowledge

Despite all the developments in Vondel's dramatic work over time, his oeuvre exhibits a great deal of consistency. If we look at the forewords to his plays one by one, it immediately becomes clear that the author believed the stage had an important function in conveying knowledge.²¹ Throughout his life the Amsterdam poet was consciously engaged in competitive rivalry with the sermon, that other powerful medium used primarily for didactical purposes.²² This explains why many of his theoretical essays include a defence of the theatre against opposition from the pulpit. The decisive argument in Vondel's view was that the main concern of the theatre was not entertainment but the increasing of competence, and in this respect the stage had enormous advantages, since it did not achieve its purpose by means of 'vapid addresses, cast to the winds for hours, and more distressing than instructive',²³ as the author believed was often the case in church, but instead through the bodily expression of knowledge on the stage. An interplay of words and actions developed in the theatre, and those watching were touched by it. The process of conveying knowledge became a sensory affair and its recipients were given something that changed them more profoundly than any preacher's rhetoric.

In the foreword to his very first play, *Het Pascha* (Passover, 1612), the poet, then still Mennonite, writes:

The old wise heathens, contemplating the nature and depravity of human beings and seeing how slow almost all of them were to climb the steps of virtue, and to rise high in all those things that among them could be called creditable and virtuous, as being a mountain all too steep; so they have in all ways tried by certain means to bring all to a good, chaste, and

²⁰ On free will in Vondel see Konst, *Determinatie en vrije wil in de Nederlandse tragedie van de zeventiende eeuw*; Konst, "Het goet of quaet te kiezen".

²¹ There are extensive references in the research to the mediating function of literature in the process of knowledge transfer in the early modern period. For a summary see Klausnitzer, *Literatur und Wissen*.

²² On Vondel's conflict with the clergy see for example Bostoën, 'Vondel contra Smout'.

²³ WB V, p. 614: 'laffe redenen, uren lang in den wint gestroit, en eer verdrietigh dan leerzaem'.

natural civic life, whether through various poetic fables and poems about invented happenings, or through effective rules and laws. Then among other things they have well realized ways of reviving old stories or forgotten histories and of putting them on the stage for the whole world, and in this way, through certain ingeniously constructed depictions and characters, expressing and imitating in a lively form that which time and antiquity had well-nigh wiped from remembrance through many past centuries and harvested years, in a manner as if they had first happened in the present, such that they show how in the end all good things lead to their own rewards and all evils their punishment, and as a consequence even coarse, rough, and unlearned people, who exhibit a willed deafness and a willed blindness, are able, without spectacles, to have their failings indicated to them as if by a pointing finger, and through the expressive teachings of symbolic characters are civilized and made virtuous.²⁴

One striking thing here is the important function Vondel attributes to the representation of the chosen material as a means of transferring knowledge. Through representation ('expressing and imitating in a lively manner'), in the form of images and action on stage, a process of generating knowledge is set in train among the spectators even if they are uneducated or have no access to the usual educational curriculum ('coarse, rough, and unlearned people'). The stage becomes a medium of cultural reciprocity. The material, which comes from a different cultural environment with its own system of norms ('which time and antiquity had well-nigh wiped from remembrance') is transformed by its representation into a matter of contemporary concern ('as if they

²⁴ Vondel, *Het Pascha*, WB, 1, p. 163: 'D'oude wijse Heydenen aenmerckende den aert ende verdorventheyt des menschen, ende ziende hoe traegh vast een yeder was om langhs de trappen der deughden op te klimmen, ende om hoogh te stijghen in al het ghene wat loflijk ende eerlijck by hun mochte ghenaemt worden, als zijnde eenen al te steylen bergh; zoo hebben sy in alle manieren ghetracht door zekere middelen een yeder te brenghen tot een goet, zedigh, ende natuerlijck borgherlijck leven; tzij door eenighe Poëtische Fabulen, ende verzierde ghedichten, oft door andere bequame Regulen ende Wetten: dan onder andere hebben sy voor goet inghezien de maniere van eenighe oude Historien ofte vergheten Gheschiedenissen wederom te verscheren, ende voor al de Werelt op't Toneel te stellen: om alzo door zekere aerdighe toeghemaecte Beelden ende Personagien, levendich wt te drucken ende na te bootsen tghene tijt ende outheyt met veel verloopen eeuwen ende aghemaeyde jaren bykans wt tghedacht ghewischt hadde, in voeghen als oft die eerst teghenwoordich gheschiedden: waer inne sy betoonden hoe int eynde alle goet syn belooninghe, ende alle quaet syne eyghen straffe veroorzaect, op dat zelfs plumpe, rouwe ende ongheleerde menschen, die al hoorende doof, ende al ziende blindt waren, zonder bril mochten hun feylen als met den vingher aenghewesen, ende door sprekende Letteren van ghecierde Figuren ghetemt ende ghezedight werden.'

had first happened in the present') and can therefore be understood by the audience.

In later forewords Vondel again emphasizes the importance of theatricality in transferring knowledge. He even regards the 'deceptive character' of the stage as a decisive advantage of the medium, quoting Plutarch with approval:

The tragedy is the same kind of deception, such that he who had deceived another and he who was deceived could become wiser than the undeceived, for the tragedy deceives or makes wiser in as much as it treats of an invention, but it deceives with such wit that the invented seems entirely authentic; yet he who by deceiving people or making them wiser brings them something that is of use appears to deal the more correctly; and he is wiser who, through invented fables, comes to know what is regarded as scandalous or honourable.²⁵

By visiting the Schouwburg, citizens who were interested in the stage acquired a certain form of competence, and this was something Vondel contemplated at length in his forewords from the very beginning of his career as a dramatist. His ideas on the subject developed over time. In his early theoretical writings, still under the influence of Seneca, language and its rhetorical power to influence its recipients by reasoned argument are uppermost. The representation of characters in the theatre is important in conveying certain ideas to the audience in a digestible form, but the audience itself does not undergo any profound change of heart. This view was altered by Vondel's encounter with Aristotle's *Poetics*, in which the emphasis lies on the consequences for the audience's psyche of linguistic and bodily interaction on stage. The effect of the theatre now penetrates a good deal further, triggering a psychological process that changes and purifies the emotions, not only – by means of the *anagnorisis* and *peripeteia* – in the characters on stage but in the spectators. In one of his forewords Vondel writes, for example:

The aim and purpose of tragedies following the tragic rules is to mollify people through terror, and empathy. Scholars and budding youths are

²⁵ Vondel, *Salmoeneus*, WB, 5, p. 715: 'Het treurspel is eenerhande slag van bedrogh, waer door hy, die een ander bedrogen hadde, en de geen, die bedrogen was, wijzer kon worden dan een die onbedrogen is: want het treurspel bedrieght of verkloect, naerdien het een verziensel verhandelt: maer het bedrieght zoo geestigh, dat het verziende geheel waerachtigh schijnt: doch hy schijnt rechtvaardiger te handelen, die de menschen bedriegende of verkloeckende, hun eenigh nut aenbrengh: en hy is wijzer, die door gedichte fabelen leert kennen wat schandelijck of eerlijck luit.'

exercised in languages, oratory, wisdom, discipline, and good morals and manners by plays, and this creates in their tender emotions and senses a habit of decency and appropriate behaviour, which will remain with them and cling to them into old age. Yes it sometimes happens that the exceptionally gifted, who cannot be either swayed or diverted by the usual means, are touched by pithy utterances and grandiloquent theatricality and are drawn in without realizing it. Just as a noble lute string gives a sound, and answers, when its equal, of the same nature and character and with the same tone although stretched on a different lute, is plucked by a skilful hand, which, as it plays, can drive the evil temper out of a possessed and unrelenting Saul.²⁶

In the theatre, therefore, not only are the intellectual powers of the audience stimulated, their feelings in particular are affected. By such means, plays are even able to influence people who have resisted a normal education because of their high estimation of their own intellectual powers, the 'exceptionally gifted, who cannot be either swayed or diverted by the usual means'. They are persuaded 'without realizing it' during the interactive process set in train by the performance on the stage. So the theatre achieves its aim precisely at the moment when there no longer seems to be any prospect of the successful intellectual appropriation of knowledge.

The content of the knowledge conveyed in the theatre is of great social relevance. The Amsterdam poet claims that in drama there are three types of information, namely 'knowledge of history, nature, and morality'.²⁷ By 'nature' he means 'natural philosophy' or what we would now call physics. The knowledge that Vondel wishes to cultivate in his readers therefore covers a very broad field and can be described as historical, social, moral, and scientific. An important aspect here is the exposure of the power structures that existed in early modern society.

²⁶ Vondel, *Lucifer*, WB, 5, p. 613: 'Het wit en oogherck der wettige Treurspelen is de menschen te vermorwen door schrick, en medoogen. Scholieren, en opluickende jongkheit worden door spelen, in talen, welsprekentheit, wijsheit, tucht, en goede zeden, en manieren, geoeffent, en dit zet in de teere gemoeden en zinnen, een ploy van voeghelyckheit en geschicktheit, die hun, tot in den ouderdom toe, byblyven, en aenhangen: ja het gebeurt by wylen dat overvliegende vernuften, by geene gemeine middelen te buigen, noch te verzetten, door spitsvondigheden en hooghdravenden tooneelstyl geraeck't, en, buiten hun eigen vermoeden, getrocken worden: gelyck een edele luitsnaer geluit geeft, en antwoord, zoo dra heur weërgade, van de zelve nature en aert, en op eenen gelycken toon, en andere luit gespannen, getokkelt wort van een geestige hant, die, al speelende, den tuimelgeest uit eenen bezeten en verstockten Saul dryven kan.'

²⁷ WB, 10, p. 34.

Power can take two forms. It can be exercised legitimately (*potestas*) or illegitimately (*violentia*). In what follows we will look more closely at each of these two dimensions.²⁸ Of central concern are the *violentia* experienced by the female characters in Vondel's plays and the *potestas* that the male characters aim to exhibit. In both cases, self-destruction as a phenomenon accompanying the exercise of power is of decisive significance.

The Body as a Symbol

The interaction between linguistic and bodily performance is clearly an important concept in Vondel's theoretical essays and in the aesthetics he presents to the reader. We will now examine the relationship between verbal and physical action in a number of his plays. This draws our attention to a gender perspective. The text of Vondel's tragedies shows that the female body can be regarded, among other things, as a 'script', in which actions undertaken by men are 'inscribed'. While a man who acts politically has two bodies, earthly and heavenly, and therefore the potential both for earthly freedom of action and for the attainment of heavenly immortality, a woman has to rely on the non-earthly aspect of physicality – only in the heavenly spheres will she find autonomy. Her role model is the martyr.²⁹ Later we will see how this apparent male supremacy carries the germ of self-destruction within it.

Gysbreght van Aemstel (1637) provides an exemplary demonstration of the role of the female body as a 'script' of male dealings.³⁰ The play was written for the inauguration of the new Amsterdam Schouwburg in January 1638 and it is characterized by the dichotomy in Vondel's thought touched upon above. On the one hand it depicts the downfall of medieval Amsterdam in a truly brutal manner, while on the other it predicts – against the background of the Nativity – the future salvation and resurrection of the city in Vondel's own time. Vondel was also concerned to 'light the beautiful fire of Troy in Amsterdam, in the sight of

²⁸ On these aspects see also Noak, 'Taal en geweld in enkele bijbelse treurspelen van Joost van den Vondel'.

²⁹ On the relationship between body, politics, and gender in the seventeenth century see Alt, *Von der Schönheit zerbrechender Ordnungen*.

³⁰ On *Gysbreght* see the summary by Prandoni, *Een mozaïek van stemmen*, which presents an overview of recent secondary literature on the play.

its inhabitants³¹ and he therefore detected in his ancient subject matter a further example of downfall and resurrection.

In the seventeenth century everyone knew the story on which *Gysbreght* was based. It had been put on stage in 1613 by the poet P.C. Hooft (1581–1647).³² Geeraerd van Velsen, hero of Hooft's tragedy of that name and a member of the nobility of the Province of Holland, gravely insults his prince, Count Floris, by refusing to marry the count's mistress. Velsen's blunt reaction to the proposal – 'your worn-out shoe will not fit my foot'³³ – sets in train a sequence of events that have fateful consequences for the characters involved. When Count Floris rapes Velsen's wife Machtelt in revenge, he is imprisoned by Velsen's friends, including Gijsbreght van Aemstel. Floris is eventually killed by Velsen, which leads to a civil war in Holland, drawing in Gijsbreght, a moderate by nature. His city of Amsterdam is besieged by the count's followers. It is here that the action of Vondel's drama begins.

The events live on in the memories of the supporters and opponents of the count and of Gijsbreght van Aemstel, and they are written in the bodies of the women who appear in the story. Their bodies become chronicles of the violent acts of the men. Geeraerd van Velsen has sparked this series of events not only by impugning the honour of Floris's mistress – and in so doing that of the count himself – but by in some sense violating the integrity of her body with his description of her as a 'worn-out shoe'. Her body is clearly sullied and worthless in his view. With this performative utterance he not only metaphorically wounds the body of the woman Floris loves but directly affects her status and her position of power at court at the same time, so Floris too is damaged. The count takes revenge by raping Machtelt van Velsen, thereby putting the stamp of 'worn-out shoe' on her body as well. These traumatic events from the source material for *Gysbreght van Aemstel* return to Gijsbreght's wife Badeloch in a dream.³⁴ Dressed for church on Christmas night she sees her cousin Machtelt van Velsen, her body disfigured as a result of her rape by Count Floris. Machtelt somberly calls out to Badeloch: 'No resistance nor any struggle will avail

³¹ WB III: 521: 'den schoonen brand van Troje t' Amsterdam, in het gezicht zijner ingezetenen, stichten'

³² The extract from Hooft is quoted here after the edition by De Witte (see also www.dbnl.nl). On *Geeraerd van Velsen* see Noak, *Politische Auffassungen*, pp. 101–27.

³³ Hooft, *Geeraerd van Velsen*, l. 292: 'uw slete schoen myn voet niet passen.'

³⁴ On the handling of trauma in Renaissance drama see Assmann, *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaft*, pp. 190–92.

you / God's saints have long since abandoned church and altars.³⁵ The violence inflicted on these female bodies in the past makes all members of the Velsen and Aemstel families sinful; the women's experiences can never be expunged. Only at the end of the story, with the flight of the family to a rural region where the memory of these events has no currency can a new historic start be made.

In the further development of *Gysbreght*, history once more plays itself out as a violent infringement of the female body. The well-known early modern concept of the 'city maiden', conquered and raped by the hostile besieger, was undoubtedly of relevance here. It is a motif that emerges in several of Vondel's occasional poems.³⁶ Illustrative of the situation of the women in the play is the scene in the church where the citizens of Amsterdam have gathered to celebrate Christmas night. Calamity overtakes the Nativity when the enemy storms the church. The frenzied tearing down of the Marianum by the count's soldiers is merely the start of a general assault on women, and Krijstijn, sister to Gijsbreght van Aemstel, is among its innocent victims. The epitome of this orgy of violence is the rape and murder of Klaeris van Velsen, daughter of Machtelt and abbess of the Clarissen convent, by Count Floris's bastard son Witte van Haemstee. With this act the trauma is passed down to the next generation.

The powerlessness of women in the face of male *violentia* can nonetheless be overcome if they assume the role of martyr, as demonstrated in Vondel's play *Maeghden* (*Maidens*, 1639). This drama tells the story of the martyrdom of St. Ursula, whom Vondel calls Ursul, and her eleven thousand followers in Cologne. The city is besieged by Attila the Hun, who has taken Ursul and her handmaidens prisoner. To the dismay of his advisors, Attila falls in love with Ursul and postpones the violation of the women in order to win her affection. This causes great discontent in the Hun army. The superior strength of the heathen soldiers and the physical threat to the innocent maidens are enthrallingly portrayed. The eleven thousand are encircled by a cordon of male violence:

The enemy has made a fortress of scythe-wheeled chariots
Facing the city like a rampart, assailing her breast.

³⁵ WB, 3, p. 561: 'Geen tegenworstelen noch strijden magh u baeten. / Gods heilgen hebben kerck en outers lang verlaeten.'

³⁶ On this subject see Gelderblom, *Mannen en maagden in Hollands tuin*, pp. 78–93.

The foot soldiers on both sides, like an iron crust,
Cover her flanks. The horseman, on their heels
From behind, encloses the backs of these doomed souls.³⁷

The soldiers' intentions are clear. One of Attila's lieutenant-colonels urges the king to concentrate on the requirements of the army and no longer to take any account of Ursul:

Necessity forbids it you. The soldiery stands, aflame
At this beguiling host. The soldiery rages, furious
That the King's eyes keep turning to Ursul's eyes,
And they pluck no love fruit from the war's harvest.
If the laws of war depart, this army, tired of waiting,
Roused by sexual desire, will soon simply help itself.³⁸

Unlike the women in *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, however, Ursul and her maidens keep control of the story, even though they are killed and mutilated in the end. Holy martyrdom transforms all earthly power relationships, and the apparently weak women are ultimately triumphant. A large proportion of the action consists of debates between the saint and her male opponents, Attila the Hun and his priest and advisor Beremond.³⁹ It is precisely in these discussions that Ursul is able to demonstrate her superiority to her heathen enemy, as was traditional in martyr plays. A future martyr, she is not in such a weak position as it seems. Since her martyrdom will bring victory over tyrannical violence, Ursul actually has no interest in self-preservation – something her followers, including the Archbishop of Cologne, cannot comprehend. It could almost be said that her striving for martyrdom in some sense amounts to a form of violence against Attila and his men, since he can only lose.⁴⁰ Against this background, Ursul's speech acts can be explained. Nowhere does she show weakness. She challenges Attila and Beremond, partly by insulting them, until the heathen prince explodes

³⁷ Vondel, *Maeghden*, ll. 882–86, WB, 3, p. 748: 'De vyand heeft een zeissenwagenburgh geslaegen / Naer Stad toe, als een wal, die stoot haer voor de borst. / Het voetvolck van weerzy, gelijk een ysre korst, / Bedeckt de lendenen. de ruiter, op de hielen / Van achter, kleed den rug van dees gedoemde zielen.'

³⁸ Vondel, *Maeghden*, ll. 951–56, WB, 3, p. 751: 'De nood verbied het u. het krijghsvolck staet en vlamt / Op dit bekoorlijck slaggh. het krijghsvolck raest, vergramt / Dat 's Konings oogen vast naer Ursuls oogen draeien, / En zy van 's oorlooghs oeght geen minnevruchten maeien. / Indienghe 't Recht vertreckt, dit heir van wachten moe, / Van geilheid aengeport, tast lichtlijck daedlijck toe.'

³⁹ See also Konst, 'Wat de toeschouwers niet te zien krijgen.'

⁴⁰ On violence in the legends of the saints see Koch, 'Formen und Bedingungen von Sprachgewalt in Katharinenlegende und -spiel'; Lützel Schwab, 'Vom Blut der Märtyrer.'

with rage and kills her with his dart. Ursul hereby achieves her goal. Without realizing it, Attila has lost sovereignty over both his speech and his acts. By killing Ursul he turns her body into a symbol with great performative power, since on seeing the dead and mutilated corpses of her eleven thousand handmaidens, the Huns flee the battlefield, bringing deliverance at last to besieged Cologne. A body violated by physical assault is able to exercise power over its assailants.

The Language of Power

The example of *Maeghden* demonstrates that the sovereignty of male rulers can in some sense be regarded as an illusion. There are consequences for the function of language as an instrument of power; every linguistic expression of power carries a potential for self-destruction within it.⁴¹ This applies not just to power exercised illegitimately, as in the case of Attila and some of the male characters in *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, but no less so in the case of *potestas*, the legitimate form of violence. By demonstrating this, Vondel reveals a fundamental weakness of power structures.

In *King David* and *Jephtah*, Vondel puts rulers on stage who can be regarded not as despots but as righteous holders of power in Israel. It is important to note that he portrays these leaders not as strong and sovereign figures but in a state of weakness and of dependency on earlier linguistic utterances. As the source story of *Gysbreght* demonstrates, the person who carries out a particular action is but one link in a long chain of performative acts by other persons or forerunners and is therefore constructed in part out of what has been said in the past.

This is particularly true of King David in Vondel's *Gebroeders*, whose acts are determined and restricted by two oaths sworn many years before. Joshua, one of David's forebears, once offered protection to the Gibeonites (whom Vondel calls the Gabaonniers), sealing his promise with a vow.⁴² King Saul, however, broke this oath, bringing about a massacre among the Gibeonites. David is told by his high priest Abiathar that the drought that prevails in Israel at the start of the play

⁴¹ On language and power see the classic studies by Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* and Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*.

⁴² On the play see Konst, *Fortuna, Fatum en Providentia Dei in de Nederlandse tragedie*, pp. 184–91; Korsten, 'Legitimatie, allianties, natievorming en mannenliefde'; Noak, "Wanneer de hemel spreekt moet alle reden wijken".

and the hunger it is suffering now are a result of the violation of Joshua's oath. The Israelites' blood-guilt, Abiathar says, can be absolved only if they make a peace offering to be decided upon by the vengeful Gibeonites – who demand the deaths of the late Saul's descendants (the brothers of the title). Now David comes under pressure because of another oath he once swore to his bosom friend Jonathan, namely to protect the descendants of the house of Saul. David is unable to resolve this conflict, which we have already seen described in this study of Vondel as the Old Testament king's moral dilemma. In a debate with representatives of the house of Saul and two women who speak up for the brothers, Risper and Michol (Saul's widow and David's former wife respectively), he proves no match for arguments that appeal to his humanity. With the words 'my spirit is now sick unto death on account of your sorrow; you can surely see the tears run down my cheeks; I promise you, here is my hand, I shall not break my vow',⁴³ he promises the women that he will continue to protect the brothers. This promise too, although no doubt sincerely meant, remains an empty speech act, since David does not have the power to carry it out to the full. He cannot act against the will of his advisors, especially Abiathar, who makes a connection between the bloody demand of the Gibeonites and the will of God and reasons of state. They furnish David with a dubious solution. He must deliver seven instead of nine brothers to the Gibeonites. This enables him to keep his promise to the women. The scope of David's words is therefore very limited; he has no power over language but is subjected to the violence of the speech of others (Joshua, Abiathar, the Gibeonites, and Risper and Michol). The order to deliver the seven brothers whom he does eventually have to relinquish causes him great pain and damages his personal integrity. Here the weakness of his legitimate power is clearly demonstrated.

This painful experience of his own linguistic impotence seems to have lasting effects. In Vondel's two subsequent plays about King David – *Koning David in ballingschap* and *Koning David herstelt* (both of 1660) – we see an Old Testament king who at a certain point ceases to give orders at all.⁴⁴ A ruler, as he ought to have learned, is in an

⁴³ WB, 3, p. 848: 'mijn geest is nu ter dood bedroeft, om uw verdriet, ghy ziet de tranen vast langs bey mijn wangen leken, 'k beloof u, dat 's mijn hand, ick zal mijn' eed niet breecken'.

⁴⁴ On the tragedies see Konst, "Geen kinderhaet verruckt u tot dees daet"; Konst, *Fortuna, Fatum en Providentia Dei in de Nederlandse tragedie*, pp. 223–31.

extremely dependent position. The exercise of power is coupled with suffering; his pronouncements, as demonstrated by Joshua's vow, will have consequences for entire generations. David is clearly trying to avoid such suffering by falling silent. Again he finds himself in a perilous position, his favourite son Absalom having risen in revolt against him. *Koning David in ballingschap* describes his flight from Jerusalem, and in *Koning David herstelt* his army is ready to defeat Absalom's troops. Paralyzed by anxiety about his favourite child, David is no longer able to speak. He refuses to condemn Absalom and thereby deliver him up to state-sanctioned violent revenge. Ironically, his silence in itself makes him guilty once again, since it weakens his position to such a degree that his final demand, that Absalom should not be killed in the battle, goes unheard. His advisors, acting on his behalf, kill his son. So even a ruler's silence can have violent consequences. David's power has reached its nadir. In this tragedy David's silence corresponds with the silence of God, whose will remains hidden from the king. David the man is thrown back upon his own resources.

Jephthah too, the hero of the model tragedy of that name of 1659, experiences the insecurity of a ruler's position. This judge and military leader in Israel likewise finds himself in the clutches of a fatal vow, this time one for which he is himself responsible. To help secure victory in a battle against the Ammonites, he promises God that he will sacrifice whatever he sees first when he returns home. To his profound distress, he is greeted immediately on arrival by his own daughter. The tragedy centres on the issue of whether Jephthah is obliged to carry out the promised act. Although his advisors point out to him the sinfulness of human sacrifice, he stubbornly holds to his intention and recognizes too late, after his daughter's death, that by doing so he has not performed a service for God but has acted out of a 'reckless enthusiasm for sacrifice'.⁴⁵

Judge Jephthah, nowadays a controversial figure in Vondel studies, illustrates particularly strikingly how violent words can turn against their speaker.⁴⁶ With his oath he has assumed a power to which he does not measure up. The patriarchal power over the life and death of 'the first in his house', to which he lays claim through his promise, rebounds

⁴⁵ WB, 8, p. 775.

⁴⁶ See the debate on the character of Jephthah in Konst, 'De motivatie van het offer van Ifis'; Korsten, 'Wartoe hij zijn dochter slachtte'; and recently Van Gemert, 'Schuld en boete bij Vondel en De Koning'.

against the ruler, inflicting a fatal wound on his soul. All is lost for Jephthah long before he actually sacrifices his daughter:

I am finished. Fortune was a long time turning
 When, with the land in danger, that high-altar promise
 Slipped of necessity from my sorrowful soul,
 Not knowing that, to repair everyone's suffering,
 This word would first sever my heart's artery,
 Then a daughter's throat. Oh word, a sword, forged
 From Ammon's revenge! Oh unrepeatable vow!
 How my heart leapt when Ifis was born!
 This bounty and treasure is now being lost
 Through the shipwreck of one single word.⁴⁷

Because of the 'shipwreck of one single word', Jephthah has lost everything. He feels obliged to bring about the downfall of his house, which was not at all the intention of his original promise. His oath as a perlocutionary speech act has brought disaster and he too is now at the receiving end of its violence. His aim in making his promise was not merely to bring about communication with God but to force Him to act according to an extremely worldly concept of vassalage: loyalty will be rewarded. Here Jephthah seems to be referring to the old oriental image of God, which describes the relationship between mankind and the gods by drawing upon political concepts, taking no account of God as a heavenly ruler who demands personal devotion rather than bloody human sacrifice. Only the chastened Jephthah at the end of the tragedy, who has laid aside the sword as a symbol of his power and is no longer a political leader but merely a penitent sinner, attains this insight.

Power and Sacrifice

The connection between the body as a symbol and language as a perlocutionary act leading to violence is demonstrated particularly clearly in the act of sacrifice. The body of the creature to be sacrificed – a specific animal, or, in the case of the dramas discussed here, one or more human

⁴⁷ Vondel, *Jeptha*, ll. 560–69, WB, 8, pp. 800–01: 't Is uit met my. de kans was lang aen 't keeren, / Toen, in 't gevaer des lants, mijn droeve ziel / Die hooge altaerbelofte uit noot ontviel, / Onkundigh dat, tot boete van elcks lijden, / Dit woort my eerst de hartaer af zou snijden, / Dan 's dochters hals. och woort, een zwaert, gesmeet / Van Ammons wraeck! ô onherhaelbaere eedt! / Hoe sprong mijn hart, toen Ifis wiert geboren! / Dees overwinste en schat wort nu verloren / Door schipbreuck van een eenigh enckel woort.'

beings – is to the sacrificing community an important symbolic token, and the words spoken during the sacrificial ritual lead directly to the violation of its bodily integrity. According to theories propounded by René Girard, the offering, the scapegoat, serves to restore harmony in a society. The aggressive sentiments of members of the community towards one another are neutralized by the sacrifice of a specific person who holds an exceptional position, someone excluded from the whole, onto whom violent tendencies are projected in a collective trance. The ritual, once completed, is sanctified. Religion is used to mask the violent origins of every form of power and the means of sustaining it.⁴⁸ The consequences of this mechanism can be seen in several of Vondel's tragedies.

In *Gebroeders* the high priest Abiathar demands the sacrifice of Saul's seven sons to purify the land from the guilt that originates with Saul. Representing the community, King David cannot escape his duty to order this sacrifice. For the ruler himself, as we have seen, this is a traumatic experience, but his attempts in *Koning David herstelt* to prevent the sacrifice of his favourite son Absalom by remaining silent are without result, since others take over the task and kill Absalom, who has caused civil war in Israel, as a scapegoat. In Vondel's model tragedy *Jeptha*, Ifis presents herself as a sacrificial lamb. By shedding her blood she will strengthen her father's state. Determined to depart this life as a martyr for God and her father, she urges him to carry out the sacrifice – which only adds to the trauma experienced by the ruler Jephthah.

In other tragedies by Vondel, the act of sacrifice returns as an important motif. The Amsterdam poet appears to go to great lengths in his attempts to reveal the underlying blood mysticism of worldly power. This was of great relevance, incidentally, to his political experiences in his own era. In early modern times executions were staged like theatrical performances, intended to focus attention on the criminal as a scapegoat.⁴⁹ Vondel wrote two dramas that rely on such early modern experiences: *Palamedes* (1625) and *Maria Stuart* (1646).

His tragedy *Palamedes* turns on the unjust conviction and execution of one of the Greek nobles facing Troy, a man called Palamedes, at the instigation of supreme commander Agamemnon. It is a clear case of *violentia*. Vondel was alluding to a political event of his own time, the

⁴⁸ See Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*.

⁴⁹ See Van Dülmen, *Theater des Schreckens*.

execution of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, land's advocate of Holland (as the Grand Pensionary of Holland was then called), a sentence he regarded as no less unjust. Oldenbarnevelt, who had lost the struggle for power against the other political leader of the Dutch Republic, Stadtholder Maurits of Nassau, was falsely accused of treason and beheaded in May 1619.⁵⁰ The poet was among those who remained loyal to Oldenbarnevelt and he made this clear in several of his writings. The execution of the land's advocate resolved a conflict that in a sense had an archaic root, the conflict between two characters who are at the same level and therefore have a kind of 'mirror relationship' (Girard), the one wanting what the other has: power. This can be resolved only by the sacrifice of one of them.⁵¹ As Palamedes' mortal enemy Ulysses admits: 'The world in no way tolerates two shining suns: / So no dominion permits rule by two heads in a state.'⁵²

The play begins with a long monologue by Palamedes, who will later be sacrificed. He discusses one after another the false accusations made against him by his enemies and dismisses the allegations with reasoned arguments. The melancholy atmosphere of this early monologue makes clear that sagacity and personal integrity are no match for the system of power and its defences. As soon as Palamedes has finished, Vondel introduces Megeer (the fury Megaera) and Sisyphus, who explain that tyranny and a craving for blood are the driving forces behind human political acts. Here, in mythical attire, the irrational forces of the political contest are revealed. Palamedes' *ratio*, as the speeches of Ulysses in the next act make clear, cannot save him from being sacrificed. Moreover, Ulysses reminds us that Palamedes tried to prevent a political act of sacrifice at the beginning of the expedition against Troy because of his humanist inclinations. Rulers came from all parts of Greece to unite against the city, to form as it were a political body, and then too, as ordained by the most prominent of Greek soothsayers, Calchas, a human sacrifice was required. Iphigenia, eldest daughter of Agamemnon, was sacrificed to atone for a past sin of her father's, so that the ships would be able to sail for Troy. This sacrifice made the political actions of the community possible, and Palamedes' rationalist

⁵⁰ On the play see the recent Meijer Drees, 'Hoe Vondels *Palamedes* geschiedenis heeft gemaakt'.

⁵¹ See also Schößler, *Literaturwissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft*, p. 183.

⁵² WB, 2, p. 661: 'De wereld geensins lyd twee schitterende sonnen: / Soo duld geene heerschappy twee hoofden in een rijck'.

and human opposition to it, Ulysses says, placed him outside the community for good, so that he eventually became its scapegoat.

Vondel is known to have been fiercely critical of attempts to cloak the bloody consequences of political acts in religion. In this play, Ulysses, the Machiavellian advisor to King Agamemnon, utters a speech the aim of which is to reveal the true intentions of the religious leaders:

Although you have stained holiness with patricide;
Bared your sister's shame in the sight of your brother-in-law;
Yes, even crowned the carrier of the lightning-bolt a cuckold,
Raping his spouse and cupbearer Ganymede;
It is not even noticed; if only an altar cloth
Covers these horrific deeds, then they are not sins.⁵³

Finally, the political acts of the drama are portrayed by Vondel as a cannibalistic sacrificial meal.⁵⁴ Palamedes is literally torn apart at the end of the tragedy by a furious mob. Yet it is Agamemnon himself who, as instigator of the entire sequence of events, drinks Palamedes' blood 'greedily and so diabolically'.⁵⁵ The power of violent speech is broken only in the fifth act by the prophesy of the god Neptune, representing the principle of nemesis, who predicts the downfall of the tyrant Agamemnon and in so doing promises that righteousness will be restored in the future.

In his drama *Maria Stuart, of Gemartelde Majesteit* (*Mary Stuart, or Martyred Majesty*, 1646), Vondel once again ventured into dangerous territory.⁵⁶ He portrays Mary Queen of Scots as a fighter for the Catholic faith and turns his fury upon Protestant doctrine and its preachers, whom he had already shown in an extremely poor light in *Palamedes*. Like Palamedes, Mary goes to her death completely innocent. Both characters can be seen as martyrs for reasons of state, and in *Maria Stuart* Vondel attacks the Kingdom of England and its Protestant foundations. This was not well received. The play was

⁵³ Vondel, *Palamedes*, ll. 531–35, WB, 2, p. 662: 'Al hebtge 't hayligdom met vadermoord beveleckt: / V susters schaemt ontbloot, int aensicht van u swager: / Ia self den blixem drigh gekroont tot hoorendrager, / Verkraght syn eegemael, en schencker Ganimeed: / Ten word niet eens gemerckt, als maer een outerkleed / Die grouwelen bedeckt, ten strecken dan geen sonden.'

⁵⁴ Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, pp. 131–34 and *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, pp. 120–23 also points to the anthropophagy motif in *Palamedes*.

⁵⁵ WB, 2, p. 743.

⁵⁶ On the tragedy and its political implications see Noak, *Politische Auffassungen*, pp. 145–93.

published anonymously, but the poet did not remain incognito for long and he was fined 180 guilders, a sum paid on his behalf by his publisher. The dichotomy in Vondel's thinking is clearly present here as well, this time in the form of two sisters and rivals, one of whom, Mary Queen of Scots, is in Vondel's view the rightful and holy queen while the other, Elizabeth, Queen of England, is the 'leopardess' and 'Herodias' who has inherited the crown unlawfully, drinking Mary's blood to satisfy her lust for power: 'Elizabeth, now drink from this honest breast / Mary's blood, and quench that unquenched thirst.'⁵⁷

Queen Elizabeth represents *violentia*, ordering the death of her sister, with whom she has that same mirror relationship discussed above, in order to hold on to power. As in *Palamedes*, Vondel emphasizes the cannibalistic aspect of state power. Led to the scaffold like a sacrificial animal, Mary is killed and her head held up as a symbol of triumph by the victorious party, her blood flowing into silver goblets. Burgon, Mary's doctor, describes the scene:

The executioner grasps the head by the tresses,
That head, which cannot be attached to the body by any remorse
That bloody head of the already crowned heroine of Christ
And crying loudly: 'God save our Queen'; [...]
While everyone weeps with grief and heartfelt woe,
That cuts through many a heart more sharply than the axe.
Still the soul plays and lives in the diamonds
Of the eyes with their fire, and glitters on all sides.
The warm and steaming blood coagulates in silver beakers.
I hardly know what I am saying, so oppressed is my heart.⁵⁸

At the same time, Mary too is accorded the status of a martyr, as 'the crowned heroine of Christ'. The mysticism of kingship is therefore preserved by Vondel on another level, the level of the true *potestas*, the holy power, where kings and queens are reflections of Christ. Here the laws of earthly political violence, which devours mankind, no longer apply. Instead there is humility and salvation.

⁵⁷ WB, 5, p. 231: 'Elizabeth, nu drinck uit deze oprechte borst / Mariaes bloet, en lesch dien ongeleschten dorst.'

⁵⁸ Vondel, *Maria Stuart*, ll. 1644–55, WB, 5, pp. 231–32: 'De scherreprechtter grijpt het hoofd op by de vlechten, / Dat hoofd, door geen berouw aen 't levend lijf te hechten, / Dat bloedigh hoofd der ree gekroonde Kristheldin, / En roepende overluit: Godt hoede ons Koningin; [...] / Terwijl een jeder weent van rouw en hartewee, / Dat scherper dan de bijl zoo menigh hart doorsnee. / Noch speelt en leeft de ziel in bey de diamanten / Der ooggen met haer vier, en blinckt aen alle kanten. / Het laeuwe en roockend bloet in zilvre beckens stremt. / Ick weet naeu wat ick zegh, zoo wort mijn hart beklemt.'

Conclusion: Zungchin

The final play in which Vondel addressed the issue of worldly power was *Zungchin of Ondergang der Sineesche Heerschappye* (*Zungchin or the Downfall of Chinese Dominion*, 1667), in which the poet portrays the end of the Chinese Ming dynasty and the impending conquest of China by the Manchus, events that had taken place in the year 1644.⁵⁹

Beijing (or Peking) is besieged by the rebellious Lykungzus who has come to seize imperial power. He has supporters in the city and at court, so the situation faced by the last Ming ruler Zungchin is hopeless from the start. Hostile soldiers have already infiltrated the city and the cannon lined up along the heavily-manned walls are loaded only with gunpowder, engaging merely in mock battles with the besiegers. In nocturnal Beijing the collapse of imperial power proceeds like one great sacrificial ceremony. Zungchin, 'son of heaven', who appears on stage 'in the yellow ceremonial robe',⁶⁰ is the scapegoat at the centre of it all. For the first time, therefore, the play concerns not the victims of power exercised either justly or unjustly but the ruler himself, whose sacrifice is central to the play. The emperor tries in vain to find out what is going on in the city, who has betrayed him and which of his courtiers have remained loyal. The dark of night and the ominous silence of a pause in the fighting provide no answer. His faithful servants and his eldest son cannot help him. The play has rightly been described as a 'drama of fear', a fear that completely paralyzes the emperor and his followers.⁶¹

When the silence that 'foretold a hurricane in the state'⁶² is over and the night comes to an end, the enemy infiltrates not only the city but the imperial court. The opportunity to flee is denied the emperor; only his three sons are able to save themselves at the last moment. With sunrise Zungchin's *anagnorisis* sets in. He realizes that most of his courtiers have sacrificed him to the enemy. He pleads in vain first to his faithful vice-regent Koläus, asking him to plunge his dagger into his chest, then to the perjured court hangers-on, who likewise refuse to oblige him. So the emperor has no choice but to prepare himself for

⁵⁹ On the play see Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 3, pp. 449–506; Langvik-Johannessen, *Het treurspel spant de kroon*, pp. 251–81.

⁶⁰ WB, 10, pp. 340–41.

⁶¹ Langvik-Johannessen, *Het treurspel spant de kroon*, p. 281.

⁶² WB, 10, p. 362.

sacrifice. In a letter written in his own blood to the victorious Lykungzus, he orders that the traitors be punished after his death and appeals for mercy for his people. Then he presents his daughter with a choice between dying at his hands or as a result of the dishonouring violence of the enemy. Without hesitation she chooses the former. In the final act Lykungzus enters victorious and inquires after the emperor's fate. On the orders of Chancellor Us, the gate to the orchard is opened, and there everyone can see the corpses of the emperor and empress, who have hanged themselves from plum trees. A maid of honour then tells the blood-drenched story of yet another 'daughter killing', describing how Zungchin stabbed Princess Pao with a dagger and how the imperial robe grew red with the blood of his child. Lykungzus hesitantly takes his place on the imperial throne. Later, in triumph, as we learn from the play's dedication, he will have Zungchin's corpse cut 'into strips and thin slices'.⁶³ The transfer of power is complete.

In the past, comparisons were made between the Zungchin character and political leaders like Gijsbreght van Aemstel and Jephthah. The plays that tell their stories share motifs such as the downfall of a city and dominion, and the sacrifice of a daughter.⁶⁴ It is clear, however, that in *Zungchin* the eighty-year-old Vondel definitively rejects any positive motivation for the political acts that take place. The fall of the 'Chinese Troy' is not portrayed as a meaningful event in God's plan for mankind; there are no predictions here of power and wealth after the pattern of the closing scene of *Gysbreght*. In China the future will bring a series of more or less tyrannical rulers. Lykungzus too will soon meet a fateful end. Nor is Princess Pao's role that of a martyr. True, her body is once again a 'script' in which male violence writes its story, but in contrast to the self-conscious Ifis in *Jeptha*, or Ursul in *Maeghden*, her sacrifice serves no higher end. It is simply part of her father's self-sacrifice. In this tragedy the language of power is silenced permanently. There are no debates about alternative ways of acting, as was generally the case in previous plays. As manifest symbols, Zungchin can present only the bodies of his daughter and his wife, along with his own. The letter written in his blood, the robe spattered with the imperial daughter's blood, the corpses of the emperor and empress on the stage beyond the open palace gate – all are visible signs that the language of power has been

⁶³ WB, 10, p. 326.

⁶⁴ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 3, pp. 449–506.

transformed into corporality and an irreversible process involving successive acts of sacrifice has set in, which will determine the future course of history.

We have already looked at the dichotomies that typify Vondel's thinking and they are again clearly present in this final tragedy. At the imperial court, along with the Chinese characters, is the famous Jesuit priest Adam Schall (Vondel calls him Schal), with his faithful followers, collectively referred to as a Chorus of Priests.⁶⁵ Their part in the action is extremely limited. As an advisor to the emperor and empress, Adam Schall provides Christian commentary on events but without becoming involved in political decision-making. Nonetheless, the Jesuits fulfil an important function, since they provide the *consolatio tragoediae*, the moment of consolation for readers or audiences.⁶⁶ After political violence – whether in the form of *potestas* or *violentia* – has been unmasked as a bloody sacrifice that offers his actors no respite, the Amsterdam poet presents a Christian stoic stance as a remedy against the world's vicissitudes. The spirit of Francis Xavier consoles the Jesuits at the end of the tragedy and shows them the route to acceptance of divine providence. They humbly follow his advice:

Though we see many dark clouds hanging above our heads
We give ourselves over to God's sustenance,
With unflagging patience, out of meekness and respect.
After the night the light appears much more beautiful.⁶⁷

Clearly as far as Vondel was concerned, only a radical step to another level of knowledge could liberate humanity from the cycle of guilt and suffering that characterized political acts. In opposition to human violence he sets divine mercy.

⁶⁵ On Adam Schall see Vāth, *Johann Adam Schall von Bell S.J.*

⁶⁶ The concept originates with Schings, 'Consolatio tragoediae.'

⁶⁷ Vondel, *Zungchin*, ll. 1611–14, WB, 10, p. 390: 'Al zienwe boven 't hoofd veel donkre wolken hangen; / Wy geven ons aen Godts voorzienigheid gevangen, / Met onvermoeit gedult, uit ootmoedt en ontzagh./ Het licht komt, na den nacht, veel schooner voor den dagh.'

CHAPTER EIGHT

VONDEL'S THEATRE AND MUSIC

Louis Peter Grijp and Jan Bloemendal

Golden Age Theatre and Music

Recent decades have seen a growing awareness of the use of music in seventeenth-century theatre, in the Netherlands too.¹ In 2004 Natascha Veldhorst defended her thesis on 'Musical Scenes on the Amsterdam Stage in the Seventeenth Century', in which she discussed the function of music on stage.² To this end she was able to make use of the results of a number of smaller studies concerning Dutch theatre and music.³ A method for recognising songs in theatre texts ('strophic heuristics') had been developed in a study that had been published in 1991: Louis Grijp's doctoral thesis on the '*contrafactum*' system.⁴ After having compiled a database of song stanzas (the 'voetenbank', later called 'liederenbank'), he was able to reconstruct melodies of choral odes and other songs in plays by P.C. Hooft (1581–1647) and elsewhere.⁵ However, this awareness of music as an essential part of early modern theatre was not registered by every scholar: prior to this – and even thereafter – modern scholars made editions of sixteenth and seventeenth-century dramas without any reference to theatre music.

In the Dutch Republic, and especially in Amsterdam, the Golden Age was also the golden age of Dutch theatre. In the Amsterdam

¹ Particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, more attention has been paid to theatre music at an earlier stage; see, for example, Sternfeld, *Music in Shakespearean Tragedy* (1963). However, it must be said that, to his credit, Worp, *Geschiedenis van het drama en van het tooneel*, 2, pp. 74–76, already devoted an important section to music; Van Gemert, *Tussen de bedrijven door?*, Appendix 2 'Overzicht van melodieën', adopted a list of choral odes that she thought had a musical component.

² Veldhorst, *De perfecte verleiding*.

³ For example: Rasch, 'De muziek in de Amsterdamse Schouwburg'; Grijp and Meeus, 'Muziek op het toneel van de Gouden Eeuw'.

⁴ Grijp, *Het Nederlandse lied in de Gouden Eeuw*. A *contrafactum* or counterfact is a song text made to the tune of an existing melody.

⁵ Grijp, 'Op zoek naar de melodieën van *Geraerdt van Velsen*'; Hooft, *Granida*, ed. Van Gemert and Grijp.

Schouwburg (Amsterdam's municipal theatre), which opened its gates in 1638, a semi-professional troupe performed several times each week. They staged foreign plays, original tragedies, farces and ballets. Plays by Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft, Gerbrand Adriaensz. Bredero (1585–1618), Theodore Rodenburg (1578–1644) and Samuel Coster (1579–1668) saw reprises, while each year new plays were staged, written by Jan Harmensz. Krul (1601/2–1644), Jan Vos (c. 1610–1667) and Vondel, to name but a few.⁶

In these performances, music played an important role.⁷ The playwrights wrote poems that were sung, such as songs for a solo voice and choral songs ('reien'). These musical choruses were sung by anonymous characters, such as a group of citizens, soldiers, maidens or shepherds, or even by an unspecified 'chorus'.⁸ The choral songs could have several functions, such as to inform the audience about the events that had taken place, to moralise about the plot, to contemplate aspects of the play, and bridge a temporal gap.⁹ Usually such a chorus consisted of just two actors. If the chorus was sung, this may have been done in two voices. But there were also choruses which were recited, probably by only one of the two. The solo songs were part of the action and sung by the actors themselves. In this respect, it has to be borne in mind that all parts were played by men, even the female ones. Until 1655 women were forbidden to act on stage.¹⁰

Besides vocal music, instrumental music also accompanied the action. We know this from the accounts from the Amsterdam Schouwburg that have been rather well preserved. In each performance at least three musicians participated playing the flute, the violin and the bass. We even know their names: in the first years of the Schouwburg, Arent Arentsz. Koer 'the Flautist' ('de Fluyter') played the flute, Thomas

⁶ Veldhorst, *De perfecte verleiding*, pp. 62 and 180.

⁷ Even though, under the influence of Seneca's dramas, music, or the singing of choral odes became less important elements in tragedy as compared to other theatrical events, see Veldhorst, *De perfecte verleiding*, p. 205, n. 48.

⁸ Choruses for female and 'neutral' groups were often sung by boys; see Grijp, 'Boys and Female Impersonators', p. 153.

⁹ Van Gemert, *Tussen de bedrijven door?*, pp. 65–94.

¹⁰ See Albach, '30 Juni 1655'. The problem of female impersonation before 1655 is discussed by Grijp, 'Boys and Female Impersonators'. The Schouwburg accounts also show that in the years between 1648 and 1651 two female singers appeared in Vondel's *Gysbreght* to sing the famous Chorus of Clares; see Grijp, 'Boys and Female Impersonators', p. 133.

Fransz. the violin and Jan Pietersz. the bass.¹¹ From 1640 to 1644 and from 1647 to 1649 a fourth musician came on the scene. Robert Tyndal played the cornetto (called 'cornet' in the accounts). Besides these musicians a drummer and one or more trumpeters were paid.

It is not known what these instrumentalists played exactly, but they will have accompanied the songs and probably there were entr'actes. Trumpets and drums may have been used to attract the audience's attention, and to accompany royal entrances within the plays. Another possible scene is the watchman playing a trumpet ('the trumpeter at dawn'). But there are more musical 'set scenes' on stage: a lament behind bars (prison scenes), the lover singing beneath the window (aubades and serenades), the polyphonic tribute to the gods (sacrifices) and sleep scenes ('gently murmuring, insight descended').¹²

In most cases, the melodies are no longer known. Sometimes they were indicated in the printed text (in the form of 'to the tune of'), but even these were often lacking. Hooft, for instance, left out all musical indications, to render his plays more similar to the plays by his exemplary dramatist, the Roman philosopher Seneca. But the same Hooft evidently had music in mind when he wrote his choruses. This can be concluded from the stanza form of his choral odes, which reveals that he wrote them to popular melodies from his age, such as English and old Dutch tunes, French 'airs de cour' and madrigals.¹³ There is an interesting remark in a manuscript preface to Hooft's *Granida*: 'The songs included in this play can be sung to their melodies or have such a metre that melodies can easily be made for them.'¹⁴ According to Hooft choruses and other songs in theatre could be written not only to existing tunes ('*contrafacta*'), but also as texts for new compositions.¹⁵

¹¹ Grijp, *Theatermuziek uit de Gouden Eeuw* and Veldhorst, *De perfecte verleiding*, p. 26 and p. 205, n. 47.

¹² Veldhorst, *De perfecte verleiding*, chapters 3–7.

¹³ Grijp, *Theatermuziek uit de Gouden Eeuw*; Hooft, *Granida*, ed. Van Gemert and Grijp, esp. pp. 19–22. Two of Hooft's pieces saw modern performances with the original melodies: *Geeraerdt van Velsen* in 1994, produced by Camerata Trajectina in the Muiderslot, and *Granida* in 2009 as a kind of opera, directed by Wim Trompert.

¹⁴ 'De gesangen hier in gebracht gaen op haer wijsen oft sulcken maet datmen'er lichtlijck wijsen op stellen kan'; quoted from Hooft, *Granida*, ed. Van Gemert, p. 19.

¹⁵ As a matter of fact, at least one of the eleven choruses and songs from *Granida* does not seem to have been written to an existing tune, so we assume that someone has composed new music for it.

Contexts of Theatre and Music

The use of music in drama did not start in the seventeenth century. On the contrary, it was as old as Western theatre itself. Already in ancient Greek drama choral odes were sung, or characters sang a tune, accompanied by flutes, cithers or other instruments. Music also accompanied medieval liturgical drama and medieval Dutch plays.¹⁶ It was considered an important means of influencing audiences. Early modern literary critics were aware of this. Vossius, who in his *Poeticae institutiones* compiles almost everything that was known on poetics, also writes about music and drama.¹⁷ He mentions the fact that Aristotle had made music one of the accessory parts of poetics and that it remained to be characterized as non-essential.¹⁸

In the Low Countries of the sixteenth century, both rhetoricians' drama in Dutch and Latin drama made use of music. The rhetoricians organised themselves into local chambers (resembling guilds) that gathered once a week. There they recited refrains and other poetry and sang songs. Occasionally they held regional contests between chambers at which they staged plays or recited poems. Such contests were accompanied by much ceremony – and music. In some instances the plays and the competition songs were compiled and beautifully printed. Only rarely did those printed texts contain musical notation. However, there are often other indications for music, ranging from indications of tunes to musical stage directions and divergent stanza forms.¹⁹

Latin drama also had its music. Roughly two forms occurred: Latin school drama, written by headmasters for their pupils at the Latin schools, and academic drama, written to be performed, recited or read by scholars and students at the universities. The latter form was in keeping with the tragedies produced by Seneca, while the former was in keeping with the comedies by the Roman poets Plautus and Terence.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Ramakers and Van Dijk, 'Inleiding' in Van Dijk and Ramakers, *Spel en Spektakel*, pp. 9–34, esp. p. 17.

¹⁷ Vossius, *Poeticae institutiones* II, 9 ('De melodia', on music in drama in general); II, 16 ('De choro tragico, item de melodia ...', on music in tragedy); II, 28 ('De ... modulatione comica', on music in comedy).

¹⁸ Vossius, *Poeticae institutiones* II, 1, 8, p. 332; Aristotle, *Poetica* 1447a14–16.

¹⁹ See Veldhorst, 'De gedrukte tekst komt tot leven', on the printed plays of the Vlaardingen contest of 1616.

Their comedies, however, did not contain choral songs (although they exhibited other musical forms). Early modern humanists reintroduced the chorus in their school plays, probably under the influence of classical Greek drama, Senecan tragedy, or popular songs. Moreover, the use of choruses could give more pupils the opportunity to act in such a play. Not all plays contained choral songs, but other ones, especially those by Georgius Macropedius (1487–1558), abounded with such (strophic) odes. This rector of the Latin schools of Liège, Den Bosch and Utrecht respectively was inspired by the German humanist playwright Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522).²⁰ The collection of his plays, *Omnes fabulae* (1552–1553), contains the first examples of printed musical notation in the Low Countries.

Ballet was another theatrical form that contained music – and was even based on it. Ballet was first recorded at the Amsterdam Schouwburg in 1642. Thereafter it remains on stage, either as an independent/separate artistic form, or as a part of a theatre play. Opera did not come to the Amsterdam stage until 1677, initially imported from France and Italy.²¹

The combination of music and theatre was a European phenomenon. All over Europe – in England, France, Germany, Italy and Spain – plays were accompanied by music.²² In Germany the 'Singspiel' was a national variant of the opera. Other theatrical events, such as Royal Entries, Water Ballets and Fireworks, also abounded with music – see, for instance, George Frederick Handel's *Water Music* and *Music for the Royal Fireworks*. Dutch theatre music was to some extent influenced by musical practice from abroad. The instruments used in Dutch theatres, for instance, strongly resemble that of the English consort.²³ Nowadays, it is the subject of analysis by scholars, and performing musicians are also engaged in rediscovering, reviving and reinventing theatre music.²⁴

²⁰ On Macropedius see Grijp, 'Macropedius and Music'. Macropedius is atypical, because he probably composed the tunes for the choral songs himself.

²¹ Rasch, 'Amsterdam, 25 november 1677'.

²² See, for example, Stein, *Songs of Mortals*, on theatre and music in Spain; Powell, *Music and Theatre in France 1600–1680* and Louvat-Molozay, *Théâtre et musique*. See also Veldhorst, *De perfecte verleiding*, pp. 14–17.

²³ See Rasch, 'De muziek in de Amsterdamse Schouwburg', p. 186.

²⁴ So, for instance, The Musicians of Swanne Alley, and their CD *In the Streets and Theatres of London: Elizabethan Ballads and Theatre Music* (released by Veritas x2). Also Camerata Trajectina, *Theatermuziek uit de Gouden Eeuw / Dutch Theatre Music 1600–1650* (released by Globe).

Vondel and Theatre Music

Vondel considered sung choral odes as important means to move the audience; at least this is what he tells us in the preface to his *Jeptha* (1659):

But just as the Greeks cannot be denied the honour of the illustrious invention of drama, which gradually reached its zenith, so too the performance of a sacred tragedy written in the same vein requires a variety of fitting characters, scenery and the singing of the music of choruses, directed by a great musician like Orlando [di Lasso], so that during the performance the audience may hear a heavenly harmony of sacred sounds that attains to all aspects of divine choral art in its perfection in such a way that it entrances souls, as though charming them from the body, and completely delights them with a foretaste of angelic bliss.²⁵

To what extent do we see Vondel's enthusiasm for theatre music embodied in his own work? It is not easy to recognise musical passages in his plays, as Vondel rarely indicated the tunes in the usual manner. We could pay attention to strophic passages and look in the Database of Dutch songs of the Meertens Institute if such stanza forms correspond with those of melodies that were popular in those days (strophic heuristics).²⁶ Another way of recognising them is by looking for verses from plays by Vondel that are used as tune indications in later songbooks. A famous example is the well-known chorus song of Nuns from *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (1637), 'O kersnacht schooner dan de dagen' ('Christmas night, supernally bright').²⁷ To this melody hundreds of new songs were written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Such considerations induced Grijp and Meeus to develop a method of recognising sung passages in theatrical texts, which they demonstrated

²⁵ Vondel, 'Berecht: Aen de begunstelingen der toneelkunste', to *Jeptha*, WB 8, p 779: 'Maer gelijk den Griecken d'eer van den heerlijkcken vont der tooneelspelen, allengs by trappen in top gesteigert, niet kan gelochent worden, zoo vereischt een gewijt treurspel, op hunnen leest geschoeit, tot het uitvoeren, keur van bequame personaedjen, en toestel van tooneel, en maetgezing van reien, geoefent door eenen grooten Orlando, om onder het speelen d'aenschouwers te laeten hooren eene hemelsche gelijkkluidentheit van heilige galmen, die alle deelen der goddelijcke zangkunste in hunne volkomenheit zodaenigh bereickt, datze de zielen buiten zich zelve, als uit den lichame, verruckt, en ten volle met eenen voorsmaek van de gelukzaligheid der engelen vergenoegt.'

²⁶ See <www.liederenbank.nl>. This database contains the stanza forms of thousands of Dutch songs from the early modern period.

²⁷ The translations of *Gysbreght* are by Christiaan Aercke.

with the example of plays by Samuel Coster.²⁸ In this chapter we will apply this method to the tragedies of Vondel.

Doing so, the harvest turns out to be scant, more scant than one would anticipate. Only ten of the thirty-two plays we searched, including Vondel's translations of Greek plays, have text parts with recognisable melodies, so *contrafacta*. Two other plays contain passages that are *possibly contrafacta*. The richest plays with regard to music are the famous *Gysbreght van Aemstel* and, more surprisingly, *Jeptha* (1659). In these tragedies all choruses seem to have been sung or, in the case of *Jeptha*, intended to be sung.

The opening line of the Chorus of Amsterdam Virgins ('Rey van Amsterdamsche maeghden') at the end of the first act of *Gysbreght* recurs as a tune indication in some songbooks printed in Amsterdam around 1650.²⁹ This song has the same stanza form as the aforementioned Chorus of Clarissen, sung at the end of the third act. However, it is not clear whether it was sung to the same melody. According to the form, the Chorus of Denizens ('Rey van Burghzaten') with the famous opening lines: 'Was ever faith more sincere / Between wife and husband clear' ('Waer werd oprechter trouw / Dan Tusschen man en vrouw'), is sung to a melody of the French court composer Antoine de Boësset ('N'espérez plus mes yeux'). The Hymn of Simeon, sung by the Chorus of Nuns in the third act, will have been sung to the popular tune 'Bedruckte herteken' ('Saddened little heart').³⁰ Finally, the Chorus of Noblemen ('Rey van Edelingen') from the second act has a very simple stanza form that looks ready to be sung, but in fact only resembles Psalm 13 of the Reformed tradition, which is a disagreeable melody in such a Catholic play.³¹

²⁸ Grijp and Meeus, 'Muziek op het toneel in de Gouden Eeuw', p. 122.

²⁹ 'Nu stelt het puick van zoete keelen', quoted in *Amsteldamse Vrolijkheit* (1647), J.J. Steendam's *Den Distelvink. Darde Deel* (1650), *Vermeerderde Amsterdamsche VREUGHDE-STROOM* [...] 2e deel (1654) and by Vondel himself for his version of Psalm CXXV.

³⁰ Van Duyse, *Het oude Nederlandsche lied*, vol. 2, p. 1601.

³¹ Later on, Vondel's choruses from *Gysbrecht* were set to new music, for instance by Alphons Diepenbrock (1892/95) and Bernard Zweers (1892). The Catholic brothers Alberdingk Thijm included several Gysbrecht choruses in their *Oude en Nieuwere Kerst-Liederen* (*Old and Newer Christmas Songs*), published with piano or organ accompaniment 'for choirs and catholic families' (Amsterdam 1852): 'O Kernacht! schooner dan de dagen' (no. 69) and 'Wij, Nederlanders, blij van geest' (no. 82), an adaptation of Vondel's chorus 'Wy edelingen, bly van geest'. In spite of the Catholic connotation these choruses were also included in the *Liedboek van de kerken* (*Hymnal of the Churches*, 1973) of the Dutch Protestant church: 'Wij edelingen blij van geest' (set to music by

In *Jeptha of Offerbelofte* (*Jephta or the Sacrificial Vow*, 1659) it is the Chorus of Virgins that concludes the acts with texts that, in view of the stanza forms, could be sung to popular melodies: 'O Schepper fier' ('O proud Creator', first act), 'Questa dolce sirena' ('That sweet siren', second act), 'Objet dont les charmes si doux' ('Object of which the charms so sweet', third act), and 'Blijdschap van mij vliet' ('Joy flee from me', fourth act). This extraordinary richness of *contrafacta* – at least for Vondel – explains the aforementioned emphasis on music in the preface.

In the other plays, too, choral passages occur at the end of the acts. However, Vondel often gave them long, artfully construed stanza forms that are not to be found in the repertoire of popular songs of his age. Often Vondel expands such a 'Strophe' ('Zang') with an 'Antistrophe' ('Tegenzang') and an 'Epode' or 'Closing hymn' ('Toezang'), comparable to the strophe, antistrophe and epode of classical Greek tragedy. In some instances, a passage in a characteristic stanza form occurs alongside these typically Vondelian forms. This is the case in the 'Gesang van d'Egyptische Goden APIS en ISIS' ('Song of the Egyptian deities Apis and Isis') from *Joseph in Egypten* (*Joseph in Egypt*, 1640). This song even has a tune indication: 'Objet dont les charmes si doux', the same melody Vondel would use in *Jeptha* two decades later. In the second act of *Salomon* (1648) the Ladies-in-waiting ('hofjuffers') sing a song in a characteristic strophe, belonging to the popular song 'Ach ongelukkige dag' ('Oh ill-fated day'). There are other plays in which one outspoken song passage occurs alongside choruses with more neutral forms: *Palamedes* (1625), *Lucifer* (1654), *Faëton* (1663) and *Noah* (1667).³² *Leeuwendalers* (1647), and the translation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*

Adriaan C. Schuurman, 1904–1998) and 'O kerstnacht, schoner dan de dagen', nos. 153 and 154 respectively. Johannes Verhulst (1816–1891) wrote an 'Ouverture Gijsbreght van Aemstel' (1839). A century later, in 1937, Henk Badings (1907–1987) wrote a 'Heroïsche Ouverture' to Vondel's "Gijsbreght van Aemstel".

³² In *Palamedes*, ll. 167–286, the song 'We, soldiers, in our turn do heed' ('Wij Krijslieën passen op ons' beurt') of the combined choruses of Euboeans and Ithacians, has a rather characteristic strophe which in the songbooks often has the indication 'Coridon en Sylvia'; the stanza form of the Chorus of Angels (Rey van Engelen) in *Lucifer*, ll. 1982–2001, betrays the tune 'Questa dolce sirena'; the Chorus of Hours (Rey van Uuren) in *Faëton*, ll. 157–222, can be sung to 'Den lustelijken mei'; the song of the Ladies-in-waiting (Joffers), 'Zou het al zinken en vergaen, / Waer bleef de zwaen?' has exactly the same form as a tune with an unidentified tune indication 'Crakougie', to be found in P. Elzevier, *Den Lacchenden Apoll* (Amsterdam, 1667), printed in the same year as Vondel's play. Possibly this tune corresponds with the popular tune 'Quand la bergère'.

(*Koning Edipus*, 1660) also contain passages that may be based on existing melodies.³³

Apart from these extremes in which all choral songs are sung or only one single passage, there are also plays in which several musical parts are sided by more neutral choruses, viz. *Het Pascha* (*Passover*, 1612) and *Hippolytus* (1628). In Vondel's first play *Het Pascha*, two or three sung choruses occur: (1) the 'hymn or song of praise' ('hymne of lofzang') of the chorus of Israelites ('Israelitische Rei': 'Nu zinght, nu speelt, nu reyt en danst'; 'Now sing and dance in chorus') in which one may easily recognise the popular melody 'De lustelijke mei is nu in de tijd' ('The pleasant May is now'), (2) the song 'Hebreen speelt s'Hemels lof' ('Hebrews play the praise of Heaven') from the fourth act, which is quoted by Abraham de Koning as a tune indication in *Achabs treurspel* (*Tragedy of Achab*, 1610),³⁴ and (3) the chorus ode 'Steenen Farao wilt swichten' ('Stone Pharaoh do yield') which is in keeping with the reformed Psalm 38 that, during his Anabaptist period, Vondel may have deemed suitable for a play.³⁵ In the second act of *Hippolytus* (1628) a Chorus starts to sing in the stanza form of 'Phoebus is lang over zee' and then turns to that of 'Sei tanto gratioso'.³⁶ The chorus at the end of the fourth act, 'Hoe draeyt Fortuyn het al', is also written in a song-like strophe. The melody is mentioned in the margin: 'Het was een jonger held' ('It was a young hero').³⁷

Let us recount what we have found so far. There are ten (or maybe a few more) plays in which music occurs. In two of them all choruses seem to be sung on existing melodies and in most other plays only one or some passages. This is a relatively small number compared to the

³³ *Leeuwendalers*, ll. 1997–2021, 'It is a wedding in the meadow' ('t Is bruiloft in de weide'), is written in an unidentified, song-like stanza form; *Koning Edipus*, ll. 1301–10, Edipus' 'Turn' ('Keer') 'Citheron, spel ick met mijn' mont' has a stanza form that, coincidentally or otherwise, fits the popular songs 'Wanneer de zon met morgenrood' and 'Aan watervlieten Babylons'.

³⁴ As can be concluded from the dates (*Achab* 1610, *Het Pascha* 1612) De Koning did not use the printed version for his *contrafactum*, but a manuscript. *Het Pascha* had already been performed in 1610.

³⁵ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 1, p. 52, n. 3, already mentioned the possibility that chorus songs from *Het Pascha* were sung on Psalm melodies.

³⁶ The songs start at ll. 889 and 931. These melodies were already observed by Bruinsma, 'An introduction to Vondel and music', p. 111.

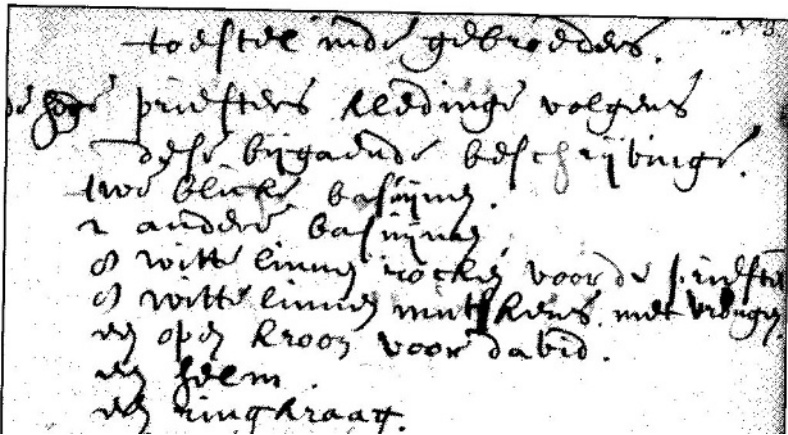
³⁷ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 1, pp. 151–52, is surprised by the exceptional mention the tunes receive and the unconventional form of the chorus after the second act, consisting of three clearly distinct parts. He does not have an explanation for either phenomenon.

over thirty plays by Vondel we examined. The method may be one of the reasons for this scant crop: we limited ourselves to identifying passages with formal characteristics of strophic songs. It is possible that melodies are hidden behind the uncharacteristic songs, i.e. melodies that belong to songs with less characteristic stanza forms. They do exist. Moreover, we have to consider the possibility that Vondel had other resources for music than making *contrafacta* on popular melodies. His chorus songs could have been set to music by composers.

Let us take Vondel's *Gebroeders* (*Brothers*, 1640). The structure of the songs in itself does not induce us to think of a musical performance. There is, however, an (oft-cited) manuscript direction to this play indicating that the priests' ode was sung and that instruments were played (at least during the first performances):

The musicians play on their wind instruments this appended composition, which was sung by priests on stage, in four parts.³⁸

The singers were males. We know that from Vondel's own handwritten casting, mentioning the four singers of the choruses: Barend van Hoorn, Jacob Willems, Jan Nooseman and Jelis Nooseman. Jelis was



Joost van den Vondel, *Gebroeders*, t'Amsterdam, by Dominicus vander Stichel, for Abraham de Wees, 1640. 4°. KB 392 H 28.

³⁸ 'De speeluiden speelen op haar blaas Instrumenten dit bijgaende musijkstuk gespeelt ende van priesteren op het toneel gesongen, met vier partijen'; see Veldhorst, *De perfecte verleiding*, pp. 144–45.

14 years old in 1640, his brother Jan 19, and the others probably in between.³⁹ Vondel also noted in the list of properties 'two trombones made of sheet metal' ('twe blicke basuijnen') and 'two other trombones' ('2 andere besuijnen') as well as 'trumpeters' ('trompetters'). Obviously, the chorus had to be sung by the four singers, accompanied by four trombones. This must have resulted in a solemn sound, quite different from the usual chant by one or two voices accompanied by flute, violin and bass. Unfortunately the sheet with the music is no longer extant. Possibly the composition applied to the first act, in which the chorus of priests strides into the temple of Gibeah (ll. 153 sqq.). There Vondel wrote:

when entering, the final part of the chorus of the priests will be sung, and played by the musicians⁴⁰

A few verses later is written:

the presentation of the ark of the covenant and the menorah, and the added song are spoken by the priests in this way⁴¹

Apparently, the choral song of the priests was partly sung and partly spoken, at least if we take Vondel's word 'gesproken' (spoken) literally (which might also be a neutral expression for 'rendered' here).⁴² The entire choral song comprises a Chant and an Antichant, both coming to fourteen verses, and an Epode of eight verses. It must have been an impressive moment in the performance. This can also be inferred from its reception. In Jan Zoet's *Thimoklea* (1641) we see the stanza form of the Epode from *Gebroeders* in a song, sung by 'Sacrificial singers' ('Offerzangers') who execute a sacrifice by means of which Alexander the Great hopes to obtain a prophecy of the future.⁴³ The situation is similar to that in *Gebroeders* when King David visits the temple to ask God's advice. Six years after *Thimoklea* we find in Willem van Heemskerck's *Hebreeusche Heldinne* (*Hebrew Heroine*, 1657) the entire

³⁹ See Grijp, 'Boys and Female Impersonators', p. 150. For a facsimile of the cast list of *Gebroeders* written by Vondel himself, see Albach, *Langs kermissen en hoven*, p. 48; Erenstein, *Een theatergeschiedenis der Nederlanden*, p. 223.

⁴⁰ 'ingaende wort de toesang vande priesteren gesongen en van de speeluiden gespeelt.'

⁴¹ 'de vertooning vande bondkist en kandelaer en de toesang word aldus van de priesters gesproken.'

⁴² The remarks quoted do not make clear which parts exactly were sung or spoken. In both remarks only the Epode ('Toezang') is mentioned.

⁴³ See Cordes, *Jan Zoet, Amsterdammer*, pp. 154–64, without mentioning music.

stanza form of Vondel's chorus of priests, including Strophe, Antistrophe and Epode. In this case the solemn procession consists of the Chorus of Bethulians, who carry along with them the head of a defeated enemy. It can be concluded that the music of Vondel's Chorus of Priests is reused by Zoet and Heemskerck for similar, solemn situations in their own tragedies, provided with new texts fitting the situation.

The music of the Chorus of Priests has not been preserved, neither is it known who composed it, although there are some conjectures. These hint at Cornelis Thymansz. Padbrué (1592–1672), with whom, by 1640, Vondel had started a fruitful cooperation, precisely at the time of his writing *Gebroeders*.⁴⁴ Padbrué came from a musical family and entered the company of Haarlem city musicians ('stadsspeelluiden'), but was dismissed from civic service in 1635. From then on he probably supported himself as a freelance musician. Padbrué published several collections of madrigals and motets on texts by the poet Jacob Westerbaen (1599–1670), Vondel, and others.

The poet and the composer, both Catholics, probably were friends.⁴⁵ As early as 1633, Vondel wrote an amusing song for the composer in which he invited him to set his texts to music:

O delicate Thymen,
When your tongue starts to rhyme
On the field or in the choir
You glue everything to your ear, [...]⁴⁶

We don't know if Padbrué immediately answered Vondel's call, but in 1640 Vondel's poem *De Kruisbergh (Mount Calvary)* was published, 'set to music [...] by Cornelis Padbrué'. In 1641 Vondel had its text reprinted after his *Peter en Pauwels (Peter and Paul)*, without music.

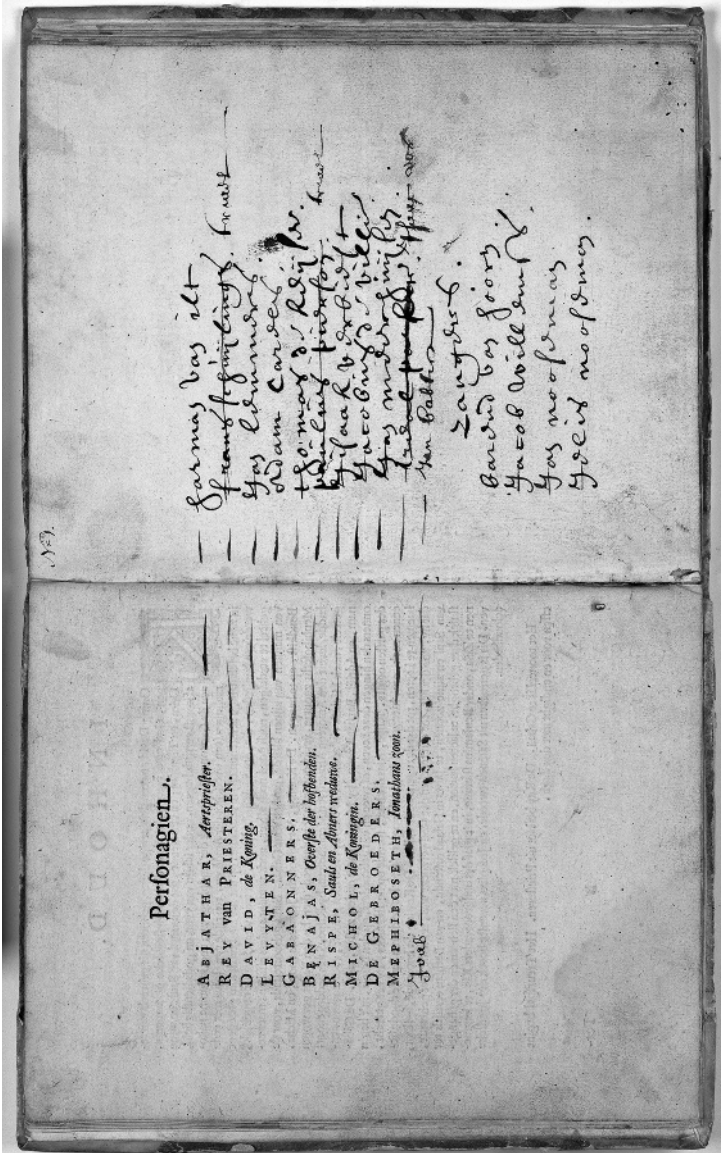
Padbrué also set sections of *Peter en Pauwels* to music. He not only composed music for the choral odes, but also for a selection of verses in the action that normally were spoken. His composition became a major work, a kind of oratorio, which was published in 1646 as *De tranen Petri ende Pauli (The Tears of Peter and Paul)*.⁴⁷ The composer writes:

⁴⁴ See on Padbrué *NNBW* 10, coll. 701–02 [Van den Sigtenhorst Meyer] and on his friendship with Vondel, Noske, 'Padbrué en Vondel'.

⁴⁵ Sterck, *Oorkonden over Vondel en zijn kring*, pp. 139–40.

⁴⁶ WB 3, p. 405: 'O genoegelijcke Thymen, / Als uw tong begint te rijmen, / Op het velt of in het koor / Lijmt gij alles aan uw oor, [...]'.

⁴⁷ Unfortunately, two of the five parts have been lost. On the reconstruction of the piece, see Noske, 'Vondel en de muziek'; Noske, 'Padbrué en Vondel'; Van Asperen, 'Padbrué's *Tranen*'. On the cd *Dutch Theatre Music 1600–1650* of Camerata Trajectina,



Perfonagien.

A B J A T H A R, *Arctpriester.*
 R E Y V A N P R I E S T E R E N.
 D A V I D, *de Koning.*
 L E Y V T E N.
 G A R A O N N E R S.
 B E N J A M, *Ouerfte der Iofthaniden.*
 R I S P E, *Saalt en Abner veldiane.*
 M I C H O L, *de Koningin.*
 D E G E B R O E D E R S.
 M E P H I B O S E T H, *Jonathans zoon.*
 J o o b

Sarmas bay alt
 Sferms fginging. *Kunst*
 Gos Eburnus
 Wiam Carsee
 t. o. m. a. s. d. R. i. j. m.
 p. u. l. c. i. u. s. p. r. i. e. s. t. e. r. e. n.
 b. i. j. l. a. a. k. v. d. e. b. i. d. e. t.
 J. a. c. o. b. u. s. v. i. l. l. e. i.
 G. o. s. m. o. o. f. m. a. s.
 G. r. e. c. u. s. m. o. o. f. m. a. s.
 Van Baltha
 Zangst. *?*
 Barend van Joors
 Jacob Willem
 Gos mo of mas
 Gecus mo of mas

Joost van den Vondel, *Gebroeders*, t'Amsterdam, by Dominicus vander Stichel, for Abraham de Wees, 1640. 4°. KB 392 H 28, fol. 6v-7r.

Our Dutch playwright, and exceptionally talented Poet, Van den Vondel had staged this so poignantly and edifyingly, that my music was inflamed to stage the choral odes and follow his metres and rhymes with strings and voices, and to represent the power of and force of his style naturally and powerfully in such a way that my notes, as they told me, touched on Your Honour's heart and moved it almost to tears, when Your Honour's ears heard the bitter laments of our Simon Peter and his companion Paul.⁴⁸

Obviously Vondel had been moved almost to tears when he heard his verses set to music by Padbrué. It is impossible that this happened at a regular performance in the Amsterdam municipal theatre. There Vondel's play has never been staged, due to its Catholic character. Perhaps Padbrué initially composed the choruses, as in *Gebroeders*, and then went on to set other verses to music when it became clear that the play would not be staged. Thus it was possible to attain at least a musical performance, though in a condensed form.

In sum, in Vondel there are several types of musical passages: *contra-facta* on existing melodies and music composed especially for the situation, such as in *Gebroeders* and *Peter en Pauwels*. We do not know whether music was composed for Vondel's songs in drama prior to *Gebroeders*. One possibility is the Chorus of Nuns from *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, the melody of which has sometimes been ascribed to Padbrué. The main argument for this is in fact merely that there are no musical sources or mention of that melody before 1638, when *Gysbreght* debuted.

There is yet another way of recognising musical passages in theatre pieces that has not been mentioned so far: so-called 'cantat-formulas'. For instance, in *Adam in ballingschap* (*Adam Exiled*, 1664) Adam introduces the Chorus of Guardian Angels (Rey van Wachtengelen) as follows:

Guardian angels, follow our track. Break into a merry song. Tell us
By turns about the origin of all things.

one of Padbrué's choruses from *De Tranen* has been recorded, reconstructed by Louis Grijp.

⁴⁸ Padbrué, 'Dedication to Symon Felt' in Padbrué, *De Tranen Petri ende Pauli*: 'Onze Neerlantsche Dichter, en zonderlingh begaefde Poët, van de Vondel had dit zoo beweechlyck en stightelyck op het tooneel gebrocht, dat myn Zang-kunst ontvonckt wert, om de reyen op het tooneel aen te voeren, zyn maet en rymen met snaeren en stemmen te volgen, en de kracht en het pit van dien styl naer myn vermogen wat natuerlyck en krachtigh uyt te beelden, zulcks dat myn Nooten, zo my gezeyt wiert, uw E. Hart raeckten, en bykans tot traenen beweeghde, als uwe E. Lief-hebbende ooren het bitt're traen geluit van onsen Symon Petrus en zyn mee-gezel Paulus omvingen,' cited from Veldhorst, *De perfecte verleiding*, p. 214, n. 142.

The resonance of Paradise inspires desire to sing along with you
How this universe was made so gloriously out of nothing.⁴⁹

This appeal is followed by a threefold Strophe and Antistrophe (Zang and Tegenzang) by the guardian angels, written in six typically long Vondel stanzas of fourteen verses each, which in no way suggest a *contrafactum* of a popular song. We may speculate that Vondel nevertheless intended this chorus to be sung, hoping for a composer to set it to music. On the other hand, he must have realised that a stage performance was most unlikely at that time, because after *Gebroeders* the plays that Vondel (who converted to Catholicism) wrote were no longer staged as regularly, and after Padbrué's setting of *Peter en Pauwels*, no music was composed for any of his theatrical texts.

One may wonder whether the composed polyphonic music in *Gebroeders* (1640) marked a turn in Vondel's relation to theatre music from the *contrafactum* system to composed music,⁵⁰ for which Padbrué's setting of *Peter en Pauwels* was a logical consequence. This does not seem to be the case. On the contrary, we have observed above that even in his later tragedies, which had become closet dramas, Vondel occasionally adopted a chorus that could be sung to a popular tune.

Six years after Vondel's death one of his late pieces was performed after all. In 1685 Govert Bidloo staged Vondel's *Faëton, Oft reuckelose stoutheid* (*Phaeton, or Reckless Valour*, 1663) in his own adaptation.⁵¹ This play on the overambitious son of the Sun god who wished to drive his father's chariot but failed, had never been performed during Vondel's life. It took a daring defender of Vondel's plays to get it staged. In Bidloo's interpretation, *Faëton* became a musical-dramatic show with music and dance, as well as pomp and circumstance and theatrical machines. Bidloo even added musical choruses. We might say that justice was done to Vondel after all, but there were also critics complaining that Bidloo had violated Vondel's piece.

What about the set music scenes that Veldhorst discerned in the plays of Jan Harmensz. Krul (1601–1646) and that she extended to seventeenth-century drama in general – guardian and prison scenes,

⁴⁹ Vondel, *Adam in ballingschap*, ll. 211–214: 'Wachtenglen, volght ons spoor. heft vrolijk aen: ontvout, / By beurte op eene ry, den oirsprong aller dingen. / De galm van 't paradijs scheidt lust u na te zingen / Hoe dit heelal uit niet zoo heerlijk wiert gebout.'

⁵⁰ This was suggested in Grijp, 'Muziek en literatuur', p. 252.

⁵¹ See on this Rasch, '19 februari 1685'; Veldhorst, *De perfecte verleiding*, n. 147, gives an interesting addition about the melodies involved.

serenade, sacrifice and sleeping scene? The only one of these scenes to which Vondel seems to have felt attracted is the sacrifice. In *Het Pascha* the Chorus of Israelites is singing during Moses's offering. But at this time the musical sacrifice was not yet a set scene; in fact, it was the first musical sacrificial scene on the Dutch stage.⁵² Furthermore, the famous four-part Chorus of Priests in *Gebroeders*, sung when King David enters the temple, recalls the atmosphere of a sacrifice. In *Jeptha* the Chorus of Virgins sings when Jephthah's daughter has prepared herself for sacrifice – although the sacrifice itself is not shown onstage. Finally there may have been musical elements in the Mass scene in *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (1637) that could also be regarded as a kind of sacrifice. But we do not know this for sure; the burgomasters protested against the 'display of forms of papistic superstition such as Masses and other ceremonies' and the play was not allowed to be performed until the Mass scene had been removed.⁵³

Conclusion

Applying methods such as strophic heuristics to Vondel's drama texts, we have found that some of his plays contain *contrafacta*, i.e. texts meant to be sung to popular tunes, just as other Golden Age authors did for their theatre plays. Unlike them, Vondel wanted only choruses to be sung and did not write solo songs. Vondel's production of theatre *contrafacta* is not very high: we have found them in at most a dozen out of the more than thirty plays we investigated. But it is possible that Vondel expected his choral texts to be set to music by composers such as his friend Cornelis Thymansz. Padbrué, especially his extensive choruses composed of Strophes, Antistrophes and Epodes, written in long ingenious stanzas. Our most striking observation is that after Vondel's plays were not performed on stage anymore, he did not change his musical policy when writing new plays: he continued to include *contrafacta* in some of his dramas and sometimes suggested that his choruses should be sung. Although he must have realised that his plays would serve as closet dramas, Vondel obviously continued to conceive of them as being accompanied by a performance, including singing and music.

⁵² Veldhorst *De perfecte verleiding*, p. 137.

⁵³ '[...] verthooninghe van de superstition van de papertije als misse en andere ceremonien'. See Sterck in WB, 3, p. 514; unsurprisingly, the ministers of the Reformed church disapproved of theatre in general, see, for instance, Duits, '11 november 1621'.

APPENDIX. *Contrafacta* in plays by Vondel

The numbers of volumes and pages refer to the WB-edition.

Het Pascha ofte De verlossinge Israels wt Egijpten (1612)

- Act 2 (1, p. 219) Choor 'Steenen Pharao wilt swichten': stanza of Psalm 38
- Act 4 (1, p. 242) Den reye der Israeliten zinghen 'Hebreen speelt s'Hemels lof': quoted as a tune indication in *Achabs Treur-spel* (1618) by Abraham de Koning
- Act 5 (1, p. 252) Hymne ofte lof-zangh vanden Israelijtschen reye 'Nu zinght, nu speelt, nu reyt en danst': stanza of 'De lustelijke mei'

Palamedes oft Vermoorde onnoselheyd (1625)

- Act 1 (2, p. 644) Rey van Eubeërs [and] Rey van Ithakaisen 'Wy Krijslieën passen op ons' beurt': stanza of 'Coridon en Sylvia'

Hippolytus of Rampsalige kuyscheyd (1628)

- Act 2 (3, p. 230) Rey 'Sneller vlied hy met sijn' voet': stanzas of 'Phoebus is lang over de zee' and 'Sei tanto gratioso'
- Act 4 (3, p. 248) Rey 'Hoe draeyt Fortuyn het al': tune indication in the margin 'Het was een jonger held'

Gysbreght van Aemstel (1637)

- Act 1 (3, p. 547) Rey van Amsterdamsche maeghden 'Nu stelt het puick van zoete keelen', quoted as tune indication by Vondel himself and others
- Act 2 (3, p. 557) Rey van edelingen 'Wy edelingen, bly van geest': stanza of Psalm 13
- Act 3 (3, p. 565) Rey van Klaerissen 'O Kersnacht, schooner dan de daegen': quoted as tune indication for dozens of song texts
- Act 4 (3, p. 570) Rey [van Klaerissen] 'Vergun, o God, op zijne bede' (Hymn of Simeon): tune indication 'Bedruckte harteke' (in Vondel's *Poëzy* (1650), p. 574)
- Act 4 (3, p. 577) Rey van Burghzaten 'Waer werd oprechter trouw': stanza of 'N'espérez plus mes yeux' (A. de Boësset)

Joseph in Egypten (1640)

- Appendix to the play (4, p. 247) Gesang van d'Egyptische Goden APIS en ISIS 'Och Apis Apis och wat haet': tune indication 'Object dont les charmes si doux'

Leeuwendalers (1647)

- Act 5 (5, p. 353) Rey van Leeuwendalers 'tIs bruiloft in de weide': unidentified lyrical stanza, possibly of 'Hoe zalig zijn de landen'

Salomon (1648)

- Act 2 (5, p. 390) Hofjoffers 'Nu zingt Astarte lof': stanza of 'Ach ongelukkige dag'

Lucifer (1654)

- Act 5 (5, p. 689) Rey van Engelen 'Gezegt zy de Helt': stanza of 'Questa dolce sirena'

Jeptha of Offerbelofte (1659)

- Act 1 (8, p. 792) Rey van Maeghden 'O Galaäd': stanza of 'O Schepper fier'
- Act 2 (8, p. 806) Rey van Maeghden 'Aertsvader Josef, och': stanza of 'Questa dolce sirena'
- Act 3 (8, p. 828) Rey van Maeghden 'Toen d'oude dwinglant van den Nijl': stanza of 'Objet dont les charmes si doux'
- Act 4 (8, p. 838) Rey van Maeghden 'Laet gehoorzaamheit': stanza of 'Blijdschap van mij vliet'

Koning Edipus Uit Sofokles (1660)

- (8, p. 919) Edipus 'Citheron, spel ick met mijn' mont': possibly stanza of 'Wanneer de zon het morgenrood' or 'Aan watervlieten Babylon'

Faëton of Reuckeloze Stoutheit (1663)

- Act 1 (6, p. 43) Rey van Uuren 'Verheffen we eenstemmigh met lofgedicht': stanza of 'De lustelijke mei'

Noah of ondergang der Eerste weerelt (1667)

- Act 3 (10, p. 436) Joffers 'Zou het al zinken en vergaen': stanza of 'Crakougie' which is possibly 'Quand la bergère'

CHAPTER NINE

VONDEL'S DRAMAS: THEIR AFTERLIFE IN PERFORMANCE

Mieke B. Smits-Veldt

The festive inauguration of the Amsterdam Schouwburg on 3 January 1638 with a performance of Vondel's *Gysbreght van Aemstel* had established him as the Netherlands' leading playwright. This play about the dramatic downfall of medieval Amsterdam and its unsuccessful defence against an army from Haarlem by brave city lord Van Aemstel struck home perfectly. The cunning attack by the vengeful enemy on Christmas night, the seizure of the Carthusian monastery outside the city walls, the depiction of Gijsbreght's fruitless battle to save the city, the despair of his loyal wife, the unscrupulous killing of the nuns in the Clarissen Convent: it appealed to everything that could enthral an Amsterdam Schouwburg audience. The shocking reversals of fortune faced by their forebears, the emotional dialogues and bloodcurdling narratives, the lyrical choruses and horrific spectacles, all set in an Amsterdam ravaged by flames, evoked memories of their own recent conflict with Spain, but it also filled residents of Amsterdam with pride in their city, which after its medieval decline had now risen again in glory. For centuries, *Gysbreght van Aemstel* would remain Amsterdam's favourite play.¹ It would be staged each year (bar one) around New Year until 1968, from 1841 always on New Year's Day. These were performances to which parents took their children to give them their first experience of the theatre.²

In the years that followed it was impossible to imagine Dutch theatre without Vondel. He was heavily involved in the stage management and his dramatic productivity was astonishing. In 1641, aside from *Gysbreght*, five more of his dramas were staged, all written after *Gysbreght* and all destined for lasting success: three plays telling the

¹ Vondel, *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, ed. Smits-Veldt; Van Gemert, '3 januari 1638: De opening van de Amsterdamse Schouwburg'; Smits-Veldt, '3 januari 1638: Opening van de Amsterdamse Schouwburg'.

² Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gysbreght van Aemstel'*, p. 95.

story of the Joseph of the Old Testament (one of the three translated from a Latin play written by Hugo Grotius), a translation of Sophocles' *Elektra*, and his next biblical drama called *Gebroeders* (*Brothers*, 1640), his first play to be written entirely in the style of Greek tragedy. In that same Schouwburg, until 1665 when the theatre was completely renovated, a further eleven plays by Vondel debuted, six of them treating biblical themes. However, with a couple of exceptions (*Salomon* in 1650 and *Jeptha* in 1659), these were far less popular with audiences.³ Four plays from this period were not in fact performed at all, partly because the playwright (now Catholic) was broaching issues that were far too 'Roman Catholic', and partly because there were more and more complaints being put forward about the religious themes of Vondel's mostly biblical dramas. One of the four plays that were not staged, the biblical *Adam in ballingschap* (*Adam Exiled*, 1664), would go on to become a popular play many years later. Aside from this Vondel complained that he was being hampered by the influential director of the Schouwburg, Jan Vos, who gave roles in his plays to incompetent actors and dressed them in old, threadbare costumes. In truth his deeply serious tragedies, in which words and argumentation were central, and his never-ending call to moral reflection, no longer satisfied the growing taste for visually appealing and varied spectacle – in contrast to *Gysbreght*. People had also begun to demand a degree of excitement. In Vondel's plays the dénouement came too soon and its effect was dissipated by long discourses in lofty language that audiences found hard to follow.⁴ Incidentally, Jan Vos, the great master of allegorical representation, embellished *Lucifer* (1654) and *Jeptha* (1659) with spectacular displays in mime, presumably to boost takings. Vondel himself seems in some cases to have left room for so-called 'tableaux vivants' to meet the demand for visual gratification.⁵ Perhaps *Lucifer* might have been a success if the Calvinist clergy had not protested so vehemently to the burgomasters against a play that was set in heaven, but as it was the work was performed only twice. After the renovation of the Schouwburg none of the four dramas Vondel was to write between 1666 and his death in 1679 were performed onstage.

In 1665 the Amsterdam Schouwburg acquired a deep stage with wings. From this point on, with scenery that could easily be changed,

³ Oey-de Vita and Geesink, *Academie en schouwburg*.

⁴ Porteman and Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen*, pp. 378, 528, 707.

⁵ Smits-Veldt, 'Vertoningen in opvoeringen van Vondels tragedies'.

many plays performed there were solemn affairs, usually translations of classicistic French works. Moreover, the theatre was now equipped with complex machinery that made sensational effects possible. It was on this stage, therefore, that *Gysbreght van Aemstel* was performed annually, in part in the setting of the classicistic 'Great Hall' scenery, with paintings and niches created by the famous painter Gerard de Lairesse (1640–1711). Here the angel Raphael, who at the end of the play instructs Gijsbreght to leave the city with his family and go into exile, could literally descend from the heavens in a painted cloud, which parted at the bottom.⁶ But probably not long after 1678, when the management of the Schouwburg was taken over by the society *Nil volentibus arduum* with its French classicistic orientation, Vondel's texts were taken to task. The French classicists wished to avoid anything that could be implausible or offensive. The treatment of biblical subjects was regarded as objectionable in itself, which precluded performance of most of Vondel's plays, as was any religious allusion, especially to the Catholic faith that the characters in *Gysbreght* adhere to purely and simply because the play had been set in medieval Amsterdam. As a result many passages in this play were omitted or altered to make them religiously neutral, including the hymns sung in the convent. In a stage script printed in 1729, giving the text as it had been performed 'these many years past', the choruses have been scrapped too. They only interrupted the action, and as group performances they were regarded by *Nil* as illogical.⁷ *Gysbreght* was popular with actors and over the centuries the main roles were performed by the leading names of their day. In the years before 1745 Jan Punt excelled at stylised melodramatic acting and what was known as the 'heroic tone of Holland', a melodious, declamatory delivery that increasingly met with resistance in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Until well into that century medieval heroes continued to be dressed in contemporary costumes, Gijsbreght appearing in a wig, tails, and white silk stockings, his wife Badeloch in a hoop skirt, and in an illustration from 1745 the angel floats down in a splendid Watteau-style gown.⁸ The tableau vivant that depicts the murder of the Clarissan nuns and Bishop Gozewijn, who has sought

⁶ Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gijsbreght van Aemstel'*, p. 34.

⁷ Vondel, *Gysbrecht van Aemstel* (1729); Van der Haven, "Dat dan de Schouwburg nooit op godsdienst schempe of smaal..." pp. 6–14.

⁸ Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gijsbreght van Aemstel'*, pp. 49–50, 54.

sanctuary in their convent, remained a standard attraction. This is how it would have been presented to the audience in the eighteenth century: after enemy troops had forced their way into the convent and the nuns and the bishop had been stabbed, the curtain would fall, to be raised a few minutes later to reveal a stirring tableau of expressively posed groups of murderers and the murdered.⁹

Along with the ever successful *Gysbreght*, Vondel's *Joseph* plays survived the changed climate at the Schouwburg for several more years, despite opposition to the staging of biblical material. Since 1653 they had been combined into a single performance, and until 1708 audiences could enjoy the portrayal of the old Bible story of Joseph at regular intervals, from his brothers' treachery to his dramatic confrontation with Potiphar's lecherous wife, his ascension to the position of viceroy of Egypt, and his pardoning of his now humble brothers. In 1690 and 1706 Schouwburg director Jan Pluimer made several further less than wholly successful attempts to breathe new life into the drama *Batavische gebroeders* (*Batavian Brothers*), which had been performed a mere three times in 1663, during the First Stadtholderless Period (1650–1672).¹⁰ In 1663 audiences had been able to make a direct connection between the events of their own time, when the ascent of the young William III was seen as a real threat, and the resistance mounted by freedom fighter Claudius Civilis and his brother to the infringement of 'Batavian freedom' by a Roman Stadtholder many centuries earlier. In 1690 Amsterdam had a tense relationship with the new Stadtholder and in 1702 another Stadtholderless era began. If Pluimer had been hoping to revive the political connotations of the play, then he failed to find a willing audience. Furthermore, the first time around he hedged his bets by providing the play with an allegorical prelude which actually paid tribute to William III.¹¹

What did go down well was excitement, emotion, a feast for eyes and ears, with plenty of music, song and dance. In 1684–1687 grand allegorical occasional plays and lyrical dramas that met these requirements were a speciality of the physician Govert Bidloo (1649–1713). This same period saw lavish experimentation with productions of French operas, probably performed by French troupes. In 1685 Bidloo tackled two of Vondel's non-biblical tragedies whose content was mythological,

⁹ Albach, 'De vertoning van de kloostermoorden', pp. 331–33.

¹⁰ De Haas, *Het repertoire van de Amsterdamse Schouwburg 1700–1772*.

¹¹ Smits-Veldt, 'Vertoningen in opvoeringen van Vondels tragedies', p. 217.

and which also, in line with classicistic rules, lent themselves well to embellishment with spectacular and essentially implausible stage effects. They were *Faëton* (*Phaeton*, 1663), which tells the dramatic story of the reckless son of the sun king crashing to earth in his father's sun chariot, and then *Salmoneus* (1657), about an arrogant king who tries to rival the god Jupiter. *Faëton* had never been staged before, but *Salmoneus* had been. Vondel had written the latter play to make good the financial blow the Schouwburg had suffered as a result of the ban on *Lucifer* (1654): after all, the heavenly scenery could be reused for *Salmoneus*, despite its heathen setting. The play had met with some success in 1657, perhaps partly because of the *tableaux vivants* inserted into it. Bidloo's solution was not static *tableaux*, however, but additional scenes with songs, ballet, mime, and much use of the machinery the Schouwburg had had at its disposal since 1665. *Faëton* especially became a true showpiece. Bidloo made few changes to the main text, but the play now opened with a Prologue in four scenes, in which several mythological and a large number of allegorical figures such as Night, Care, Work, Alertness, Sleep, Aurora, and the Hours of the Day portrayed the end of the night and the coming of daytime in speech, singing, and dancing. Then the impressive decor of the Court of the Sun was revealed. Even the lightning strike that causes Phaeton to crash amid clamorous calamity into the River Po along with his chariot must also have been tremendously impressive.¹² Bidloo introduced additional characters and sizeable chunks of text from his own hand into *Salmoneus* as well, again interlarding the play with song and dance, performed this time not by allegorical figures but by shepherds and shepherdesses, a chorus of soothsayers, maidens, and suchlike. A speaking picture of an oracle was introduced as an added attraction. As in *Faëton*, the fall of the central character is portrayed in an interpolated *entr'acte* full of thunder, lightning, and unceasing action, followed by singing and dancing performed by 'wrestling Slaves': a sensually gratifying spectacle.¹³

Faëton in particular was a great success in 1685 and 1686, although not everyone was delighted. In a satirical 'ode' actor Hermannus Brinkhuizen protested against what he regarded as an ignoble corruption of Vondel's texts and asked whether Vondel had perhaps at some

¹² Rasch, '19 februari 1655: Onder regie van Govard Bidloo wordt Vondels *Faëton* opgevoerd'. Bidloo's productions in Vondel, *De werken*, ed. Van Lennep, 10, pp. 331–44.

¹³ Vondel, *De werken*, ed. Van Lennep, 7, pp. 117–30.

point worried that without such trappings his 'style, and reasoning' would displease the audience.¹⁴ But in 1715 the embellished *Faëton* was put on again and it was staged fairly regularly until 1761. As late as 1810 it was performed three times.¹⁵ In 1865 Jacob van Lennep, who had grown up to become a Vondel expert, still remembered going with his father to see it, as an eight-year-old boy. The characters had been shabbily dressed, he remembered. The Hours of the Day and the Night, for example, were not wearing the beautiful robes described by Bidloo or, in the case of Night, dark, star-spangled veils. Instead they were played by ladies dressed in white, who wore an indication of their role only on their belts. Even eighteenth-century directors had been stumped by Vondel's script: the *hemelraed* or 'council of heaven,' by which Vondel meant a gathering of all the gods of Olympus, was presented as a distinguished old gentleman with powdered wig and beard, a kind of *Geheimrat* (privy councillor).¹⁶

In the eighteenth century, allegorical ornamentation of non-mythological plays was concentrated in separate tableaux vivants performed between the acts. Such displays were still immensely popular. Thus the drama Vondel had written in his youth, *Palamedes* (1625), experienced a substantial revival in the second Stadtholderless era (1702–1747), with three allegorical tableaux vivants introduced by the dramatist Pieter Langendijk. In 1625 *Palamedes* had been an indictment (in classical guise) of the execution of Grand Pensionary Oldenbarnevelt; it paid tribute to the innocent hero, while Stadholder Maurits was pilloried. Vondel came close to being convicted by the Hof van Holland ('High Court of Holland') and the play was subject to a strict ban. In 1664 it was performed for the first time, in Rotterdam, by the travelling players of Jan Baptist van Fornenbergh, who had achieved great success in the Baltic states.¹⁷ A number of performances in Amsterdam followed. In this period *Palamedes* became part of a revived discussion about the future of the young William III, as had *Batavische gebroeders* two years before. In 1707, when the Republic went through another period without a stadholder, *Palamedes* was relaunched in the Amsterdam Schouwburg, where thirty performances took place over the next forty years. Langendijk's tableaux, first described in the printed edition

¹⁴ Smits-Veldt, 'Vertoningen in opvoeringen van Vondels tragedies', p. 217.

¹⁵ Amir and Groen, 'De opvoeringsgeschiedenis van Vondels treurspel Faëton', pp. 442–43.

¹⁶ Vondel, *De werken*, ed. Van Lennep, 10, pp. 329–30.

¹⁷ Albach, *Langs kermissen en hoven*, p. 96.

of 1734, may have been included in performances as early as 1707. Initially the imprisonment of Palamedes was portrayed as a desecration of the law by political ambition, a summary of sorts of the third act. Justice, fleeing Tyranny, has been dethroned by Ambition. As a result Freedom has succumbed and Commonwealth, along with Harmony, Wisdom, Alertness, and Truth, are in mourning. The second tableau portrays the death of Palamedes, stoned by Ulysses and Diomedes in the company of the Furies who, after a spoken explanation, make way for Time and Truth to descend. Finally the image of Palamedes, surrounded by his personified virtues, was embraced by Freedom while his enemies lie chained at his feet, whereupon Fama flies up to heaven. Langendijk made clear in an explanatory note that these displays actually add nothing of value to the famous play and were purely intended to entice the ignorant to the Schouwburg.¹⁸

Meanwhile several of Vondel's plays had really taken off in Brussels in the Southern Netherlands, each one adapted and embellished with colourful displays and ballets by Brussels rhetorician Jan Frans Cammaert, who specialised in adaptations and translations from the French repertoire. In 1746 'De Wijngaard' ('The Vineyard') put on the first ever performance of *Adam in ballingschap* (*Adam Exiled*, 1664) in the Muntshouwburg in Brussels. It would not be staged in the North until the twentieth century. In Cammaert's hands this tragedy about the dramatic reversal of fortune experienced by the first human couple underwent a veritable metamorphosis to satisfy the tastes of a large audience. Cut, pruned, but also provided with supplementary material, the colourful production now opened with six scenes, each portraying one of the days of creation, followed by a ballet, a seventh scene, and a song in which the outcome was divulged: Michael's victory over Lucifer and the fall of the 'evil' angels. As well as ballet dancing by subterranean spirits, triumphant devils, and 'good' angels in mourning, spectators were treated to two scenes in which God descended from heaven accompanied by a host of angels, and a final scene in which Adam and Eve were driven out of paradise by Uriel. In 1748 Cammaert took on *Samson*, probably giving his dramaturgical imagination just as much free rein. A single reference is all that remains, but we know from a theatre programme that he also produced an adaptation of *Salomon* in the Muntshouwburg in 1762, this time performed by 'De Leliebloem'

¹⁸ Smits-Veldt, 'Vertoningen in opvoeringen van Vondels tragedies', pp. 217–18. For Langendijk's displays see Vondel, *De werken*, ed. Van Lennep, 2, Nalezing, pp. 27–30.

(‘The Lily Flower’). In this staging he allowed himself even more freedom than he had with *Adam in ballingschap*: this text too was embellished with displays and ballet and substantially rewritten.¹⁹ Unlike Bidloo and Langendijk, Cammaert, it seems, made no use of allegory.

In the 1840s, lyrical drama, ballet, and emotive plays with a lot of varied action had almost completely driven the classical tragedy off the stage and the more cultivated of theatre audiences had taken flight. The time had come to raise the national theatre to a higher level by consciously promoting the classical Dutch repertoire. At least, such was the opinion of the members of *Achilles*, the Amsterdam society set up for this purpose and that emphatically presented itself as a chamber of rhetoric. Even before its official founding on 18 March 1846 it had given a public recital of a classical, early eighteenth-century tragedy, and a little over six months later it was the turn of Vondel’s *Lucifer*. An invited audience of more than five hundred listened attentively to the declamation of one lady and thirteen gentlemen, who spoke their parts dressed in black dress coats, white waistcoats, and white gloves. The most impressive among them was theatre expert, author of historical novels and admirer of Vondel, Jacob van Lennep, whose delivery of the lines of archangel Michael was, in spite of his hoarse voice, the best. Van Lennep had been the heart and soul of *Achilles* for some time; even before this he had recited fragments from Vondel’s dramas for the Felix Meritis society along with a number of his friends, and now he had been directing preparations for the recital of *Lucifer* for at least six months. Later there were also performances of *Adam in ballingschap* and the pastoral play *Leeuwendalers*, which Vondel had written for the celebrations of the Peace of Münster. Even *Gysbreght van Aemstel* was recited, in its original, complete version, refocusing attention onto Vondel’s text, in contrast to the deficient acted versions.²⁰

Van Lennep’s efforts to elevate the tastes of theatre audiences made little headway at first. Despite attempts to improve them (a royal commission was even set up specially for the purpose), performances of *Gysbreght* remained fairly unedifying – the Clarissan nuns giggled, and the dumb show was a flop every time. The play was now being performed everywhere in various theatres in Amsterdam, – ‘embellished with processions, fights, and Bengali lighting’ – in The Hague and

¹⁹ Cammaert, *Straf en de dood van Balthassar*, ed. Langvik-Johannessen and Waterschoot, 1, pp. 20–30.

²⁰ Schravendeel, ‘De Amsterdamse rederijkerskamer Achilles’; Van den Berg, ‘11 december 1846: Vondel in de voordracht’.

Rotterdam, and even at fairs and in the homes of distinguished Amsterdam families.²¹ After 1860, however, more care was taken over performances of *Gysbreght*, with much emphasis in realist style on the romanticism of the medieval environment in which it was set. In 1841 an attractive new edition of the script appeared, with fourteen romantic plates by Charles Rochussen that became the model for the scenery and costumes used in performances in the second half of the nineteenth century.²² The theatrical gestures and booming delivery that had since become the typical thespian manner remained in vogue until the end of the century, but in the 1890s there was increasing resistance to traditional-realist performances and appeals were heard for purity and restraint in acting, delivery, and staging. In 1894, on the occasion of a new performance to mark the opening of a new municipal theatre, the Amsterdam Stadsschouwburg on the Leidseplein, a luxury edition was published that cautiously ushered in a new era. Alongside illustrations by the painter Antoon Derkinderen and a series of set designs by the architect H.P. Berlage, it included a lengthy introductory study by L. Simons, although he still opted for the romantic, realist approach.²³

With the reaction against traditional theatre and revived attention to the power and beauty of the spoken word, other plays by Vondel were given a chance as well. As early as 1879, on the occasion of the second centenary of Vondel's death, *Leeuwendalers* was performed at the Amsterdam Stadsschouwburg, according to instructions from Vondel expert Alberdingk Thijm.²⁴ But at that time this was still a fairly traditional affair, though further performances followed in 1902 and 1905.²⁵ A truly radical reaction to baroque ostentation was the production of Vondel's *Maeghden* (*Maidens*, 1639) by the symbolist artist André Jolles. In 1898 he presented a version of this drama about Catholic martyrdom as a lyrical oratorio, in which all theatricality was deliberately eschewed. The actors in the leading roles were surrounded on both sides by the rest of the cast and whoever's turn it was to speak would take a step forward.²⁶ Jolles had them deliver their lines in soft,

²¹ Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gijsbreght van Aemstel'*, pp. 94, 96.

²² Vondel, *Gysbrecht van Aemstel* (ill. Rochussen); Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gijsbreght van Aemstel'*, p. 98.

²³ Vondel, *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, ed. Simons; Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gijsbreght van Aemstel'*, pp. 119–20.

²⁴ Vondel, *Leeuwendalers*, ed. Alberdingk Thijm.

²⁵ Vondel, *Leeuwendalers*, ed. Stoett, p. 4.

²⁶ Albach, 'De vertoning van de kloostermoorden', p. 334; Van der Zalm, 'Rooyaards in revisie', p. 107.

lilting voices and in protracted tones, inspired by the recital of Verlaine that had toured the Netherlands in 1892. In both the professional and amateur theatre Vondel was to receive increasing attention from the early twentieth century onwards. *Joseph in Dothan* was staged in Rotterdam and in 1904 students in Utrecht performed *Lucifer*.

Theatrical innovator Willem Royaards introduced a wholly new style. In accordance with the ideals of the literary movement of his day known as the Tachtigers (the Eighties Movement), Royaards was concerned above all with the beautiful sound of the verse, which needed to be presented to audiences as art. The sober stage sets now called on spectators to use their imaginations: no more realistically painted backdrops but instead decorative, stylised scenery that created an expressive space for the actors to move in. Royaards would present three sensational productions of Vondel's dramas, with which he also toured Belgium. In 1908 his company 'Het Tooneel' (The Stage) showcased itself with a performance of *Adam in ballingschap* in the Paleis voor Volksvlijt in Amsterdam. Royaards' young wife, Jacqueline Sandberg, played Eve in a white robe à la Botticelli's *Primavera* and delighted the audience with her beguiling, understated acting.²⁷ It was followed in 1910 by a production of *Lucifer* that did away with realism completely. The artist R.N. Roland Holst had designed a classical structure with a backdrop of sky-blue fabric, the angels were wingless and had been dressed in symbolic colours: light for the faithful, dark for the renegades.²⁸ Royaards' third and final Vondel production, again highly stylised, was of *Gysbreght*, staged during the Dutch music festival of June 1912. This performance in the Amsterdam Stadsschouwburg was a prestigious affair, and the entire royal family and many dignitaries were present. To the artistically-minded audience Vondel's lines seemed to resound for the first time. Against a sober set by Frits Lensvelt, with curtains hanging in folds and architectural forms inspired by the unfulfilled designs of Berlage, the brightly coloured costumes stood out intensely and delighted the eye with their harmony. There was huge admiration for the way in which Royaards made his actors move and how he grouped them, in stark contrast to the old, static productions.²⁹ A little while later the theatrical producer Eduard Verkade adopted an

²⁷ Van der Zalm, 'Rooyaards in revisie', pp. 109–12.

²⁸ Van der Zalm, 'Rooyaards in revisie', pp. 112–15.

²⁹ Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gijsbreght van Aemstel'*, 121–24; Van der Zalm, 'Rooyaards in revisie', pp. 115–18.

approach along the same lines, although in his productions of *Gysbreght* he did bring out the medieval mysticism of the play.³⁰ His pursuit of spirituality was also expressed in a production of *Maria Stuart* that he directed in 1929.

For many years musical accompaniment had been an important element in performances and it was often entrusted to famous composers. After 1774 settings by Bartholomeus Ruloffs of two songs sung by the Clarissan nuns had been included in *Gysbreght*. At this point a start was also made on reciting a few choruses, which previously had been omitted. In 1839 Johannes Verhulst composed music for the play, including a prelude, and in 1894 it was Bernard Zweers who set all the choruses to music, sung by choirs, as well as composing a prelude to each act and a short postlude. He also, for example, provided music to accompany Raphael's emergence from heaven. In his *Gysbreght* Royaards used compositions by Alphons Diepenbrock performed by the orchestra of the Concertgebouw conducted by Willem Mengelberg at the music festival of 1912. He later added music by Theo van der Bijl.³¹ For his *Adam in ballingschap* and *Lucifer* he signed up Hubert Cuypers. To mark the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Vondel's birthday in 1937, Hendrik Badings was commissioned to compose new music for *Gysbreght* and Willem Pijper for *Faëton*, directed by Verkade. Vondel's *Lucifer* even became the basis of a symphonic poem by Henry K. Hadley that was first performed during the Norfolk Festival in June 1914 and thereafter several times in New York.³²

Meanwhile Royaards' touring performances had led to the rediscovery of the Catholic playwright Vondel in Catholic Flanders. This was the period in which an ideological belief in the function of the theatre for the masses had led to a greater focus on performances in the open air. Thus between 1921 and 1923 'Het Vlaamse Volkstoneel' ('The Flemish People's Theatre') performed *Joseph in Dothan* for a large audience with great success. In August 1922 Vondel was played on the city walls of Sluis and Hulst, and by July 1923 the number of performances had reached fifty. Intent on international prestige, the same company

³⁰ Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gijsbreght van Aemstel'*, 124–27; for scenery designed by Royaards and Verkade for performances of *Gysbreght* see Van Pelt, 'Januari en februari 1922: De Internationale Theatertentoonstelling', pp. 596–98.

³¹ Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gijsbreght van Aemstel'*, pp. 69–70, 102, 113, 123; Valkenburg, 'De muziek bij Vondels *Gysbreght*'.

³² Hadley, *Lucifer*; *New York Times*, 21 May, 20 November 1914, and 23 July 1922. With thanks to Karel Porteman.

put on *Lucifer* in the Théâtre des Champs Elysees in Paris in 1927.³³ Later there were even productions in the Koninklijke Schouwburg of the relatively neglected plays *Noah* (in 1930) and *Peter and Pauwels*, as well as *Adam in ballingschap* (in 1936).³⁴

In the 1930s Vondel was staged regularly by both professional and amateur companies. In the years after the Second World War, however, dissatisfaction gradually increased in the professional theatre world with a choice of repertoire that was regarded as conservative. In October 1969 this led to united resistance by opponents of the old guard in what was known as the 'Aktie Tomaat' or the 'Tomato Campaign'. Even before this, in 1968, the Amsterdam theatre company 'De Nederlandse Comedie' had replaced the annual *Gysbreght* performance with a production of another seventeenth-century play, *De Spaansche Brabander* by Bredero, breaking the age-old tradition for good. Vondel was no longer performed, until he was resurrected at the end of December 1979 by director Hans Croiset. With a remarkable production of *Lucifer* Croiset dispelled the prevailing view that Vondel's plays were dated or impossible to stage, and he gained a large audience by doing so. In dress suits and bowler hats, the rebellious angels mounted a kind of 'revolution of officials' in heaven, which they traversed using swings and rope ladders. For the first time people were able to understand the despair of Lucifer at having to choose between the assertion of his own rights and absolute obedience to God. The script, adapted and abridged by dramatist Guus Rekers, was now delivered in a normal speaking voice, and the text acquired a surprising clarity as a result. These productions of *Lucifer* heralded a series of new interpretations of Vondel plays, for which Croiset used those six texts that had already been performed at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1983 he produced *Adam in ballingschap* based on an interpretation that was against the grain and that did not meet with the acclaim of everyone, with scenery depicting Paradise as made up of the ruins of civilization. He presented Adam and Eve as survivors of a genial but dictatorial culture in which frenetic efforts were made to maintain the hold of religion and the power it confers. After they have bitten the apple the true situation becomes clear to them for the first

³³ Opsomer, 'Mei-juni 1927: Het Vlaamsche Volkstoneel (VVT) en de opvoering van *Lucifer* en *Tijl* in Parijs.'

³⁴ Benoy, '1938: Joris Diels verlaat de Koninklijke Nederlandse Schouwburg te Antwerpen'; Peeters, '22 augustus 1909: Openluchtvoorstelling van *Philoktetes*'.



O Gysbrecht, zet getroost uw schoulers onder 't kruis

Scene from Vondel's *Gysbrecht van Aemstel* in an eighteenth-century performance. The angel Raphael appears unto Gijsbrecht and his family. Illustration in J. v. Vondel, *Gysbrecht van Aemstel*, treurspel. Gelyk het op den Amsterdamschen Schouwburg vertoond wordt. Amsterdam, Izaak Duim, 1745. Royal Library, The Hague, 448 L 21.

time and they go on to make the best of a world in ruins.³⁵ This was followed in 1987 by *Faëton*, in which a connection was suggested between Phaeton's fall in his father's sun chariot, which results in the disruption of nature, and today's ecological disasters.³⁶ After productions of *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (1988) and *Joseph in Dothan* (1996) that were true to the original scripts, although with cuts,³⁷ Croiset announced in 1997 that he was planning a production of *Jeptha*. The outcome, however, was a fairly loose adaptation by Benno Barnard: *Jefta en de Semitische liefdes (Jeptha and the Semitic Loves, 1998)*. In this production Jephtha, leader of a Jewish tribe, does not sacrifice his daughter but forces her into an arranged marriage against her will, which results in her suicide. His actions do not stem from a conviction that he must fulfil his promise to God; his dilemma arises from doubt as to whether he can break his promise without losing prestige and power. Barnard ultimately made a connection between Jewish tribal conflict and the contemporary dilemma as to what attitude Jews should take towards their enemies.³⁸ Then, in 1998, together with Marcel Otten, Croiset staged an equally free adaptation of *Leeuwendalers* and finally in 2001 he produced another *Lucifer*, this time true to the original. The production was tighter than the 1979 version, with an emphasis on maintaining a grip on possessions and power and on the fear of strangers (supporters of Lucifer as opposed to newly created mankind), in which references to modern-day xenophobia can be detected.³⁹

Vondel's *Gysbreght* (along with *Adam in ballingschap* and *Joseph in Dothan*) has inspired other directors too in its freely modernised form. An opera version by Rob Zuidam of *Adam in ballingschap* had its premiere in Amsterdam in June 2009 and the American singer Claron McFedden shone as a charming and assertive Eve. The opera was based on Vondel's original script. Clearly the work of the great playwright of the seventeenth century is still capable of rejuvenation.

³⁵ Heijer, 'Vondels verzenparadijs bloeit op de puinhopen'; Rekers, 'Adam in ballingschap'.

³⁶ Heijer, 'Faëtons val met de zonnwagen als een ecologische ramp'.

³⁷ De Kock, '15 december 1979: Het Publiektheater speelt een opmerkelijke Lucifer', pp. 806–07.

³⁸ Stronks, 'Jephta als eigentijdse vader van een eigentijdse dochter'.

³⁹ Habbema, 'Croiset maakt theater van Vondel'.

CHAPTER TEN

BETWEEN DISREGARD AND POLITICAL MOBILIZATION – VONDEL AS A PLAYWRIGHT IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN CONTEXT: ENGLAND, FRANCE AND THE GERMAN LANDS

Guillaume van Gemert

Introduction: Outlines of Non-Dutch Vondel Reception

In Daniel Georg Morhof's *Polyhistor literarius, philosophicus et practicus*, the great manual of education and inventory of contemporary learning, first published in 1688, Vondel's name is not mentioned at all; only those 'Dutch' authors who made their mark in Latin Poetry are listed under the heading *Poetae recentiores*, such as Hugo Grotius, Daniel Heinsius, Janus Doussa, Caspar Barlaeus and Constantijn Huygens.¹ Morhof, however, definitely must have known Vondel: in his *Unterricht von der Teutschen Sprache und Poesie* from 1682, a history of German language and literature, as well as an introduction to poetics and a survey of other Western European literatures, he not only repeatedly quotes from Vondel's *Aenleidinge ter Nederduitsche dichtkunste* (*Introduction to Dutch Poetry*), but also characterizes him as perhaps the most outstanding Dutch playwright of his era.² As regards the French- and English-speaking countries a similar acquaintance with Vondel cannot be perceived for the same time period: in Louis Moréri's *Grand dictionnaire historique* (1674), for example, he is not itemized at

¹ Morhof, *Polyhistor, literarius*, 1 (1732), pp. 1059–72.

² Morhof, *Unterricht von der Teutschen Sprache und Poesie*, p. 135: 'Die Schauspiele sind bey ihnen [the Dutch] zur Vollkommenheit gebracht. Insonderheit hat die Stadt Amsterdam ein grosses daran gewandt. Da haben sich in grosser Menge gefunden/welche umb den Preiß hierinne gestrieten. Vor andern hat Jost van Vondel sich hierinnen hervor gethan/ von dessen Comoedien und Tragoedien gantze grosse Tomi heraus gekommen [...]' ('They [the Dutch] perfected drama. The city of Amsterdam was a particularly significant contributor to this process. Many authors were to be found there striving for the prize for drama. Joost van den Vondel excelled above all others in this regard, his comedies and tragedies having been published in exceedingly hefty volumes').

all, not even in later editions that appeared in the early 18th century;³ and the first French Vondel appraisal can be found in an anthology, compiled in 1822, which also presented translations of *Gysbrecht van Aemstel* and *Lucifer*, the first Vondel plays ever rendered in French.⁴ Vondel is reckoned here to be ‘le Virgile de la Hollande’,⁵ and it is suggested that the straightforwardness of his plays could substantially have swayed the main orientation of Dutch playwriting during his lifetime towards France rather than towards England or Spain:

Ultimately Dutch theatre should greatly be indebted to Hooft and Vondel, because they recognized that the classical theatre of antiquity was highly preferable to English, Spanish or Italian playwriting; and although their plays ran contrary to actual trends, it is due to their straightforwardness that newer Dutch theatre caters more to Corneille and Racine than to Shakespeare and Calderón.⁶

From the English side during the 17th and 18th centuries there seem only to have been some sporadic references of minor relevance;⁷ that is to say, a secondhand quote from a letter of Hugo Grotius by John Dunton (1659–1732)⁸ and casual mention in a biographic

³ Cf. Moréri, *Le grand dictionnaire historique et Supplément aux anciennes éditions du Grand dictionnaire historique*.

⁴ *Chefs-d'oeuvre du théâtre hollandais*, 1 (1822), pp. 101–98 and 199–07 respectively.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 96: ‘Enfin, le théâtre hollandais doit à Hooft et à Vondel une grande reconnaissance de ce qu’ils ont su distinguer combien les pièces de l’antiquité étaient préférables à celles de l’Angleterre, de l’Espagne ou de l’Italie; et quoique leurs pièces soient contraires au goût actuel, c’est à leur simplicité que les Hollandais doivent l’avantage d’avoir, dans leurs pièces plus modernes, suivi Corneille et Racine de préférence à Shakspeare [sic!] et Caldéron.’

⁷ For these references I am greatly indebted to Dr. Helmer Helmers.

⁸ Dunton, *Young-Students-Library*, pp. 51–53: ‘The most noble part of the Criticks, if we may believe those who make a Profession of it, is that which teacheth us to judge of Authors to discern their true Works, from those which are Suppositious, to distinguish their stile, to find out the defects thereof, and to remark the faults they commit. For that Reason, we shall place here the Judgment that Grotius hath made of divers Books both Ancient and Modern. [...] Justus Vondel. This famous Flemish Poet published in 1638 a Tragedy, which is acted once a year at Amsterdam, entituled Gisbrecht van Amstel. He dedicated it to Grotius, who makes this judgment thereof in a Letter to Vossius the 28th of May the same year: Vondel did me a kindness in dedicating unto me (as to a man who hath some gust of these sort of things) a Tragedy whose subject is noble, whose order is excellent, and expression fine, &c. It is a folly not to have in a subject of 300 years, the customs of that time represented. Thus is that those of Geneva in a French Edition of Philip de Comines, have observ’d every where, where the Author saith that the King heard Mass, that he was at the Lords Supper’. For Dunton see: *ODNB*, 17, coll. 366–67.

article⁹ as well as in the travelogue of Andrew Becket (1749–1843),¹⁰ although some of them may aptly illustrate the contemporary English perspective on Dutch culture. One of the first more comprehensive English statements to Vondel might date back to the traveller and diplomatist John Bowring (1792–1872).¹¹ In his *Sketch of the Language and Literature of Holland*, which appeared in print in 1829, he mainly categorizes Vondel negatively, comparing him with Shakespeare and Milton, although he acknowledges him to be the most famous Dutch poet:

He revels in all the affluence of language – clothes all his thoughts in poetical expression – but those thoughts are not thoughts of the sublimest range, nor have they much in them of the music of philosophy. He – a Shakspeare [sic!] of a lower order – overflows equally with beauties and defects. [...] Compare him with Milton, – for his Lucifer gives the fairest means of comparison, – how weak are his highest flights compared with those of the bard of Paradise; and how much does Vondel sink beneath him in his failures! Now and then the same thought may be found in both, but the points of resemblance are not in passages which do Milton's reputation the highest honour. [...] Vondel has rather been judged of by extracts, which are in every body's mouth in Holland, than by any entire piece of composition, or by the whole of his writings; and undoubtedly he would sink very rapidly if the test of criticism were applied to the mass of his works.¹²

Vondel's contemporary renown abroad, in other European countries, is mostly in accord with the extent of his reception there, in terms of translation of his writings into the respective vernacular, of their adaptations and of referring to them by individual foreign authors. On the whole one must still agree to the conclusion Hendrik Diferee already drew in 1929 implying that contemporary translations only emerged in

⁹ Aikin, *General Biography*, 6 (1807), col. 225 (in voce: Lescaille, Catharine): 'She surpassed her father in the beauty of her verse, and obtained the applauses of Vondel and other celebrated poets of her country.'

¹⁰ Becket, *Trip to Holland*, 2 (1786), pp. 43–44: 'Apropos of poets, said I, pray is there a living one to be found in Holland? Not that I know, returned Monsieur de M–; a Dutch versifier is a *rara avis* indeed. There has been none of any repute, I think, since the days of Vondel. Vondel, continued he, was really a good poet; and he has sufficiently proved by his writings, that the Dutch language (however grating to the ear of an Englishman) is by no means deficient in harmony and sweetness of numbers.'

¹¹ For Bowring see: *ODNB*, 6, coll. 987–90.

¹² Bowring, *Sketch of the Language and Literature of Holland*, pp. 38–40.

the German Lands, and otherwise interest in Vondel outside of the Netherlands was not perceptible until the early 19th century:

We hear nothing more about translations of Vondel's plays in the 17th century [except from those into German]; there is no reference to French or English ones at all, although it is a matter of fact that his tragedies as well as his poems must have been known in England in the 17th century and were read and sometimes studied there by men of letters and historians. [...] During the 18th century not one translation of Vondel's works was published outside of the Netherlands, at least as far as we have been able to establish through thorough research, or rather: have not been able to establish. Yet the 19th century, perhaps pre-eminently the age of revived interest in art, literature and their history, amply compensated the deficiencies of its predecessors which had considered Vondel to be doomed to die.¹³

Diferee's optimistic hope – that future research might bring up some further indications of foreign dealings with Vondel in early modern times – was not fulfilled during the past eight decades. In the meanwhile, on the other hand, the contextualizing of individual agents of reception could much more be differentiated.

*German References to Vondel and his Political Mobilization in the
German Lands During the Seventeenth Century*

All over Europe not one single poem composed by Vondel as a lyricist was translated from Dutch into another vernacular during his lifetime. Some of his plays, by contrast, were, but only into German, as highlighted by Diferee. The latter's stand should, however, be modified insofar as it would be better to characterize them as adaptations. Whereas the first translations into French did not appear any earlier

¹³ Diferee, *Vondel in den vreemde*, p. 5: 'Meer vernemen wij niet over vertalingen van Vondel's toneelwerken in de zeventiende eeuw; van fransche of engelsche vertalingen wordt nergens melding gemaakt, ofschoon als zeker mag worden aangenomen, dat zoowel de treurspelen als de gedichten van Vondel in de zeventiende eeuw in Engeland bekendheid verwierven en daar door literatuur- en historiekenners werden gelezen en soms bestudeerd. [...] Gedurende de achttiende eeuw verscheen in het buitenland geen enkele overzetting van Vondel's werken, althans voor zoover ons op grond van een uitvoerig onderzoek bekend werd, wellicht beter gezegd: onbekend bleef. Doch de negentiende eeuw, bij uitstek misschien de eeuw van de herlevende belangstelling in kunst en literatuur en hare geschiedenis, haalde de schade van haar voorgangster, die onzen Vondel zoo goed als ten doode had opgeschreven, ruimschoots in.'

than 1822,¹⁴ and whereas it was almost at the same time (that is to say, in Bowring's *Batavian Anthology* from 1824) that English-speaking people were able to acquaint themselves with selected sections from Vondel's *Gysbrecht* (1637), *Lucifer* (1654), *Adam in ballingschap* (*Adam Exiled*, 1664), *Palamedes* (1625) and *Batavische gebroeders* (*Batavian Brothers*, 1663) in their vernacular,¹⁵ in the German Lands at least four plays were published as early as the second half of the 17th century, explicitly deriving their origin from Vondel. French as well as English references to Vondel, from the very beginning in the early 19th century, had a purely antiquarian focus. They were initiated at a time when the concept of 'world literature' was prevalent, and were therefore pre-determined by comparative approaches. In the German Lands, on the contrary, Vondel the dramatist had already gained significant topicality during his lifetime, firstly because of the specific value appertaining to the respective translations or adaptations, and secondly on account of his cultural-strategical importance as a representative of Dutch literature. For in the German Lands Dutch literature as such has got an exemplary function because of its perceived unifying potency, that Vondel's colleague poet Pieter Cornelisz. Hooft already attributed to it. He, as is well known, considered literature to be the precursor of political unity,¹⁶ inasmuch as centralized unity came to fruition in the Dutch Republic with its pivotal principles of proportionate and localised sovereignty.

France and England in the 17th Century were more or less centralistic unitary states. The German Lands, by contrast, constituted a patchwork of hundreds of *de facto* autonomous and self-governing entities, mostly mini- or microstates. Nearly all of them strived for unity, with the political nation as its final objective, transcending the cultural nation as an intermediate step. On the pathway to this ideal the

¹⁴ *Chefs-d'oeuvre du théâtre hollandais*, 1 (1822), pp. 101–98 and 199–307 respectively.

¹⁵ Bowring and Van Dyk, *Batavian Anthology*, pp. 125–152.

¹⁶ Hooft, 'Over de Waardigheid der Poëzy', p. 573: 'Om dit te bewaarheeden, daag ik het getuigenisse van U allen, die zelve beleeft hebt en ondervonden, welken dienst de Hollandtsche Poëzy, toen zy noch maar op 't ontknoopen van de tonge en in 't haaperen van haar kindtsheit was, deezen Vaderlande, in 't verstoeten van de Tyranny en 't stichten der vryheit beweezen heeft' ('To underpin this, I call on all those as witnesses who experienced and sensed the favour Dutch poetry did our country when she was as yet untying her tongue in her earliest childhood, in expelling tyranny and in establishing freedom').

Netherlands was looked up to as a shining example, and literature was considered to be an excellent vehicle through which to create the desiderated cultural community. Martin Opitz's programmatic *Buch von der deutschen Poeterey* (*Book of German Poetry*) from 1624 and the poetic reform he initiated confirm this very convincingly. The initial spark might have provided the intense and vivid consciousness of close linguistic affinity of German and Dutch, still embedded in an overall pan-Germanic thinking.¹⁷ It was supplemented with strong admiration for the neighbouring country's continuous rise into the rank of global power, although formally it still was part of the Holy Roman Empire. Finally, the Dutch way of tackling the problem of sovereignty might, in times of increasing territorialism of an absolutist character, have appealed to Germans as a temporary compromise, until national unity was fully attained. In England and France, however, such cultural political aspects did not carry any weight in dealing with the Netherlands, and neither did any other similarities – in fact rivalry prevailed. This might have been the very reason why there, that is to say in England and France, was scant reception of contemporary Dutch literature, and hardly any discussion of Vondel's plays.

By contrast, Opitz and his poetizing contemporaries in the German Lands in the 1620s and the early 1630s assigned to Dutch programmatic anthologies like the *Zeeusche Nachtegael* (*The Nightingale from Zeeland*, 1623), the *Thronus Cupidinis* (*Cupid's Throne*, 1620) and the *Bloem-Hof van de Nederlantsche Ieught* (*Flower-Garden of Dutch Youngsters*, 1608) an almost exclusive exemplarity, particularly to a collection of Dutch poems from 1616 entitled *Nederduytsche Poemata* (*Dutch Poems*) and written by Daniel Heinsius, native of Ghent and a renowned professor of philology at Leiden University.¹⁸ A man of letters like Heinsius would normally have written only Latin verses, but using his mother tongue for poetic purposes, however, he enhanced the Dutch language, as he did the German language indirectly, because of its close relationship to the former. Purely because of this, Opitz was able to praise the 'Gentscher Schwan' (swan from Ghent) for ultimately having 'vnsre Muttersprach in jhren werth gebracht' ('elevated our [i.e. the German] mother tongue to its rightful standing').¹⁹ As a playwright Vondel was not involved in these very beginnings of German Baroque

¹⁷ See, for example, Bornemann, *Anlehnung und Abgrenzung*, pp.103–13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.1–93; Van Gemert, *Niederländische Einflüsse*, pp. 9–83.

¹⁹ Opitz, *Teutsche Poemata*, p. 25.

literature. The early German Baroque poets already preferred lyrics, and, apart from that, up to the year 1635 Vondel did not publish any major theatre plays, except for *Het Pascha* (Passover, 1612), *Hierusalem verwoest* (Jerusalem Destroyed, 1620) and *Palamedes* (1625). Nevertheless, like Jacob Cats, whose works were translated into German up until the 1720s,²⁰ he has to be ranked among the few Dutch authors who were continuously received in the German Lands even during the second half of the 17th century, and among them he was probably the only dramatist.

The German interest in Vondel's plays can sometimes be explained by a personal and profound familiarity with his poetical works, as in the case of Andreas Gryphius, who translated the *Gebroeders* (Brothers, 1640) in 1641 or 1642, presumably during his stay in the Netherlands.²¹ Otherwise all Vondel's plays that were translated into German could be related to key German political issues, such as the legitimization and limits of princely power or the subjects' relation to absolutist sovereignty. Such themes gained increasing currency in the second half of the 17th century, when absolutist territorialism was becoming firmly established – in this context it should be remembered that the most relevant guide to territorial sovereignty, Veit Ludwig von Seckendorf's *Teutscher Fürstenstaat* (Princely Territorial State in Germany), appeared in 1665 – and the execution of Charles I Stuart caused a stir all over the German Lands. It is precisely this political mobilization that renders the German versions adaptations rather than translations in the proper sense of the word, this pertaining specifically to the three tragedies that were published in the 1660s and 1670s: firstly Elias Heidenreich's *Rache zu Gibeon* (Revenge on Gibeon, 1662), like Gryphius's *Sieben Brüder* (Seven Brothers) going back to Vondel's *Gebroeders*; secondly Christoph Kormart's *Maria Stuart oder Gemarterte Majestät* (Mary Stuart or Martyred Majesty, 1672), which has its origins in Vondel's *Maria Stuart of Gemartelde Majesteit* (1646) and finally Constantin Christian Dedekind's *Simson* from 1676, going back to Vondel's *Samson of Heilige wraeck* (Samson or Holy Vengeance, 1660). Apart from the political factor, German reception of Vondel in the 17th century might also have been facilitated by the rich tradition of biblical theatre plays in the

²⁰ Van Gemert, *Niederländische Einflüsse*, pp. 85–153.

²¹ Kiedroń, *Andreas Gryphius und die Niederlande*, p. 34; Gryphius, *Die Sieben Brüder*, p. x.

German Lands²² as well as by the steady establishment of martyr tragedy there from the 1650s onwards.

*Vondel's Gebroeders as an Apprentice Piece of Imitatio Cautiously
Reinterpreted by Young Gryphius*

Die Sieben Brüder Oder Die Gibeoniter (*Seven Brothers or the Gibeonites*) was the first dramatic work Andreas Gryphius (1616–1664)²³ wrote, being at the age of 25 and still a student at Leiden University.²⁴ During the following decades he was to develop into the most eminent playwright of German Baroque literature. His translation of Vondel's *Gebroeders*,²⁵ therefore, could be considered an apprentice piece, preparation for his own dramatic writing in the future, which was partly influenced by Vondel too.²⁶ Gryphius's German version enjoyed some popularity, since it was performed in Breslau in 1652 up to five times,²⁷ as is substantiated by historic evidence. In print, however, it did not appear earlier than in the 1698 posthumous edition of the complete works. It is versified and adhered closely to the original; Gryphius's main contribution was to add a large number of stage directions.²⁸ However, he was obliged to draw frequently on paraphrases and sometimes even on downright Batavisms.²⁹ He has no major problems translating Vondel's complicated idioms as well as his elaborate clauses, and his skill is undeniable. This is shown by his rendering of Michol's long monologue in Act III, in which she begs her former husband David to show mercy to her foster sons:

Mijn uitverkoren heer, of schoon Bathseba nu
Onze echte plaets verwarmt, en meer vermagh by u
Dan Michol; laet nochtans u niet zoo veer verrucken,

²² See Van Ingen, 'Übersetzung als Rezeptionsdokument', p. 152.

²³ For Gryphius see Flemming, *Andreas Gryphius*; Szyrocki, *Andreas Gryphius*; Wentzlaff-Eggebert, *Andreas Gryphius*; ADB, 10 (1879), pp. 73–81; NDB, 7 (1966), pp. 242–46.

²⁴ For the time the translation was written, see Plard, 'Sieben Brüder', pp. 305–06.

²⁵ Joost van den Vondel, *Gebroeders. Trevrspel*, WB, 3, pp. 797–878.

²⁶ A more recent outline of the debate on the Gryphius-Vondel relationship is to be found in Kiedroń, *Andreas Gryphius und die Niederlande*, pp. 59–87.

²⁷ Plard, 'Sieben Brüder', p. 317.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

²⁹ For Gryphius's way of translating and reinterpreting Vondel's *Gebroeders* cf. Plard, 'Sieben Brüder'; Van Ingen, 'Übersetzung als Rezeptionsdokument', pp. 147–53.

Dat heilooze Amoreen, door uw gezagh, verdrucken
 Dit bloed, waer over ick zelf moey ja moeder sta,
 In Zuster Merobs plaets; dit gaetme veel te na.
 'K heb Zuster, toen de dood haer bed begon te dreigen,
 Gezwoven, deze vijf te koestren, als mijn eigen,
 En houze oock voor de mijne, indien dit baeten kan;
 En zoo ick moeder ben, weest ghy 'er vader van.³⁰

In Gryphius's German translation 'Euch in dem Herzen spielt' largely complies (in terms of meaning) with 'Onze echte plaets verwarmt', as do 'nicht so sehr verlencken' with Vondels 'niet zoo veer verrucken' and 'O übergrimme Pein!' with 'dit gaetme veel te na'. In point of directness and perspicuity Gryphius almost surpasses the Dutch original; only 'Amor' as an occasional collective designation for the Amorites might easily lead to misunderstandings:

Mein auserkührner Herr/ ob schon Bethsabes Bild
 Euch in dem Herten spielt/ und höher nunmehr gilt
 Als Michal/ laßt dennoch euch nicht so sehr verlencken/
 Das Amor auf eur Wort mög' unbarmherzig kräncken/
 Diß Blut/ worüber ich soll Muhm und Mutter seyn/
 An Schwester Merobs Platz. O übergrimme Pein!
 Ach Schwester/ als ich dich sah' mit dem Tode ringen/
 Schwur ich die fünff als mein' als eigen auffzubringen/
 Auch halt ich sie als mein/ und wo dis helffen kan/
 Und Michal Mutter ist; blickt sie als Vater an.³¹

In Vondel as well as in Gryphius David is the central figure who has to decide between reasons of state and humanity.³² Gryphius, however,

³⁰ Vondel, *Gebroeders*, ll. 811–820: 'My beloved Lord, although Bathseba now / is warming up our [former] marital bed, and has greater influence on you / than Michol; still do not let yourself get carried away so much, / that godless Amorites, by your authority, are allowed to erase / this kinship, whose aunt I am, still even better, for whom I act as a mother, / in my sister Merob's place; this affects me very deeply. / As death was impending and approached her bed, / I swore to my sister, I would foster these five, as if they were of my own blood / and actually regard them as mine, as far as it benefits them; / and because I am their mother you should be a father to them.'

³¹ Gryphius, 'Sieben Brüder', p. 101 (Act 3, ll. 222–231): 'My beloved Lord, although Bathsheba's image / is juggling in your heart and ranks above Michal now, don't let yourself get carried away so much, / that Amor [i.e. the Amorites], by your word, is allowed to violate ruthlessly / this kinship, whose aunt and mother I am, / instead of my sister Merob. Oh cruel painful torture! / My dear sister, as I saw you lie dying, / I swore, I would foster these five, as if they were of my own / and even regard them as mine, as far as it benefits them; / and because Michal is their mother, look upon them as a father.'

³² For the political significance of Vondel's *Gebroeders* within the Dutch context cf. Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, pp. 93–112; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, pp. 92–109. See also Langvik-Johannessen, *Zwischen Himmel und Erde*, pp. 114–32.

expanded the original by a longish prologue, in which Saul's ghost speaks from eternity, and as such this embedded the play more intensively in a metaphysical context. Here reference is made to the punishment heaven imposed on Saul's descendants, and here David is apostrophized as the righteous, who is endeavouring to expiate the blood guilt. Rather than mitigating the inevitability of his decision, this seems to intensify the pressure that weighs on him:

I already hear that Heaven speaks its sentence
and that the judge's trumpet of punishment is announcing nothing but
murder and woe.
Go on, Righteous! Go on!
And inveigh severely against this murder.³³

The epilogue, which is an expansion as well, is to serve as an undisguised warning to all those who misuse the divine right of kings:

Thus our house shall perish for the sake of David's throne!
Thus David's fame shall originate from my downfall!
Thus those are broken down
who are revolting against the King of Heaven!
Man! Look upon me as in a mirror;
What has beaten me is threatening you.³⁴

Thus, already in Gryphius's translation the factor of politicization can be found that in the later German occupations with Vondel was to become more and more important.

*Heidenreich's Politicization of Gebroeders as a Warning to
Unrighteous Rulers*

Some twenty years after Gryphius was concerned with Vondel's *Gebroeders*, the play was once more submitted to a German-speaking audience, in 1662, by the lawyer David Elias Heidenreich (1638–1688),³⁵ who was promoted to be a councillor at Weißenfels court later.

³³ Gryphius, 'Sieben Brüder', p. 77 (Prologue, ll. 81–84): 'Ich höre schon den Himmel Urtheil sprechen/ Und des Richters Straff-Trompete lauter Mord und Weh ausblasen/ So fahre fort/ Gerechter! Fahre fort/ Und eifre scharff um diesen Mord.'

³⁴ Ibid., p. 129: 'Also muß unser Haus vor Davids-Thron vergehen! / Also muß Davids-Ruhm aus meinem Fall entstehen! Also werden die zerbrochen/ Die des Himmels-König pochen! / Mensch! O spiegel dich an mir/ Was mich schlug/ daß dreuet dir.'

³⁵ For more information about Heidenreich see: *ADB*, 11 (1880), p. 302; Krispyn, 'David Elias Heidenreich'; Killy, *Literatur Lexikon*, 5 (1990), pp. 117–18.

He decided in favour of a version in prose. The impact thereof can be observed in comparing his translation of Michol's beseeching pledge for mercy in Act III with that of Gryphius, already quoted:

Mein außerkohrner König; Wie wol der Bethsabe Schönheit in E.M. Herten nunmehr höher geachtet wird/ als die verlassene Michol/ so beliebe E.M. dennoch sich nicht so seure verlencken zu lassen/ daß Sie auff der Amoriter Wort das Blut/ darüber ich Muhme und an Schwester Merobs Statt Mutter bin/ so grimmig halten wolte. Ich schwure meiner Schwester/ als sie mit dem Tode range/ die Printzen/ als Kinder auffzuziehen; E.M. sehe sie doch nun als Vater an [...].³⁶

From the wording it can be concluded that Heidenreich must have known Gryphius's translation,³⁷ which might surprise, inasmuch as the latter had not been published hitherto. All in all he deals quite freely with the original text, by expanding, shortening or reshuffling it, in order to suit the taste of the audience or to adapt it to the local, viz. specifically German, conditions.³⁸ He characterizes the outcome as reshaping according to rational criteria ('vernünftige Ausmusterung').³⁹ In general he effectuates a striking revitalization of dramatic action by distributing it across a greater number of characters, by intensified dialogizing and by inserting extensive, fairly vivid stage directions. He does not shy away from theatricality and sensationalism in the least, since he is staging the preparations for the execution⁴⁰ and the gallows, on which hang the seven princes.⁴¹ All this can easily turn into the grotesque, as is apparent from the scene in which the Gibeonites argue about the exact number of Saul's children, or from the end of Act IV, when all princes, already on their way to the gallows, cry with one voice: 'Now then, dearest mothers, farewell, we'll see you in eternity' ('Nun hertzgeliebten Mütter gute Nacht bis zu der Ewigkeit').⁴² On the other hand the deletion of all choruses ('Reyen') without any substitution

³⁶ Heidenreich, *Rache zu Gibeon*, pp. 51–52: 'My beloved King, although Bethsabe's beauty in Your Majesty's heart ranks above abandoned Michal now, Your Majesty may deign not let Thyself get carried away so much, that Thou on request of the Amorites would act so cruel against this kinship, whose aunt and mother I am, instead of my sister Merob. Oh cruel painful torture! I swore to my sister, as she lay dying, to bring up the princes as my children; Your Majesty may look upon them now as a father.'

³⁷ See: Krispyn, 'David Elias Heidenreich', p. 283.

³⁸ For Heidenreich's translation cf. Van Ingen, 'Übersetzung als Rezeptionsdokument', pp. 144–48; Krispyn, 'David Elias Heidenreich', pp. 283–86.

³⁹ Heidenreich, *Rache zu Gibeon*, p. 103.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 84.

strongly reduces the emotional factor. In particular Heidenreich's modifications at the play's end are instructive. Here there is no effort towards reconciliation as in Vondel, where David concludes by providing his assurance that he will concede to Saul and his descendants dignified graves. By contrast, there is explicit focus on the inconsolably wailing widow Risper, and in a specially attached epilogue Benajas emphasizes that the vengeance of heaven will be upon unrighteous rulers and their posterity:

Regard, curious eye, this mirror of the instability of human happiness! What a vile and shameful fall of an illustrious house this is! Oh slippery throne! Oh unstable scepter! [...] Pitiful, however, it is that children must recompense for their parents. [...] Look at it as in a mirror, you bloodthirsty rulers! Take it as a mirror, you tyrants! Let it be a mirror to all those who become arrogant! You, pale corpses, did not abet the murder at Gibeon at all, but nevertheless it has been bloodthirstily revenged on you. Really, with you boundless arrogance led into utter ruin. Although you were not, you could have got tyrants, because the apple does not fall far from the tree. Spilled and shed blood finally falls to earth, but it cries to heaven. Thinking of the righteous vengeance of heaven makes me shudder. For it does not spare the heirs, and their heritage only will be punishment. Since their property will be taken away from them, along with their honour. Cursed tyranny! Beware of tyranny, you mighty of the world. When the lightning that punishes this vice does not hit you, it will catch your offspring. For God is righteous and just. He humiliates and exalts. He shall make the house of David green and flourish forever!⁴³

In this way Heidenreich's adaptation amplifies the didactic charge in Vondel's *Gebroeders* and strengthens its actuality. The 'mirror' function of biblical and historical occurrences is expressly underlined and

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 102: 'Betrachte doch neugieriges Auge diesen Spiegel der Vnbeständigkeit Menschlichen Glückes! Welch ein schnöder und schmähhlicher Vntergang ist dieser eines so durchleuchtigsten Hauses! O schlüpferiger Thron! O unbeständiger Scepter! [...] Erbärmlich ist es gleichwol/ daß die Kinder die Eltern entgelten müssen. [...] Spiegelt euch ihr Blut-dürstigen! Spiegelt euch ihr Tyrannen! spiegelt euch/ die ihr anfanget groß zu werden! Ihr blassen Leichen habt den Mord zu Gibeon am wenigsten befördert/ noch dennoch traff euch die Rache des Blut-Dursts. Der unmäßige Gebrauch des Groß-werdens muste sich erst in euch vollends zu Grunde stürzten. Ihr kuntet nicht Tyrannen seyn/ doch aber etwan werden/ weil Stamm und Apfel sich auff einem Platz finden. Gestürzttes und vergoßnes Blut fällt ja wol endlich auff die Erde/ doch rufft es Himmel-an. Die Haut schauert mir/ wann ich die gerechte Rache des Himmels darüber erwege. Sie schonet keiner Erben/ deren Erbtheil nichts al Straffe. Denn das Gut sampt der Ehre wird ihnen genommen. Verfluchte Tyranny! hütet euch davor/ Ihr Grossen der Welt. Trifft euch nicht das Wetter/ das dieses Laster ahndet/ so wird es doch der nach Euch kömmt empfinden. Gott ist immittelst gerecht. Der erniedriget und erhöhet. Der lasse das Haus David ewig grünen und blühen!'

the political factor is additionally emphasized by positioning David's decision in the metaphysical context of the vanity of all earthly things. Since early modern absolutist sovereignty was also justified metaphysically, the warning must have been addressed to all 'modern' Machiavellian rulers too.

Kormart's Restyling of Vondel's Maria Stuart Into a Constitutional Discourse on the Interrelation of Rulers and Subjects

In his *Maria Stuart: Oder Gemarterte Majestät* from 1672,⁴⁴ the German adapter of Vondel's *Maria Stuart of Gemartelde Majesteit* (*Mary Stuart, or Martyred Majesty*, 1646),⁴⁵ the Dresden lawyer Christoph Kormart (1644–1701),⁴⁶ is operating in a somewhat similar way to his predecessor Heidenreich. He wrote his version, as is highlighted on the title page, to stimulate and to accommodate a Leipzig students' theatre company ('Auf Anleitung und Beschaffenheit der Schaubühne einer Studierenden Gesellschaft in Leipzig').⁴⁷ This seems to imply here as well as in Heidenreich the abandonment of alexandrine verses in favour of prose sentences, together with revitalization of action. The latter is mainly achieved by increasing the number of characters acting onstage, and by changing overly long monologues into dialogues.⁴⁸ Vondel's five acts are reduced to four and Kormart's extensive stage directions are crucial to understanding the piece. Mary's execution is shown onstage, but it is precisely here that the scene threatens to tip over into mere theatricality. Kormart deals very freely with Vondel's original play in order to achieve what he calls 'real performance' ('reiche Vorstellung'), setting it in opposition to the lack of dynamics with which he reproaches Vondel, although he appreciates him very much:

Frequent departure from the admirable Dutch poet's arrangements has been made, and his composition has only been followed in part, courting

⁴⁴ A first edition must have been published in 1672, as reveals the digital catalogue of German 17th Century imprints VD17 (www.vd17.de) (cf. VD17 7:710193N). It could not be consulted. Therefore, the edition here quoted from is the second one, from 1673.

⁴⁵ Joost van den Vondel, *Maria Stuart of Gemartelde majesteit*, WB, 5, pp. 163–240.

⁴⁶ Johannes, *Christophorus Kormart*; Killy, *Literatur Lexikon*, 6 (1990), pp. 498–99.

⁴⁷ Kormart, *Maria Stuart*, title page.

⁴⁸ For the way Kormart translated and adapted Vondel's play see Van Ingen, 'Übersetzung als Rezeptionsdokument', pp. 133–39; Van Gemert, *Niederländische Einflüsse*, pp. 67–74.

the affections of a different audience, who crave real performance and not simple appearance on stage.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, didacticism was Kormart's primary concern; compared to Vondel he reinforced didactic impact. At the same time he fundamentally changes the play's orientation, no longer focussing on Catholic Mary as a martyr for her faith's sake, but rather on her opponent Queen Elizabeth, who as an acting character is inserted by Kormart himself and who has to decide between ethico-moral principles and reasons of state. Vondel is convinced that Mary's Catholicism and the defence of her hereditary rights against the bastard Elizabeth led to her undoing:

For two reasons an axe was driven into her flesh,
because of her hereditary right to the Crown and her Catholic life.⁵⁰

Kormart toned down the references to Mary's martyrdom considerably and totally erased the fact of Elizabeth's illegitimacy. In reality both Dutch original and German adaptation are concerned with the limits of absolutist princely power.⁵¹ In Vondel this is directed towards the question of the extent to which the divine right of kings as a legitimization of absolutist sovereignty may protect against demands for accountability by subjects and ultimately against execution:

De hemel zalfde my, en riep door zijn genade
Marie tot dien troon, als met zijn eige stem.
'k Bezit rechtvaerdighlijck, en houde alleen van hem
Mijn' troon en kroon te leen, en wilze met mijn leven
En bloet oock hem alleen gehoorzaam wedergeven.
Hy heeft Elizabeth niet boven my gestelt.
Laet Parlement en Raet en Ketterdom gewelt
Te wercke stellen, als geweldenaers en stroopers,
Die in een moortspelonck, gesterckt met overloopers,
Den allervroomsten Vorst vast knevelen met kracht;
'k Gedoogh het tegens recht: 't is buiten hunne macht,

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. A6^v–A7^r. Due to the pages not being numbered in the preface ('Vorred'), the citations have here been indicated by means of the signatures of the sheets: 'Von des vortreflichen Holländischen Poetens Vertheilungen ist man in vielen abgewichen/ und nur zum theil seinen Aufsatz nachgefolget/ indem man sich nach anderer Zuschauer Zuneigung richten müssen/ welche reiche Vorstellung und nicht blosse Auftritte des Schau-platzes begehren.'

⁵⁰ Vondel, *Maria Stuart*, p. 168: 'Byschrift Op d'afbeeldinge van Koningin Maria Stuart' ('Inscription on the portrait of Queen Mary Stuart'): 'Twee punten hebben haer de bijl door 't vleesch gedreven / Haer erfrecht tot de Kroon, en haer Katholisch leven.'

⁵¹ For the underlying political ideas in Vondel's tragedy cf. Noak, *Politische Auffasungen*, pp. 155–73. See also Kipka, *Maria Stuart im Drama der Weltliteratur*, esp. pp. 119–39.

Dat ick geen Koningin (zy doen hun beste) sterve;
 Hoewel mijn staet wat glimps in 't oogh der menschen derve.
 [...]
 Noch houdt het Koningsdom zijn' luister onbedorven.
 De Koningen des Rijcks zijn meer dan eens gestorven
 Een doot, zoo eereelijck voor 't Koningklijck geslacht,
 Als schandelijck voor 't volck, dat in die boosheit lacht:
 Wat wonder is het dan, zoo weder een verwoede
 't Getal der Koningen van Engelantschen bloede
 Vermeere met mijn lijck? 't is Engelants manier:
 Dat schatte noit het bloet der Koningen zoo dier,
 Of plengde 't milt, en maeide, als met een dolle zeissen,
 De telgen van den stam, die recht hadde iet te eischen,
 Te vorderen, uit kracht van tijtel, op dees kroon.⁵²

Kormart's rendering of these verses shows – as, incidentally, is further underlined by his explicit reference to Gryphius's tragedy *Carolus Stuardus* in his 'Preface to the Gentle Reader' ('Vorrede An Den Hoch-geneigten Leser')⁵³ – that in his eyes Mary is at best just a martyr for the ideal of absolutist monarchy. At the same time he reduces Vondel's poetic exuberance in favor of prosaic directness lacking any emotionality:

Wir wollen alles mit Gedult leiden. Der Himmel salbete uns zu dieser
 Crone/ und diesem wollen wir Gut/ Blut und Leben als ein Lehn willigt
 wieder überreichen. Es mag aller Ketzler Reich am heftigsten wüten und

⁵² Vondel, *Maria Stuart of Gemartelde majesteit*, ll. 668–80 and 683–93. Cf. Vondel, *Mary Stuart or Tortured Majesty*, pp. 63–64: 'For Heaven has anointed me, has called through grace / For Mary Stuart's rule, with God's own voice, it seemed. / So, I alone am justly chosen, and to Him / Alone I owe my crown and throne and will render / Them unto Him alone, together with my life. / He did not place Elizabeth above myself. / Let her Parliament, her lords, and her heretics / Resort to violent means; just so, cutthroats and / Bandits, with traitors gathered in their gruesome den, / Will fetter even the most devout of princes. / I'll suffer it! though it's unjust. But what's beyond / Their might, though they try, is that I die not a Queen, / Although my state lacks lustre in the eyes of some. / [...] / Yet the prestige itself of Monarchy survives! / This realm has witnessed more than once its monarchs die / In ways that brought much glory to the kingly race / And much disgrace to the rejoicing, guilty throng. / What wonder is it then, if yet another mob / Increases with my corpse the count of slaughtered Kings / Of English blood? Is't not the English custom / To hold the blood of Kings of very little worth? / They've spilt it lightly, and trimmed like crazy reapers / All branches from the trunk that were, because of birth, / Entitled to demand the right to rule this realm.'

⁵³ From Gryphius's play he is quoting here in his 'Preface to the Gentle Reader' (Kormart, *Maria Stuart*, fol. A6^r) the verses (1657 edition: Act I, ll. 181–88; 1663 edition: Act I, ll. 213–20), in which Mary's ghost appears to King Charles, who is already sentenced to death, and complains that in England princes are sentenced by their subjects, although they owe responsibility only to God. See Gryphius, 'Ermordete Majestät. Oder Carolus Stuardus', pp. 8 and 80.

toben/ so soll es nicht diesen himmlischen Glantz verdunckeln. [...] Und dennoch muß das Königliche Recht ungeschändet bleiben/ obgleich der eusserliche Schmuck hingerissen wird. Was kan eine unrechtmäßige Beschuldigung der Tugend schaden? Und so endlich viel Königliche Geschlechter in diesem Reiche also ihr Grab gefunden/ wie kan es uns wunder nehmen/ daß ihre Anzahl von grausamen Wüterichen durch unsern Tod vermehret wird? Es ist der Britten Frevel/ die Wurtzeln Königliches Stammes auszurotten.⁵⁴

Instead he explores what might be the prince's scope of action if he were compelled to act contrary to natural law and kinship obligations in order to protect the interests of state:

We abhor in general the violence of severe regimes, and in particular the fact that a new heresy may lead on to cruel persecution that sheds our poor subjects' blood. Nevertheless popish zeal is stirring sisterly blood and, in spite of our mansuetude, tries in blind malice to rise to the throne. We, however, are fully aware of the penalties the law imposes on such criminals, and she herself can read the compassionate admonition to desist from her wickedness, from the letter we sent to her. But we really are in doubt if we should leave the execution of the sentence to a court that, in common with us, seems to lay hands on kingly Majesty. Due to our princely dignity we are publically acting in front of all mankind, but we are mortal. We eschew shedding sisterly blood. We don't want our reputation with posterity to be damaged by the allegation as if we would have founded our throne upon her precious blood. Should not love defeat severity? Because we are used to deliberating extensively even on minor issues of governance, we do not wish to leave any salutary remedy untried, before we swing the deathman's sharp axe.⁵⁵

In general, however, Mary represents to Kormart the instability of all earthly things and especially of princely power which operates continuously between the poles of Fortune and Virtue, as is evident

⁵⁴ Kormart, *Maria Stuart*, p. 68: 'We will bear it all with patience. Heaven has anointed us to the crown and to Heaven we willingly will give back, as a fief, property, blood and life. The realm of all heretics may rant and rave, but it cannot darken the splendour of Heaven. [...] Nevertheless the kingly rights must remain inviolate, although their external attributes will be torn away. How could unjust accusation affect virtue? And finally, because so many royal houses found their graves here in this realm, it is not surprising that the number of cruel tyrants should increase owing to our death. To eradicate the roots of royal lineage is a perfidy of the Brits.'

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40: 'Wir hassen ja in allen Stücken die Gewalt scharffer Regierung/ absonderlich/ daß nicht durch neue Ketzerey eine abscheuliche Verfolgung mit unserer armen Unterthanen Blut erreget werde: Und gleichwol suchet der Päbstliche Eiffer in

from Mary's great monologue in Act IV, immediately prior to her execution:

All those who rely on the wheel of blind Fortune and beseech its glamour for godlike protection should come and see here that their place is unstable and that they must fall from the height of honour losing all glory of life. Should we, Kings, in such a state be called gods on earth and rulers of the world, when the power of the sceptre and the foundations of the throne so easily break down by a single strike? Everything in the world is subject to transience, therefore, even a crowned Majesty does not escape from human fortuities. Constant hatred has come into the world in conjunction with virtue and wickedness has darkened mankind's heart so much that it is willing to do anything wrong and that, in its blindness, it is itself the cause of death.⁵⁶

Because Fortune here, despite all efforts of *virtus*, leads into perdition, Mary, in the end, turns out to be an example of pernicious Machiavellianism.⁵⁷ On the whole, however, Kormart's play is overburdened with ideas and therefore appears to be inconsistent. All in all, it can only have functioned as a closet drama.

Schwesterlichen Blute zu toben/ und sich bey unserer Sanfftmuth in verblendeter Boßheit auff diesen Thron zu erheben. Wir erwegen zwar wohl/ was auff solche Verbrecher in unserm Gesetze für Straffe erfolget/ und sie selbst kan das mitleidende vermahnen von ihrer Boßheit aus unsern an sie gestelleten Schreiben abnehmen. Aber wir zweiffeln billig/ ob wir die vollziehung der Straffe einem Gerichte überlassen/ welches sich mit Uns an einer Majestät zu vergreifen scheint. Wir an Fürstlicher Hoheit sind in dieser Welt allzu offenbahr aller Menschen Augen vorgestellt/ und begehen. Wir scheuen uns Schwesterliches Blut zu vergiessen. Wir wollen nicht gerne den Ruhm bey der Nachwelt verliehren daß wir unsern Thron mit so theuren Blute gegründet. Solte denn nicht die Liebe der Schärffe obsiegen? Wir/ so allezeit gewohnet/ auch den geringsten Sachen des Regiments langsam Rath zu pflegen/ möchten hier auch wohl die Gelegenheit wünschen/ alle heilsame Mittel noch zuvor zu versuchen/ ehe wir das scharffe Richtbeil aufhieben.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 122–23: 'Wer nun auff des blinden Glückes Rad sich zu vertrauen gedencket/ und seinen Glantz für göttliche Beschirmung anbetet/ der komm und lerne allhier/ wie er so wanckend sitzen/ und von dessen Ehren-Gipffel mit Verlust aller Lebens-Pracht fallen muß. Wer wil uns Könige in solchen Stand auff dieser Erden Götter/ und dieser Welt Beherrscher nennen/ wann des Scepters Macht und des Thrones Grundfeste also zerbrochen durch einen Schlag dahin fällt? Wie alles in dieser Welt der Veränderung unterworfen/ also kan sich auch nicht eine gekrönte Majestät den Menschlichen Zufällen entziehen. Es ist der stete Has mit der Tugend auff diese Welt gekommen/ und eine Boßheit hat der Menschen Hertzen also verblindet/ daß es zu allen Unrecht fertig stehet/ und gantz blind ohne Liebe der Tugend ihm selbst eine Ursache des Todes ist.'

⁵⁷ For the interrelation of *virtus* and Fortune cf. for example: K.-H. Gerschmann, 'Machiavellismus' in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 5 (1980), coll. 579–83.

*The Transformation of Vondel's Samson into a Politically Inspired
Musical Tragedy on the Perils That Threaten Absolutist Princes*

Similarly extensive, though less in content than in form, were the changes made by the Saxon poet and court musician Constantin Christian Dedekind⁵⁸ (1628–1715) in adapting Vondel's *Samson of Heilige Wraeck*⁵⁹ (*Samson or Holy Vengeance*, 1660) for a German audience; in his *Simson, ein Trauerspiel zur Music eingerichtet* (*Samson, a Tragedy Arranged for Music*) from 1676, he transformed the biblical tragedy into a musical one.⁶⁰ On the whole he follows Vondel's storyline, but due to the frequent changes of metre Dedekind's play must in formal terms be qualified as more vivacious. The lyrical momentum has been intensified by the fact that again and again arias have been inserted. Vondel's choruses, his 'Reyen', have been transformed into real choirs. Moreover his single chorus, that of the Jewish women, which ends every act, is split up into four different others, viz. that of the people of Gaza, that of the Ekron prophetesses, that of the people of the tribe of Dan ('Daniter' i.e. 'Danites') and that of the Dagon temple singers. The number of acting characters has thus increased. As it did by his introducing of allegorical characters such as Chesed (Piety), Tickveh (Hope), Mauz (Strength), Taef (Idolatry) and Aenemunah (Superstition); he really needed them, for his music drama lacks the very dynamics that enabled Vondel to highlight psychic processes by action or dialogues. And last but not least, he brings to the stage Simson's mistress Delila, who in Vondel was only mentioned in the summary, but did not really act. Here she mourns after him, who was, as she says, her most outstanding lover, and depicts herself as a victim of intrigues. Thus sexuality is openly exposed, though dressed in the image of the chivalrous game of jousting, and can the seduction of the ruler Simson more strongly be pronounced:

Es hat mich das Gerichte/
wie vohrmahls mein Verlangen/ nicht betrogen;

⁵⁸ For more information on Dedekind see *ADB*, 5 (1877), pp. 11–12; *NDB*, 3 (1957), pp. 550–51; Killy, *Literatur Lexikon*, 3 (1989), pp. 10–11.

⁵⁹ Joost van den Vondel, *Samson of Heilige Wraeck. Treurspel*, in *WB* 9, pp. 173–239.

⁶⁰ For Dedekind's adaptation of Vondel's *Samson* see: Van Ingen, 'Übersetzung als Rezeptionsdokument', pp. 139–43.

es hat/ vom Bache Sorek/
 mich heute herein gezogen/
 den Gazaritischen Triumph zu schauen/
 und Simson/ der durch mich kahn üms Gesichte/
 beim Sieges-Prachte ahnzusehen.
 Zwahr mihr ists leid daß ihm so weh geschehen;
 allein/ was kann man nicht mit Gelde erkauffen?
 Geld machet keinem Grauen;
 eine Hand voll Gold bezahlt wohl ein paar Augen/
 wänns einen andern schmerzet.
 Das Gold kann Augen bländen/
 wann die Gelegenheit man hat in Händen.
 Denn sie ist zuergreifen
 weil sie vohr Augen stehet/
 sie/ die nicht wiederkehret/
 wänn sie einmahl verschmäheth/ uns entgehet.

Aria.

Wie gabst du dich so blohs?
 du stärker Löwen-Zäumer!
 so bald in meiner Schohs
 du wardst ein Liebes-Träumer.
 So bald sich kühl't an mihr dein Bluht/
 so bald erlag dein Helden-Muht.

Wo ander' in Gefahr/
 daß sie die Krafft verführen/
 da hieltest du dich gahr
 daß kein' Unkrafft zuspühren.
 Hingegen wiche Stärck und Muht
 von dihr/ durchs Haar und nicht durchs Bluht.

Wänn ich in einer Nacht/
 Zwölfmahl rieff aufzusizzen;
 Zwölf-mahl Qwartal gemacht/
 und dich so oft ließ schwizzen:
 dennoch erhieltst du/ muntre Knecht/
 ein ungeschwächtes Reuter-Recht.

Dahrüm beklag ich dich/
 dem ich so wohl behaget/
 dem keinen Lanzen-Stich
 mein Ring iemahls versaget/
 daß du/ durch mich/ verlohrst die Krafft/
 und kahmest in Gefangenschafft.

Mich selber klag' ich an/
 daß ich so falsch gehandelt;
 Denn meine Renne-Bahn
 hat keiner so bewandelt.

Ich sage daß es keiner kann
du bist der bäste Ritters-Mann.⁶¹

This kind of commitment to sexuality does not really match to Vondel; it is quite obviously a remnant of an older tradition of German Samson plays, in which Delila necessarily has to be presented as a seductive harlot in order to reduce Samson's own culpability.

Altogether, a different perspective shines through: Simson's tragic situation as a ruler is lent considerably more emphasis. Above all, Vondel's Samson was, fairly traditionally, a refiguration of Christ.⁶² In the German Lands, however, his story must have been read quite differently. Simson here embodies the perils to which rulers and in particular absolutist monarchs are exposed, viz. the perils of being misled or even seduced by their confidants. At the same time, however, there is hope: as the Lord's Anointed the prince will, if he feels remorse and regret, regain divine assistance and defeat his people's enemies. Samson's fate by this means becomes a case study on the balancing act that absolutist Principality implies, as is indicated by the dialogue, in fact a meta-discourse, between the Prince and Princess of Gaza on the importance of the theatre for the princely self-reflection and (absolutist)

⁶¹ Dedekind, *Simson*, fol. A5^r-A5^v (due to the pages not being numbered, the citations have been indicated by the signatures of the sheets): 'Rumour did not mislead me, / as formerly did not lust; / It now brought me up to here, from the Brook of Sorek, / to view the Gazarites' Triumph / and to see too in the triumphal procession / Simson, who, because of me, lost his eyesight. / I do, admittedly, regret that so much grief befell him, / but is not everything to buy for money? / Nobody is horrified by money. / A handful of gold recompenses a pair of eyes, / especially when it hurts somebody else. / Gold can blind eyes, / when you have caught the opportunity. / You should catch it / when it is before your eyes, / since it does not arise again / and it disappears when it has been missed./ Aria. / How did you expose yourself, / You strong lion tamer? / As soon as you were in my lap / You became a love dreamer. / As soon as your blood cooled itself on me / As soon did your courage subside. / While others were in danger / Of losing their strength / You stayed completely so / That no weakness could be found./ But your strength and courage would leave you / Through your hair rather than blood. / When I in the course of one night / asked you to mount twelve times, / And go all the way twelve times / and let you sweat so often, / Even then, you cheerful Knight, / you kept up your unflagging Rider-right. / That's why I mourn for you / To whom I gave such pleasure / Whose fierceful lancet stab / Was never refused by my ring, / That you, through me, lost your strength / And came to be imprisoned. / I accuse myself / For being so false to you; / For no one ever ran / on my course like you did. / I would maintain that no one can: / You are the best rider-man.' For translation of the Aria I am greatly indebted to Dr. Rudolph Glitz (Amsterdam University, Department of English).

⁶² For Vondel's intent in *Samson* see Langvik-Johannessen, *Zwischen Himmel und Erde*, pp. 188-207.

governance as such, which features in Vondel at the very beginning of Act III and, as compared to Dedekind's version, reveals implicitly as well as explicitly many underlying principles of his way to adapt:

Tooneelspel heeft voorheene ons meer dan eens bedrogen
 Met schijn van waerheit, en niet ongeluckigh: want
 Zoo wort de deught met vreught den vorsten ingeplant,
 Al 't weereltlijck beloop naer 't leven afgeschildert,
 Door spreekende schildry. men ziet een hof verwildert,
 Verwart, en overendt, geverft met prinszenmoort.
 Daer wort van schennisse en wraeckgierigheit gehoort.
 Men ruckt gekroonden, en gezalfden, van hun stoelen.
 Hartstoghten, onderlinge aen 't barrenen, aen 't woelen,
 Ontvouwen zich, gelijk de verwen, met de naelt
 Of schietspoel net geleght, en daer geen meester dwaelt
 Van wel te schicken, zijn tapijtwerck geestigh tekent,
 Dat wie 't bespiegelt dit een overeenkomst rekent
 Van hemelsch ooghmuzijck. hier geeft de bloem van spreuck
 En hemelval een' geur, een' liefelijcken reuck,
 Die meer dan wieroockgeur, en schaelen, hun behaegen.
 Tooneelspel sticht een' staet, verschoont geen lastervleck,
 En smet in heiligh, noch onheiligh, elx gebreck
 Wort, zonder iemants naem te quetsen, aangewezen.
 Tooneelspel wort alleen van dommekracht misprezen,
 Die recht noch reden volghet. toneelspel leent een' schat
 Van wijsheit by de naelt van Menfis, Zonnestadt,
 De hooge rijxschool der befaemde Egyptenaeren,
 Die op de wolcken treên, en kost noch arbeit spaeren,
 Om vrou natuur, van lidt tot lidt, geheel t'ontleên.
 Zoo zamelden zy al wat kenbaer is by een,
 Een' schat van wijsheit, opgestapelt van veele eeuwen.
 Het snaterbecken van alle aexteren en spreeuwen
 Verbluft geen speltooneel. is eenigh vorst belust
 Op spel; wie meer dan wy? dit's u, mevrou, bewust.⁶³

⁶³ Vondel, *Samson*, ll. 668–698. Joost van den Vondel, 'Samson, of Heilige Wraeck, Treurspel 1660: Samson, or Holy Revenge' in Kirkconnell, *Invincible Samson*, pp. 77–142. See pp. 102–103: 'The drama has beguiled us more than once / Ere this with masterly pretence of truth / And not unhappily: if inculcating / True virtue blent with pleasure for our lords / And painting, to the life, the way o' the world / Through speaking pictures. Men behold a court / Confused, upset, unruly, overthrown / By the sad death of princes. Then they hear / Of outrage and revengefulness. Men drag / Crowned and anointed monarchs from their thrones. / Passions that burn and move are blended there / Like colours which a needle on a loom / Quaintly portrays; a master dramatist / Can in imaginative tapestry / So well portray that he who contemplates it / Vows 'tis divine eye-music. Here the flower / Of apophthegm in heavenly valleys yields / A fragrance and a perfume past compare, / More pleasing to the gods than frankincense /

In Dedekind the verses are usually shortened, the heroic alexandrine is exchanged in favor of a richer variation of metric forms and the rhyme pattern, insofar as it can be determined at all, is much more complicated. On the other hand the imagery is systematically reduced. Moreover the princely characters have got names – they are called now Rodeam and Saradi; further the dialogue has shifted into the second scene of Act III and was formulated more concisely. More specifically, it focussed on the *Theatrum Vitae Humanae*-metaphor, which Simson seems to embody up to a high degree:

Die Schau-Spiele haben uns/ zu guhitem Glükke/
 vohrdessen/ unterm Scheine
 der Wahrheit/ oft betrogen;
 Wihr sind dahrüm den'nselben wohlgewogen/
 denn sie sinds/ die den'n Fürsten/
 flugs von der zahrten Jugend/
 den Glanz und Schein der Tugend/
 mit Freude und Lust/ recht einzupflanzen wissen.
 Der ganze Wällt-Lauff wird/ wie nach dem Leben/
 dahrinnen abgerissen.
 Mann sieht den Hooff verwildert;
 mit Fürsten-Mord gefärbet;
 da wird von Rache und Gräuel-Taht gehöret;
 da wird ein Reich/ das andern ahngeerbet/
 durch Meuterei zerstöret.
 Man stürzt Gesalbte herab von ihren Troonen;
 beraubet sie der'r Kroonen/
 und jagt sie fort ins Elend;
 Man hört auf Laster schänden/
 und keines Männschens schohnen/
 wer der auch sei. Man sieht der Tugend lohnen.
 Schau-Spiele geben/ ohne iemand zunännen/
 uns männiglichs Gebrächen
 auf klährste zuerkännen.
 Sie werden nuhr vernichtet/

Upheaved to them in golden bowls and censers. / The drama edifies a state; it brooks /
 No stain of calumny or idle scorn / On holy or unholy. Each one's fault / Is marked
 without disclosing any name. / Drama is not despised but by the churl / Whose dull
 soul follows neither right nor reason. / Surely the drama grants a store of wisdom /
 Upon the stage of Heliopolis, / By the obelisk of Memphis, and the famed / Egyptians'
 national dramatic school / Who tread the clouds and spare not cost nor labour / To
 anatomize Dame Nature, limb by limb. / So have they gathered into one the sum / Of
 all things knowable, a treasury / Of wisdom garnered up by many ages. / The drama
 feels no mute embarrassment / If human starlings chatter in disfavour. / All princes
 take much pleasure in the stage. / Who more than we? 'Tis known to thee, milady.'

von denen die der Weisheit nicht verpflichtet.
 Sie borgen ihre Künste und Wissenschaften
 bei denen weisen Griechen/
 welche an der Klugheit hafften/
 wie am Magnet ein Staal/ und nuzbahr fünden/
 in allem die Natur wohl zuergründen.
 Wo Fürsten ein belieben
 zu solcher Lehr-Ahrt tragen/
 so wird/ wie gnug bekannt/ uns nachgeschrieben/
 daß sie uns oft gereiche zum Behagen.⁶⁴

Even Simson's apotheosis, Dedekind has appended, confirms that the biblical hero's perennial exemplarity is to be found primarily in his political actions, including his victory over the Philistines after the humiliation they had caused him:

Now we take, just as he wished,
 his body to his father's bosom.
 Simson, who won high renown,
 can boast in his outstanding victory.
 Simson's fame will endure for all posterity
 until the end of the earth.⁶⁵

Contemporary German Vondel-Reception Apart from Translations and Adaptations: Travelling Theatres and the Gryphius-Vondel Relation

Already during his lifetime Vondel enjoyed some renown in the German Lands, and not only through translations and adaptations of his

⁶⁴ Dedekind, *Simson*, fol. C7^r-C7^v: 'Drama formerly has, for our benefit, / under the guise of truth / deceived us many times. / We therefore are heartily inclined to it / because it is able properly to implant in princes / straight from their earliest childhood / the glory and the splendour of virtue / in a pleasant and delightful mode. / The whole course of the world / is drawn into it from life./ There you can see the court being brutalized / and blood coloured by murder of princes. / There you can hear about revenge and cruelties. / There a kingdom that was bequeathed to others / is destroyed by mutiny. / The anointed are thrown down from their thrones, / bereaved from their crowns / and banished into exile./ You can hear there vices being blamed and nobody being spared, / whoever he may be. You see there virtue being remunerated. / Drama reveals, without naming somebody, / many men's deficiencies. / It is despised / only by those who do not rely on wisdom. / It obtains its skills and knowledge / from the wise Greeks / who stuck to philosophy / as iron does to the magnet, and considered it useful / to explore, in every respect, nature thoroughly. / When princes take pleasure / in this kind of didacticism, / it is, as is well known, written about us / that it often brings us intense joy.'

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. F8^v: 'Nuhn/ wihr bringen/ nach Verlangen/ diese Leich' ins Vaters Schooss. / Simson/ der sich machte grooss/ kann mit sondrem Siege prangen. / Simsons Nach-Ruhm soll bestehn / bis die Wällt wird untergehn.'

plays; there were, aside from people's private reading, two other ways in which a German auditory, indirectly, could have taken note of (aspects of) Vondel's plays. Firstly Dutch travelling theatres crossing the northern parts of the German Lands might have acted as intermediary. Although they generally popularized and also mostly improvised, they could have transferred some Vondel topics into the German-speaking countries. Because texts of their performances are not extant, it cannot be determined if plays about Lucifer, about the destruction of Jerusalem or about the biblical Joseph, given in German cities like Hamburg in 1654, in 1666 and in 1678 respectively, ultimately trace back to Vondel.⁶⁶ Secondly in original works by German authors too there can occasionally be found some traces of a preoccupation with him. In particular the playwright Andreas Gryphius certainly knew more of Vondel's works than the tragedy *Gebroeders* that he translated and from which he borrowed a few short sections in his *Leo Armenius* (*Leo the Armenian*) and in *Catharina von Georgien*.⁶⁷ His *Carolus Stuartus* (*Charles Stuart*) could, to some extent, have been written as a counterpart to Vondel's *Maria Stuart*, although there is no evidence of any immediate influence. By contrast, modern scholarship is in full agreement on the fact that in his *Gelibte Dornrose* (*Beloved Sleeping Beauty*) – which, together with *Das Verliebte Gespenst* (*The Enamoured Phantom*), constitutes a 'Mischspiel' ('hybrid play') – there are unmistakable echoes of Vondel's *Leeuwendalers*.⁶⁸ A more far-reaching influence cannot be confirmed, even though Gryphius's supposed reliance on Vondel has been the subject of intensive discussion in recent decades: putative references are too vague to speak of any kind of influence.⁶⁹ In such cases Gryphius might at best have had recourse to collectanea, brought

⁶⁶ Junkers, *Niederländische Schauspieler*, pp. 159–61, 211, 226, 238, 245.

⁶⁷ Kiedroń, *Andreas Gryphius und die Niederlande*, pp. 69–72.

⁶⁸ See Kollewijn, 'Gryphius' "Dornrose" und Vondels "Leeuwendalers"; Krispyn, 'Vondel's "Leeuwendalers"'; Kiedroń, *Andreas Gryphius und die Niederlande*, pp. 81–84.

⁶⁹ The extent of Vondel's influence on Gryphius has been discussed in scholarship for over a century. See (for instance): Kollewijn, *Über den Einfluß des holländischen Dramas*; Kollewijn, 'Über die Quelle des Peter Squenz'; Flemming, 'Vondels Einfluß'; Haerten, *Vondel und der deutsche Barock*; Weevers, 'Vondel's Influence'; Hechtle, 'Joost van den Vondel'; Pott, 'Holland-German Literary Relations'; Rens, 'Over het probleem'; Verhofstadt, 'Vondel und Gryphius'. In 1993 Stefan Kiedroń, after a critical evaluation, concluded that only in a few cases could specific influence be confirmed and that Vondel mainly served for Gryphius as an intermediary of ideas of the philosopher Justus Lipsius, cf. Kiedroń, *Andreas Gryphius und die Niederlande*, pp. 59–87. See also Van Gemert, *Niederländische Einflüsse*, pp. 102–05.

together over time for later use, if required. Howsoever it may be perceived, all this was definitely not of any profound significance for his plays.

England, France and Latinity

The question of whether Vondel could have influenced contemporary England, and especially whether his *Lucifer* (1654) might have been of immediate significance to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, has been discussed in scholarship with an intensity similar to that found in the case of Gryphius. In spite of their large number, the relevant studies, published over more than one century,⁷⁰ did not succeed in finding any concrete relations; the overall similarity may be explained through the common use of the biblical creation story as the main source of inspiration. Thus, after more than a hundred years, there is still full consensus on the conclusion Moolhuizen drew in 1892 in his Utrecht thesis:

In generalities Milton and Vondel align with each other, in details they do not. Every matching that occurs is due to the fact that both poets draw on the same source: both of them follow the biblical story. None of them needs the other as an example. Their artistic autonomy and their high level allowed each of them to go his own way [...].⁷¹

To some extent Moolhuizen's statement could be criticized. By asserting that, on account of their extraordinary poetical abilities, Milton and Vondel would not have needed each other, he wrongly applies present standards of originality to early modern literature. Furthermore, he does not take account of the different religious backgrounds of both poets, which could have hampered reception. Neither does he consider the political impact of their works. His denial of an English reception of Vondel in early modern times, however, and more specifically of a Milton-Vondel relation, can be the subject of unquestioning consent.

⁷⁰ See, for example: Edmundson, *Milton and Vondel*; Müller, *Über Miltons Abhängigkeit von Vondel*; Moolhuizen, *Vondels Lucifer en Miltons Verloren Paradijs*; De Vries, *Holland's Influence*, esp. pp. 288–91 and 294–96; Mody, *Vondel and Milton*; Davies, *The 'Samson' Theme*, esp. pp. 177–204; see also Van Dijkhuizen and Helmers, Chapter 19, 'Religion and Politics', in this volume.

⁷¹ Moolhuizen, *Vondels Lucifer en Miltons Verloren Paradijs*, p. 121: 'In algemeenheden komen Milton en Vondel overeen; in bijzonderheden niet. Dat er overeenkomst is, komt hier vandaan, dat beide dichters uit eene en dezelfde bron putten: beide volgen den Bijbel. Zij behoeven elkanders voorbeeld niet. Zij waren zelfstandig genoeg en stonden hoog genoeg om elk zijn eigen weg te gaan [...].'

Almost as scant as the English contemporary concern with Vondel was the French, although here some more concrete indications can be found, since the Dunkirk poet Michael de Swaen (1654–1707)⁷² referred to Vondel several times by criticizing his highly artificial style and his intricate reasoning.⁷³ He, however, cannot be considered as an exponent of French Vondel reception: he was a Dutch-speaking poet of Flemish provenance, who became a French subject because his native city was annexed to France in 1662, but he himself nevertheless continued writing in Dutch.⁷⁴ His preoccupation with Vondel therefore remained without relevance for French culture.

It might surprise that as a playwright in the 17th century Vondel was not received in contemporary European Latin literature. To be sure, this is partly due to the fact that he himself did not write in Latin and therefore, especially abroad, must have been considered not to be a member of the *respublica litteraria* or a *poeta doctus*. This does not necessarily imply that he would not have participated in the intellectual climate of learned society. It is supposed that for his *Jeptha* (1659) – next to its immediate source, George Buchanan's *Jephtes, sive votum* (1554) – he could have had recourse to the Neo-Latin *Jephtias* of the German Jesuit Jacob Balde⁷⁵ (1604–1668), which was published some years earlier in 1654.⁷⁶ As yet it has not been possible to confirm this in detail. It is, however, obvious that the common biblical source could have led to similarities. Translations of works by Vondel into Latin seem not have appeared earlier than in the second half of the 18th century, but they then no longer functioned in a social setting and were primarily the intellectual gimmicks of schoolmen.⁷⁷

Conclusion

In his lifetime, Vondel's European reception as a playwright and as a poet in general was fairly limited. This may partly be explained by the

⁷² For his life see: Sabbe, *Leven en werken van Michael de Swaen*, esp. pp. 3–7.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 69–71.

⁷⁴ See Thys, 'Vondel en Frankrijk', pp. 294–97; Thys, *Vondel et la France*, pp. 39–46.

⁷⁵ Westermayer, *Jacobus Balde (1604–1668)*; *ADB*, 1 (1875), pp. 1–3; *NDB*, 1 (1953), p. 549.

⁷⁶ Führer, *Studien zu Jacob Baldes 'Jephtias'*, pp. 174–75.

⁷⁷ Cf. (for example) *Justi Vondelii Joannis metanoë-angeli sive Poenitentiae praeconis, libri sex versibus latinis redditi*. Auctore C.F. de Rees. Hagae Comitum: apud Eustachium de Haan, 1761. A second edition seems to have been appeared in 1766 in Amsterdam.

then relatively small spread of knowledge of Dutch outside its own language area, which might, apart from in the German Lands where a related language was spoken, have hampered reception everywhere. But also thematic and content-related aspects, as well as Vondel's reputation, might have counteracted a broader European noticing of his works. He just did not deal primarily with catchy issues of everyday life that were didactically exploitable, as Jacob Cats did. He did not acquire European prestige, as Hugo Grotius did. And he did not hold a scholarly rank such as that held by Daniel Heinsius. And finally, his Catholicism too – which he confesses, like many converts, openly and in a militant way – could have prevented his plays gaining wide appeal. In most instances of adaptation of Vondel outside the Netherlands in the seventeenth century, his plays are even more politicized than in their original form. In his highlighting the political factor, Vondel may have been a child of his time that vehemently discussed key political events all over Europe such as the execution of Charles I Stuart. However, his specific approach outside of the Dutch Republic somehow must have had added value for the respective domestic production of literature.

Conspicuously, contemporary Vondel reception outside the Dutch Republic was limited to the German Lands, where language affinity facilitated accessibility and where the Netherlands at that time functioned as a role model, especially in the field of cultural politics. It is conspicuous too that, apart from the Silesian Gryphius, who had lived in the Netherlands himself, reception was mainly in Saxonia. A similar climate of pragmatic interconfessional tolerance to that in the Dutch Republic may well have prevailed,⁷⁸ being an appropriate basis of reception. German Vondel reception during the 17th century was anything but comprehensive and did not really care about proximity to the Dutch original. As a specimen of the European impact of contemporary Dutch literature, however, it could be instructive.

During the 18th century there are no traces to be found of any more intensive concern with Vondel outside the Netherlands, and in the 19th century foreign interest in him is mostly antiquarian in focus; it mainly manifests itself within the context of the then new concept of world literature, which competes with the older, politically connoted one of national literature. Again, in Germany alone Vondel is now received in

⁷⁸ Böttiger, *Geschichte des Kurstaates und Königreiches Sachsen*, 2 (1831), pp. 159–220.

a different way: here he was contemporized during the so-called 'Kulturkampf' (cultural struggle) and its backwash, when in confrontation with the Bismarck regime he was positioned by German Catholics as an exemplar of an outstanding level of culture achieved by a Catholic.⁷⁹ A thorough monograph on his life and works, written by the Jesuit literary historian Alexander Baumgartner⁸⁰ (1841–1910), appeared⁸¹ and a complete edition in German translation even seems to have been planned.⁸² Now too the long-standing kinship between the Germans and the Dutch is emphasized, and the German Vondel lobby, personified by Lina Schneider⁸³ (1831–1909) as its figurehead, is strongly supported by Dutch kindred spirits such as Jozef Albert Alberdingk Thijm⁸⁴ (1820–1889). Once emancipation of the German Catholics was achieved, Vondel lost currency in Germany, as he did *mutatis mutandis* in the Netherlands. The German edition of his complete works never got beyond the beginnings. Although recently Vondel has increasingly been translated once more, especially into English, this does not imply renewed contemporization, but is merely due to comparative, philological or cultural interests. All in all, Vondel has since been enshrined, within the Netherlands and outside its borders, in the pantheon of classical authors, and he shares their fate fully; that is to say, he is revered in awe, but hardly ever read by the mainstream public.

⁷⁹ See Van Gemert, 'Germanje groet U', esp. pp. 68–69.

⁸⁰ On him see *NDB*, 1 (1953), p. 666.

⁸¹ Baumgartner, *Joost van den Vondel, sein Leben und seine Werke*; see also Van Gemert: 'Germanje groet U', pp. 82–84.

⁸² Diferee, 'Vondel in den vreemde', pp. 11–13; Van Gemert, 'Germanje groet U', pp. 76–82.

⁸³ De Beer, 'Levensbericht van Lina Schneider'; Van Gemert, 'Germanje groet U', pp. 84–91.

⁸⁴ Van der Plas, *Vader Thijm*.

PART II
APPROACHES AND DRAMAS

CHAPTER ELEVEN

NEW HISTORICISM – *HIERUSALEM VERWOEST* (1620) AND THE JEWISH QUESTION*

Jürgen Pieters

Hierusalem Verwoest and its Critics: 'A Mere Religious Play'?

Hierusalem verwoest (*Jerusalem Destroyed*) has never been a favourite among Vondel scholars, and that is putting things mildly. Despite the author's own enthusiasm for it,¹ Vondel's second play (1620) has definitely not been greeted with much critical acclaim throughout the past century and a half. The modern standard of the text's reception seems to have been set by Jacob Van Lennep. In his introduction to the play in his edition of *De Werken van Vondel* (1855), Van Lennep expressed his admiration for the poet's distinct linguistic virtuosity in *Hierusalem verwoest*. This clearly marked a welcome step forward, he thought, in comparison with *Het Pascha* (*Passover*), Vondel's first play which was published eight years earlier. But at the same time, Van Lennep seems to have been a bit disappointed by the new play's lack of dramatic power.² With respect to the latter, he considered the comparison with *Het Pascha* less advantageous. Although still clearly rooted in the Dutch late medieval tradition of 'het rederijkersspel' from which Vondel would soon break away, *Het Pascha* was much more of a real play than *Hierusalem verwoest*, Van Lennep felt. He concluded, therefore, that it would be better to characterize Vondel's second dramatic opus as a 'tragic song' (*treurzang*) rather than a 'tragedy' (*treurspel*).³

Both ingredients of Van Lennep's mixed feelings about the play return in the summary treatment that *Hierusalem verwoest* is given in

* The author wishes to thank Mike Keirsbilck for his invaluable bibliographical help in the preparation of this text and Lise Gosseye for her assistance with the English translations of Vondel's verse.

¹ Of his earliest writings, he only includes *Hierusalem verwoest* in the 1644 edition (*Verzamelt door B.D.L.B. t'Amsterdam, gedrukt bij Jacob Lescaille. Voor Joost Hartgers*) of his *Verscheide Gedichten*. Cf. Van Lennep, 'Kritisch overzicht', p. 757.

² Van Lennep, 'Kritisch overzicht', p. 752.

³ Van Lennep, 'Kritisch overzicht', p. 752.

most of the important histories of Dutch literature of the modern era. Kalff, Te Winkel and Knuvelde, to give only those three examples, all seem to agree with Van Lennep. Compared to *Het Pascha*, *Hierusalem verwoest* is indeed a step forward as far as the development of Vondel's budding mastery of the Dutch language is concerned, both Kalff and Te Winkel write,⁴ but the characters are lacking in personality, Kalff claims.⁵ According to Knuvelde, on the other hand, dramatically speaking the play as a whole, on account of its largely emblematic purposes, is not very gripping.⁶ Te Winkel concurs, by means of what any reader of *Hierusalem verwoest* will ultimately consider a serious understatement: 'there is more dialogue than action' in Vondel's second play.⁷

There is, to be frank, hardly any action at all in *Hierusalem verwoest*. The play opens *post medias res*, one could say, after the real action has taken place, the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the later Roman emperor Titus in 70 AD. The play's first four acts are almost entirely taken up by *post factum* descriptions of the town's bloody siege and by comments on the event by members of both the victorious party (the Roman leader, Titus, for instance, and his second in command, Librarius) and those who are left defeated (the daughter of Sion, for instance, a personification of the Jewish people, and the Jewish priest, Phineas, whose monologue opens the third act). In true Senecan fashion,⁸ each of the first four acts is rounded off by the lyrical ruminations of a group of characters: no action there either. There are five 'Reyen' in all in *Hierusalem verwoest*, representing the different parties in the military conflict: Roman soldiers, Jewish women, 'Jewesses in general',

⁴ Kalff, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandse Letterkunde*, 4, p. 267; Te Winkel, *Ontwikkelingsgang*, 3, pp. 270–71.

⁵ Kalff, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandse Letterkunde*, 4, p. 267.

⁶ Knuvelde, *Handboek*, 2, p. 323.

⁷ '[E]r [is] meer dialoog dan handeling': Te Winkel, *Ontwikkelingsgang*, 3, p. 271.

⁸ In the interlude between *Het Pascha* and *Hierusalem verwoest*, Vondel discovered Seneca, of whose *Troades* he made a prose-translation together with P.C. Hooft and Laurens Reael, probably in the winter of 1622–1623. Seneca's play deals with the destruction of Troy and its impact on the female population of the city: the analogy with *Hierusalem verwoest* is obvious, since most of the play's action is taken up by the attempt of the women of Jerusalem to prevent the daughter of Sion from being taken to Rome as part of the war booty. Vondel's *Amsteldamsche Hecuba* (1625) is a translation of the play in rhyming verse. I will not deal with the Senecan influence in *Hierusalem verwoest*, given the extensive treatment of the subject in Smit, *Van Pascha to Noah*, 1, pp. 61–63. Smit's chapter on the play (*Van Pascha tot Noah*, 1, pp. 61–96) is still the best general introduction to it. Other good introductions to the play can be found in Molkenboer, *De jonge Vondel*, pp. 627–57 and Konst, *Fortuna, Fatum & Providentia*, pp. 127–35.

‘Courtly ladies in waiting’ (Staet Jonffren) and Christians.⁹ The latter group, who on account of the Roman victory will be allowed to settle in Jerusalem, are addressed in the fifth act by the angel Gabriel. In his long monologue, which takes up most of the fifth act, he explains God’s ways to both the Christian settlers and the Amsterdam audience of Vondel’s play. I will come back to Gabriel’s speech later in this chapter.

In the two most recent literary histories to date, the critical fortune of *Hierusalem verwoest* has not made a turn for the better. In *Nederlandse literatuur, een geschiedenis* (1993), the play does not even receive a separate mention at all, whereas in *Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen (1560–1700)*, their contribution to the seven-volume *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Literatuur* (2008), Karel Porteman and Mieke Smits-Veldt grant *Hierusalem verwoest* one single sentence, a dismissive one at that: Vondel’s second play, the authors believe, is ‘nothing but a religious play about God’s deliverance of vengeful justice to sinners, in a Christian *aemulatio* of Seneca’s *Troades*’.¹⁰ As the title of this chapter suggests, I intend to dispute this qualification as well as the slightly condescending judgment that it seems to entail. Of course, the play is religious to the bone, like most of Vondel’s work, but as I hope to make clear, a closer look at the historical moment in which *Hierusalem verwoest* was written, may enable us to relate the Christian message that it tries to convey to the political actuality of Vondel’s Amsterdam in a new and, hopefully, exciting way.

The Historical Method: From Old to New

While there is much to be said in favour of Van Lennep’s general appreciation of Vondel’s play, it is not the purpose of the present chapter to add to the aesthetic criticism of *Hierusalem verwoest* that he inaugurated. Rather, what I wish to do is to relate the play to a set of historical circumstances to which it can be read as a response. My aim is not to pin down the meaning of Vondel’s entire text to what traditional historical scholars would have called its original context of production, but to indicate within it one specific discursive thread that enables us to see the text as participating in the complex historical moment to which

⁹ Cf. Van Gemert, *Tussen de bedrijven door?*, pp. 235–36.

¹⁰ Porteman and Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland*, p. 231: ‘[...] niet meer dan een religieus spel over Gods wrekende gerechtigheid over zondaren, in een christelijke *aemulatio* van Seneca’s *Troades*.’

it belongs. At large, the text's historical moment is that of the closing years of the Twelve Years' Truce and the aftermath of the tragic execution of Oldenbarnevelt, a moment of great political and religious instability. As we will see shortly, Vondel's second play has been repeatedly connected to this historical background, but in my view not in a very satisfactory manner, or at least not on the basis of sufficient textual evidence.

My aim, obviously, is in line with the reading method this chapter is meant to exemplify, the New Historicism. A word of caution is in order, however. What I am here presenting is not a full-fledged New Historicist analysis of *Hierusalem verwoest*. Such an ambition would require more space and, admittedly, more archival study than I have been able to pursue so far. My ambition is more modest, but it does nevertheless tie in with the critical agenda of New Historicism, in the sense that, on the basis of a number of specific textual markers, I wish to situate Vondel's text in a dialogical framework of other texts whose presuppositions it borrows and elaborates upon. Instead of taking an allegorical approach as previous historicist readings of *Hierusalem verwoest* have done, I have opted for a more literal reading and taken the Jews in Vondel's play for what they represent: Jews. In doing so, the historicist bias behind my reading of the play has directed me towards the question of their actual treatment in Vondel's Amsterdam and to Hugo Grotius's *Remonstrance Concerning the Order that Needs to Be Imposed on the Jews in the States of Holland and Westvrieslandt* (*Remonstrantie nopende de ordre dije in de landen van Hollandt ende Westvrieslandt dijen gestelt op de Joden*, 1615). Without wanting to suggest an explicit intertextual relationship between Vondel's play and the text by Grotius, I want to argue that both texts participate in a shared ideology with respect to the Jewish Question, an ideology that I would describe in terms of a 'missionary tolerance': their presence is tolerated, for several reasons – primarily economic ones, but also ultimately anticipation of their long-awaited conversion to Christianity.

To be sure, a full-fledged New Historicist analysis of Vondel's play would require a more extensive reading of Vondel's text in connection with a broader corpus of co-texts. However, I hope that what follows may ultimately serve as the first step towards a more exhaustive treatment of the subject along the lines presented here. New Historicist analyses are generally meant as corrections of a number of presumably flawed characteristics of more traditional historicist readings: (a) their positivism (their tendency to anchor texts in a set of facts that are

treated as indisputable rather than historical representations that can be seen from different perspectives); (b) their ‘monologism’ (their tendency to take contexts as monoliths of which the literary text is subsequently seen as a simple illustration); (c) their idealism (their tendency to venerate literary authors as beings endowed with more historical insight than other living beings).¹¹ It would not be too hard, I think, to come up with examples of traditional historicist readings of texts by Vondel that fit this description. In what follows, I intend to counteract these three tendencies, by (a) construing historical facts (in this case, the presence of the Jews in Amsterdam anno 1618–1619) as a matter of dialogical dispute; (b) regarding the background of Vondel’s play as an unstable and multifaceted artefact that contains a force field that cannot be reduced to a simple formula; (c) treating Vondel not as a straightforward champion of political correctness (‘toleration,’ ‘moral rectitude’) but as a historical agent who like any other historical agent in his time did not have the freedom to transcend the discursive boundaries of his age.

*The Political Actuality of Hierusalem verwoest: the Dedication
to C.P. Hooft*

From what I have said so far about the critical reception of *Hierusalem verwoest*, one might be led to conclude that there is very little about which critics tend to disagree with respect to Vondel’s second play. However, such a conclusion stands in need of immediate qualification. The most important bone of contention among scholars who have written about *Hierusalem verwoest* seems to be that of the play’s presumed ‘topicality’: the question, more specifically, of how Vondel’s dramatization of what to him and his contemporaries was after all a story from a distant past, relates to the major political event of the year that precedes the play’s composition, the execution of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt on May 13th 1619. It is well known that the history of Oldenbarnevelt’s final days is the subject of the play Vondel wrote after *Hierusalem verwoest*, *Palamedes* (1625). Yet according to some critics, Vondel’s outrage at the scandalous ‘murder’ of the Raadpensionaris by

¹¹ A good survey of the basic principles of the reading method can be found in Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*. See also Pieters, *Moments of Negotiation* and ‘In denkbeeldige tegenwoordigheid’.

Stadtholder Maurits (the term is Vondel's) can be distinctly felt in *Hierusalem verwoest*, especially in the play's opening monologue by Josephus (a character representing Flavius Josephus, the Jewish-Roman historian, writer of the *Antiquitates Judaicae* and of the *Bellum Iudaicum* from which Vondel took some of the historical materials for his play) and in the dedicatory epistle to C.P. Hooft, 'Councillor and former Burgomaster of the globally famous Merchant City of Amsterdam' (HV, p. 77).¹²

Albert Verwey, for one, felt quite sure that, much in the same way as *Het Pascha* could be read as a 'laudatory poem on the secession from Spain', *Hierusalem verwoest* had to be seen as 'Vondel's response to the beheading of the Pensionary'.¹³ Written in 1927, Verwey's comment can be taken as an echo of the lengthy exposition that C.R. De Klerk in the *Kultuurbeschouwende inleiding* to his edition of *Het Pascha* and *Hierusalem verwoest* (1911) devotes to what he considers to be the reasoning behind Vondel's dedication of the latter play to former burgomaster Hooft.¹⁴ The play in itself, De Klerk admits, scarcely contains any immediately visible traces of the politically turbulent moment of its composition. This is hardly coincidental, he feels, since the time was definitely not ripe for a direct attack against those Vondel would have considered responsible for Oldenbarnevelt's end: the Stadtholder and his political entourage, in the first place, as well as the orthodox Calvinist preachers whose party had prevailed at the Synod of Dordrecht of 1618–1619. It is a well-known fact that the impact of the Synod was not limited to religious issues. The theological dispute between Remonstrants and Contraremonstrants also involved differences of meaning with respect to the political organization of the Republic and foreign policy.¹⁵ The Contraremonstrants were generally

¹² 'Raed en ouwd Burgemeester der om des weerelds ommeloop wyd beroemde Koopstad Amsterdam.' In what follows, I will draw on the text as it appears in the second volume of *De werken van Vondel* in the ten-volume edition from the 'maatschappij voor goede en goedkoope lectuur te Amsterdam' ('company for well-written and well-priced reading material in Amsterdam'). References are given parenthetically as HV, followed by the page number (for the paratextual materials) or the line number (for the text of the play itself).

¹³ '[L]ofzang op de losmaking van Spanje' and 'Vondels antwoord op de onthoofding van de Advocaat': Verwey, *Vondels vers*, p. 37.

¹⁴ De Klerk, *Kultuurbeschouwende inleiding*, pp. lii–lxxxii.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Rowen, *The Princes of Orange*, p. 46. For a clear survey of the political and religious struggles of the moment see Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, pp. 399–477.

in favour of a heavily centralized state in whose organisation the Church would play a central role, more central at least than the one it had in the federation of semi-independent states that made up the young Dutch Republic.¹⁶ In the political force field that structured the first decades of the Republic, their position automatically seemed to entail the support for the Stadtholder, whose role, they believed, needed to become that of a quasi-monarch, whose absolute power it was to decide upon what was best for all his subjects, not just *including* their religion but even *predominantly* their religion. In his political struggle against Oldenbarnevelt, spokesman for the States and staunch supporter of the federalist organization of the Union, Maurits will have been aware that the outcome of the Synod in favour of the Contraremonstrants would ultimately strengthen his own power and possibly even secure him the position of supreme sovereign.

The outcome of the political struggle between Oldenbarnevelt and Maurits is well-known, as is the fact that it filled Vondel with pure rage, a rage which according to De Klerk he could not express in *Hierusalem verwoest*. However, by dedicating his play to former burgomaster Hooft, Vondel did make it perfectly clear whose side he was on. Both in his political ambitions and in his continued plea for religious tolerance, Hooft could be considered an ally of Oldenbarnevelt and Grotius, the two most memorable victims of the political outcome of the Synod of Dordt. Between 1588 and 1610, C.P. Hooft, father of the famous poet, was several times elected as one of the burgomasters of Amsterdam, on whose 'city council' ('vroedschap') he served in different capacities from 1584 until his death in 1626.¹⁷ On the occasion of his death, Vondel composed a touching sonnet ('Klinckdicht') in which he urged his fellow citizens to always remember Hooft as an 'irreproachable' ('onbesproken') enemy of 'profit and thirst for power' ('baet en staetzucht'). In *Het Roskam* (*Currycumb*, 1630), one of his fiercest satirical poems, dedicated to Hooft's son, the famous poet and Sheriff ('Drost') of Muyden, Vondel addressed the former burgomaster as 'dear burgomaster' ('beste bestevoer') and 'Mirror of virtue' ('Spiegel van de

¹⁶ For a good survey of the political organization of the States making up the Republic, see Méchoulan, *Amsterdam ten tijde van Spinoza*, pp. 58–59.

¹⁷ For an intellectual biography of Hooft see Van Gelder, *Levensbeschouwing*. For a brief survey of Hooft's activities on the 'Raedt' of the Amsterdam 'Vroedschap' see Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam*, I, p. 147. In the introduction to his book, Elias gives a succinct description of the city's political organization. See also Burke, *Venetie en Amsterdam*, passim and Méchoulan, *Amsterdam ten tijde van Spinoza*, p. 64.

deugd'), an avatar of moral rectitude and hence a true counterexample to those who were now in charge of the city and whose politics of blind self-interest, Vondel felt, might bring an end to Amsterdam's prosperity.

Throughout his career, Hooft had always taken a firm stance against those Vondel gradually came to consider his worst enemies, the Calvinist preachers whom the poet also targeted in other memorable satires.¹⁸ Hooft's resistance to the 'Predikanten' (preachers) was, unsurprisingly, based on a mixture of religious, moral and political considerations. He abhorred their intolerance of dissenters on the basis of the very principles that earned him the nickname of Cato, but his untiring resistance to the preachers was also a matter of political conviction. Their continued plea for more authority for the Church in State matters ultimately threatened to bring down the good fortune of Amsterdam, Hooft felt, the economic success of which he considered to be the result of the sound and pragmatic organization of the City and the fact that it was ruled by merchants and for merchants. His no doubt justly famed tolerance was equally grounded in an economic rationale, as Busken Huet already shrewdly noted in his trenchant portrait of Hooft in *Het Land van Rembrandt*.¹⁹ However, by the time of Vondel's dedication of *Hierusalem verwoest*, the man's power had already waned considerably. On 3 November 1618, two months after the imprisonment of Oldenbarnevelt, Hooft famously stood up to Stadtholder Maurits when the latter came to a meeting of the Amsterdam city council to sack those regents of the City of Amsterdam who were less supportive of his cause.²⁰ Maurits, however, seems not to have been duly impressed by Hooft's protest.

Vondel's Play and the Jewish Presence in Amsterdam

Apart from the dedicatory epistle, some critics have also perceived references to the Oldenbarnevelt case in the very text of Vondel's play. According to Sterck, some of the lines of Josephus's opening

¹⁸ Cf. Van Gelder, *Levensbeschouwing*, pp. 124–29.

¹⁹ Huet, *Het land van Rembrandt*, 3, pp. 161–66. As Méchoulan puts it: 'Vrijheid en tolerantie zijn commerciële imperatieven, dat wil zeggen categorische imperatieven voor het stadsbestuur.' ('Freedom and tolerance are commercial imperatives, i.e. categorical imperatives for local government', *Amsterdam ten tijde van Spinoza*, p. 57)

²⁰ Cf. De Klerk, *Kultuurbeschouwende inleiding*, pp. lxxvii–lxx. See also: Calis, *Vondel*, pp. 118–19.

monologue of *Hierusalem verwoest* would not have been out of place in *Palamedes*.²¹ In his brief analysis of the play in *Vondels Vers*, Verwey quotes the first twelve lines of the play in which the theme of God's revenge on the Jews is immediately introduced and he feels sure that these lines could only have been provoked by the imprisonment and the execution of Oldenbarnevelt.²² Molkenboer, in his famous study of the writings of *De jonge Vondel* (*The young Vondel*), even detects in Josephus's first speech 'allusions suggesting that the poet even thought of the overconfidence of those preaching predestination.'²³

However, as I suggested earlier, not every reader of *Hierusalem verwoest* agrees with De Klerk, Verwey, Sterck and Molkenboer. In his analysis of the play in the first volume of his classic *Van Pascha tot Noah*, W.A.P. Smit is quite emphatic: 'I am truly convinced that any political allusion to Oldenbarnevelt is wholly foreign to *Hierusalem verwoest*', he writes, 'even in the Josephus monologue.'²⁴ The play, Smit goes on to write, contains no immediate references to the political actuality of its moment of production; it 'only contains Biblical-Christian symbolism.'²⁵ Having repeatedly and closely read the play's opening monologue, I tend to side with Smit on this specific issue. To be sure, Vondel will no doubt have been thinking about some kind of poetical means with which to call for revenge in the immediate aftermath of the horrendous events of May 1619, but it is hardly clear why he would want to choose this specific story about God's revenge on the Jews to air his dissatisfaction with the outcome of the political struggles in the Republic in general and in Amsterdam in particular. In 1625, it was clear to every reader that *Palamedes* was in fact about

²¹ Sterck, 'Het leven van Vondel', p. 3.

²² 'Door welke gebeurtenissen anders dan door de vervolging van de Remonstranten en de gevangenneming en dood van Baernevelt, kon hij gedreven zijn tot zulk een spanning, overspanning bijna, van gekrenkt rechtvaardigheidsgevoel.' ('What events, other than the persecution of the Remonstrants and the arrest and death of Barnevelt, could compel him to such a strain, overstraining almost, of aggrieved sense of justice?') Verwey, *Vondels Vers*, p. 38.

²³ Molkenboer, *De jonge Vondel*, p. 640: 'toespelingen die het vermoeden wekken dat de dichter zelfs aan de overmoed van de Praedestinatie-predikanten gedachten heeft (ll. 25–26)'.
²⁴ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 1, p. 94: 'Ik ben ervan overtuigd, dat in werkelijkheid iedere politieke allusie op Oldenbarneveltdt aan de *Hierusalem verwoest* ten enenmale vreemd is, ook in de Josephus-monoloog'.

²⁵ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 1, p. 94: 'uitsluitend drager van een Bijbels-Christelijke symboliek'.

Oldenbarnevelt: the eponymous hero is the classical exemplum par excellence of a wise leader unjustly convicted, and that is precisely what Oldenbarnevelt was in Vondel's view. In the case of *Hierusalem verwoest*, any historical analogy between what could be seen on the theatrical stage or read on the page of a printed literary text and what happened on the political stage is much harder to determine, unless one takes the phenomenon of the analogy in a very flexible (and possibly even blasphemous) sense of the word and considers the killing of Christ by the Jews as a historical parallel to the murder of Oldenbarnevelt by the Contraremonstrants.

Still, this does not mean that *Hierusalem verwoest* 'only contains Biblical-Christian symbolism'. Vondel's use of this Biblical motif has an actual bearing on the moment of its production. In the remainder of this chapter, I want to follow a different 'contextual' trail that allows us to connect Vondel's text in a more direct manner to the historical circumstances in which it was produced. I want to relate *Hierusalem verwoest* to a question that seems immediately relevant to the historical materials that Vondel drew upon in his play and that was clearly in the air at the time when he wrote it, even if less spectacularly so than the Oldenbarnevelt case.

On 13 December 1619, the States of Holland decided that in future it would be left to the cities within the Assembly to decide upon their own regulations with respect to the treatment of their Jewish inhabitants. A 'national' policy with respect to the Jews turned out not to be feasible at the time, possibly also on account of the fact that the Jewish question kept dividing the Calvinist and more libertarian factions within the States. The only general rule that the States decreed was that Jews should not be compelled to wear any distinguishing mark, as was the case in different European states and regions.²⁶ As far as the city of Amsterdam was concerned, the decision of the States enabled the city council to continue the moderately liberal policy it had been adopting for some years. Given the steady rise of the number of Sephardic merchants in the Republic (and in Amsterdam, in particular), the Jewish Question seems to have been a not wholly unimportant one during the Twelve Years' Truce.²⁷ The Truce had resulted, among other things, in a major economic boom, to which the growing number of Jewish merchants had contributed significantly. In contrast to their Dutch

²⁶ Huussen, 'The legal position of the Jews', p. 34.

²⁷ Meijer, 'Inleiding', p. 47.

colleagues, the Sephardic Jews had an immediate access to the interesting markets related to the Spanish and Portuguese colonies.²⁸ If only on economic grounds, therefore, most Dutch policy-makers seem to have found it reasonable to welcome members of the 'Jewish Nation' in their midst, even if their presence was greeted with serious hostility by other groups within society, the reformed clergy in particular. 'Provocations and oppositions aside', Hsia notes in one of many surveys of the matter, 'the Jewish community flourished because of the protection of the regents, who ignored most of the complaints of the Reformed clergy'.²⁹

This should not lead us to conclude, however, that Amsterdam was a true heaven on earth for the Jews.³⁰ In 1614, five years before the decision to which I just referred, the question of the increasing number of Jews living in the Republic was already occupying the members of the States of Holland. According to Meijer, the direct occasion may have been one or two cases of apostasy, Christians suddenly converting to the Jewish faith.³¹ The States asked two prominent lawyers to draft a recommendation with respect to the Jewish question: the Calvinist Adriaen Pauw, Pensionary of Amsterdam, and the Arminian Hugo Grotius.³² Of their responses, only that of Grotius seems to have survived; his 'Remonstrance Concerning the Order Needing to be Imposed on the Jews in the States of Holland and Westvrieslandt for the Jews' (1615) has been taken by many historians of the period to be a typical product of the treatment of the Jews in the first two decades of the seventeenth-century Republic: 'liberal on some points, reactionary on others', to borrow the terms used by Jonathan Israel.³³ Indeed, Grotius's text strikes the contemporary reader as a bizarre mixture of philosemitism and antisemitism. The text opens with a number of historical arguments that are traditionally directed against the toleration of Jews.³⁴ In that context Grotius provides us with examples of 'the general

²⁸ Van Rooden, 'Jews and religious toleration in the Dutch Republic', p. 134.

²⁹ Hsia, 'Introduction', p. 3.

³⁰ For a survey of four different Christian perspectives on Jews in the seventeenth-century Republic see Abicht, *Geschiedenis van de Joden van de Lage Landen*, pp. 72–75.

³¹ Meijer, 'Inleiding', p. 48.

³² Huussen, 'The legal position of the Jews', pp. 32–33.

³³ Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism 1550–1750*, p. 64. Nellen (*Hugo de Groot*, p. 99) describes the text as 'tolerant'.

³⁴ They are characteristically (and backed by Biblical authority) described as 'stubborn, uncircumcised of heart, murderers of the prophets, scum' ('hardtneekinghe, onbesneden van harten, prophetenmoorders, addergebroet'), De Groot, *Remonstrantie*, p. 109.

irreconcilable hatred of the Jews towards the Christians,³⁵ taken from the Talmudic compilation 'Abodazara' and the Bible, but also from stories involving the supposed crucifixion of Christians by Jews. Over and against those stand two arguments in support of their presence, Grotius concludes, arguments 'that perhaps ought to outweigh the former':³⁶ one is economic (their presence is advantageous for the material prosperity of the common good), another religious. It is the latter that is of interest to my reading of *Hierusalem verwoest*, since the logic behind this part of Grotius's 'Remonstrance' ties in, I believe, with the emblematic message of Vondel's play.

Grotius's 'Remonstrance'

'It is obvious that God wants them to stay somewhere,' Grotius writes in his 'Remonstrance,' 'so why not here,' he wonders.³⁷ The logic behind the former sentence is clear: the history of the dispersal of the Jews shows that God remains willing to protect this people, despite the hideous fact that they are responsible for the killing of His Son. God's lasting protection seems to be accounted for in Grotius's text by means of a single axiom: 'habent primordium veritatis,' 'theirs is the origin of truth.'³⁸ This, Grotius feels, is what distinguishes the Jews from the heathens and from other heretics: 'The heathens have false Gods. The Muhammadans have a false Prophet. The Jews in a certain sense have the right God and the right Prophets. The bulk of their faith we share, and the rest of what we believe, we prove from the scriptures they believe in.'³⁹

As Steven Nadler points out in his brief discussion of the 'Remonstrance' in *Rembrandt's Jews*, Grotius was later to return to the idea that the Jewish faith was not so completely different and contrary to that of the Christians; their faith, Grotius writes in *De veritate religionis Christianae* (*On the Truth of the Christian Religion*, 1627), is

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 109: 'den generaelen onversoelijcken haet van de Joden tot de Christenen.'

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 110: 'dije misschijen de voorgaende behooren te overweegen.'

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 113: 'T' is kennelick dat Godt wilt dat zij ergens blijven,' 'Waerom dan hijer nijet.'

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 112.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 111–12: 'De Heijdenen hebben valsche Goden. De Mahumetisten een valsche Profeet. De Joden hebben eenichsints den rechten Godt ende de rechte Propheten. De substantie van haer gelooff gelooven wij mede, ende t' gunt wij meer geloven, bewijsen wij vuijt de schriften dije zij geloven.'

‘the stock onto which [the Christian faith] was grafted.’⁴⁰ In other words, Judaism contains the germ of a truth God intended to find fulfilment in the Christian faith. The iconic moment of that fulfilment is, obviously, the arrival of the New Jerusalem and its blessing at the Second Coming of the Saviour. In the ‘Remonstrance’, Grotius more than once calls upon Saint Paul to support the religious grounds of his plea for toleration of the Jews. Paul’s conception of the Judaic Law, as Michael Grant has noted, is perfectly in line with the logic of prefiguration and fulfilment that sustains his influential reading of the Bible. The Mosaic Law does not suffice for those who are seeking God’s justification, Paul writes in Romans, chapter 3: more is needed, and that more can be found in the true faith of the Christian.⁴¹

The same logic underlies Paul’s conviction, referred to by Grotius, that the Second Coming will also entail the ultimate conversion of all Jews to the Christian Faith. As a Jew himself, Paul knew that the members of his former race were also anxiously awaiting the coming of the Messiah,⁴² but it was only by becoming a Christian that he felt he could see the true message of God. In line with his own personal experience, Paul therefore saw it as a duty of all Christians to facilitate the eventual conversion of the Jews. In his ‘Remonstrance’, Grotius refers to the Pauline ideal as follows:

Moreover, the apostle Paul has stated emphatically that a general conversion of the Jewish People is still to come, to which end God appears to be miraculously saving the Jewish nation in itself and apart from other people, to prove to them when the time has come the certainty of his promises. All Christians have to strive for this particular and general conversion, which cannot take place if the Jews are cut off from conversation with Christians, because how can they believe without hearing or hear without preaching?⁴³

In the 34th article of the regulation that Grotius proposes in his ‘Remonstrance’, the question of the conversion of the Jews returns as

⁴⁰ Quoted in Nadler, *Rembrandt’s Jews*, p. 20.

⁴¹ Grant, *Saint Paul*, p. 50.

⁴² Grant, *Saint Paul*, p. 51.

⁴³ De Groot, *Remonstrantie*, p. 110: ‘Hijerenboven seijt den Apostel Paulus uijt-druckelijck, dat noch eijndelijck een generaele bekeringhe van het Joodtsche Volck is te verwachten, tot de welcken eijnde Godt oock schijnt de Joodtse natie wonderbaerlijck te bewaeren op haer zelve ende affgesondert van alle andere menschen, om daer aan t’sijnen tijde te beethoven de seeckerheijt van zijne beloften. Tot dese particuliere ende generaele bekeringhe moeten alle Christenen haer best doen, t’ welck nijet en can geschijeden indijen men den Joden affsnijet de conversatie van de Christenen: Want hoe sullen sij geloven zonder gehoor ofte hooren sonder predicatie?’

follows: 'If a Jew is converted to the Christian religion, he will not be troubled or harmed because of this by the Jews, upon pain of banishment from the land and confiscation, or also corporal punishment should the occasion call for it.'⁴⁴ In contrast to the inverse movement of conversion – Article 33: 'A Christian that converses to Judaism will be banished from the land'⁴⁵ – the Christianization of Jews is a goal worth striving for.

At least part of the apparent philosemitism of the more liberal defenders of the Jewish presence in Amsterdam at the time seems to have been driven by the Pauline desire to convert. As Steven Nadler among others has shown, the Jewish fascination of prominent intellectuals like Scaliger and Vossius, of preachers like Cornelis Anso, and artists like Rembrandt was related to the idea that Amsterdam could be seen as the New Jerusalem to the millenarian belief that the Second Coming was nigh. The conversion of the Jews, Nadler writes, was supposed to facilitate the inauguration of God's kingdom of earth, and the concomitant restoration of the Temple of the New Jerusalem. The influence of millenarianism was 'nowhere more [influential] than in the Netherlands', Nadler claims.⁴⁶ Without wanting to assert that Vondel actually shared those beliefs, I would like to point out three loci around or in *Hierusalem verwoest* that can be connected to the discursive field I have sketched in the preceding paragraphs: the sonnet addressed 'Aende Ioodsche Rabbynen' ('To the Jewish rabbis') that immediately precedes the play, the speech by Josephus that opens Act I, and a passage from the monologue by Gabriel in Act V.

Vondel's Dream of a New Jerusalem

Let me start by quoting the first locus in full:

All your priests were drunk with happiness,
as Jesus hung suspended from the cross

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 119: 'Indijen een Jode hem quaeme te bekeeren tot de Christelijcke religie, den selve sall ter saecke van dijen bij de Joden nijet mogen eenigh hinder ofte letsel aengedaen werden, op peijne van bannissement vuyt de landen ende confiscatie, ofte oock straffe aen den lijve, ingevalle de gelegentheijt van de saeck zulckx meriteerde.'

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 119: 'Een Christen, dije hem tot het Jodendom zoude mogen begeven, zall werden gebannen vuyt de landen.'

⁴⁶ Nadler, *Rembrandt's Jews*, p. 92.

Crucified, flogged, spat at and mocked,
Because he was served the Cup of bitterness:

Little did they think that Justice, who above
In Heaven's golden lap, balances the scales,
values Innocent blood over fine Ophirian gold,
and counts the sighs of Truth cast aside

But when the day arrived that God had chosen
To avenge the crime of that God-forsaken City
And the people who thought they were safe on the holy threshold:

Then they plainly saw which plagues sin brought along,
And that for the wicked no walls or temple worshipped sanctimoniously
could be used for defence against the wrath of God.⁴⁷

The characterization of those addressed in the first line of the sonnet is typical and, therefore, anything but philosemitic: the Jews are explicitly marked as the murderers of Christ, 'the murderers of prophets', to borrow the term used by Grotius in his 'Remonstrance'.⁴⁸ However, this is not the only reason why God would want to inflict his vengeance on them, the poet seems to suggest. The wickedness of their ways also manifests itself in a number of other stereotypical characteristics of their race: their hunger for material wealth (l. 7), their hypocrisy (l. 14) and the stubborn conviction that they are the truly elect, and hence safe from God's wrath (l. 11). At the same time, the poet's abundant use of evaluative markers, causally connected with the divine revenge mentioned in lines 10 and 12, opens up the suggestion that if these people were to mend their ways, God would definitely not act towards them in the way that he has.

The title of Vondel's poem begs the straightforward question of the identity of its addressees. Whether or not 'Rabbynen' is taken as a generic noun for all Jewish rabbis, the Jews of the City of Amsterdam did in fact have different rabbis. As it happens, several sources stress the

⁴⁷ Vondel, *Hierusalem verwoest*, p. 100: 'De Rey uws Priesterschaps was als van blyschap droncken / Doen *Iesus* hingh aen 't hout met ermen uytgestreckt, / Gekruyst, gegeesselt, en bespogen, en begeckt, / Om dat hem was den Kelck der bitterheyd geschoncken: // Zy dachten luttel dat Rechtveerdigheyd, die boven / In 's Hemels gulden schoot de weeghschael recht op houd, / 'tOnschuldigh bloed meer schat als fijn Ophirisch goud, / En telt al 't zuchten vande Waerheyd hier verschoven. // Maer als de dagh aenbrack die God beschoren had / Tot wraeck van 't schelmstuck van die Godvergeten Stad / En 't volck dat veyligh dacht te staen op heyl'ge dremp'len: // Doen zaghen baer wat zonde al plagen met zich brocht, / En dat de Boosheyd tot geen borstweer strecken mocht / Geweld van muren nog schijnheyligheyd van Temp'len.'

⁴⁸ De Groot, *Remonstrantie*, p. 109.

fact that in the years 1618–1619 there was a great deal of commotion between three different congregations of the Amsterdam Sephardics, which ultimately even led to a trial.⁴⁹ The case will have been known to the original audience of *Hierusalem verwoest*, who will no doubt have been reminded of it by Vondel's insistence (both in the summary of the play that precedes the sonnet 'Aende Ioodsche Rabbynen' and in the play itself) that Titus's victorious siege of Jerusalem was in part caused by internecine strife among three different factions.⁵⁰ Vondel derived this detail, like so many others, from Flavius Josephus's *The Wars of the Jews or History of the Destruction of Jerusalem*. Though he also made use of other historical accounts of the event,⁵¹ it is clear that the work by Josephus was his main source, if only because the author figures as a character in the play.

This brings me to the second locus that I would like briefly to focus upon: the monologue by Josephus with which the play opens (*HV*, ll. 1–150). Being the first to speak in *Hierusalem verwoest*, Josephus sets the tone of the play. In the first part of his monologue (*HV*, ll. 1–38) he addresses the city of Jerusalem twice, accounting for its fall on the basis of the 'vanity' ('hooghmoed') and 'sins' ('zonden') of its inhabitants (*HV*, l. 36). In an effort to further legitimize the divine act of revenge, he also addresses Daniel, whose insight 'into the sea of God's mysteries' ('inde zee van Gods geheymenissen', *HV*, l. 26) had enabled him to prophesy the fall of the city. As of l. 39, Josephus moves on to his own personal history. Flavius Josephus was born Joseph Ben Matthias, a Jewish priest from a prominent family, who on his mother's side apparently descended from the Maccabeans. He was originally involved as a Jewish military leader in the Revolt that began in 66 A.D. and was

⁴⁹ Cf. Nadler, *Rembrandt's Jews*, pp. 150–51. See also Van Roorden, 'Jews and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Republic', p. 134.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, Vondel's own summary of the play: *Hierusalem verwoest*, p. 97, ll. 20–21. The detail returns in the opening speech of Josephus, *Hierusalem verwoest*, ll. 109–11, where he names the three 'traitors of the city / Whom Heaven had elected as his bride' (verraders van die stad / Dien d'Hemel als zyn bruyt zich uytgelezen had). This is in accordance with Josephus's own reading of the event. As Meijer and Wes put it, Josephus makes clear to his readers that the Jewish resistance to Rome was provoked by a number of blinded rebels who refused to see that God's alliance was with the Romans – a conclusion Josephus himself had reached earlier. (Meijer and Wes, 'Flavius Josephus en de Joodse geschiedenis', p. 39).

⁵¹ He mentions them at the end of his brief summary: *Hierusalem verwoest*, p. 99: Hegesippus's *Verwoesting van Jerusalem*, the *Chronica* by Eusebius, and Louis Carrion's *Antiquarum lectionum commentarii tres* (1576). In the preface 'To the reader who loves poems' (Aenden Gedichtlievendende lezer) he also mentions, apart from Josephus and Hegesippus, Carolus Langius. (*HV*, p. 85).

captured by the Romans at the siege of the town of Jotapata in the summer of 67.⁵² In *Hierusalem verwoest*, Josephus refers to his miraculous survival at the hands of the Romans, and considers it due to the graciousness of the Roman emperor Vespasian, whose family name (Flavianus) he came to adopt (*HV*, ll. 55–56). As of 69, Josephus served under Vespasian's son Titus. He even seems to have negotiated with the Jews during the siege of Jerusalem, to no avail, as he puts it in Vondel's play. (*HV*, ll. 91–92)

In several historical accounts, Josephus is seen as a traitor to his people,⁵³ but in the logic of Vondel's play, he presents himself as a convert, one could say, one who gradually came to see the truth of God, whom he calls upon to show mercy for the people of Judea, now that He has delivered them into the hands of heathens:

O Father! have mercy on Judea: cast your eyes down,
 you who tame the waves, the lightning and the storm,
 Tame the enemy's rage, and cool and extinguish the fire
 That burns within the ferocious warriors,
 So that no other disaster may strike Isaac's descendants
 who you have put to the mercy of the Heathens.⁵⁴

The final lines of the historian's opening speech can be read as an anticipation of the play's final act, which shows the fulfilment of Josephus's plea for mercy and hence confirms the correctness of his conversion. At the beginning of Act V, a group of Christian settlers strike up a conversation with a Roman soldier, representative of the 'Heydenen' ('pagans') to whom Josephus refers at the end of his opening monologue. Simeon, one of the Christians, identifies himself to the soldier as a member of

A peaceful people that always awaits Jesus Christ
 the Saviour of the souls: who was villainously accused and heinously
 murdered
 by the Godless Jews.⁵⁵

⁵² Cf. Wes and Meijer, 'Flavius Josephus en de Joodse geschiedenis', p. 32.

⁵³ Cf. Wes and Meijer, 'Flavius Josephus en de Joodse geschiedenis', p. 33.

⁵⁴ Vondel, *Hierusalem verwoest*, ll. 145–50: 'O Vader! haers erbermt: slaet 't aengzicht eens neder, / Die ghy de baren temt, de blixems, en 't onweder, / Temt 's vyands razernye, en koelt, en lescht den brand / Die van 't woest kryghsvolck heeft geschroockt het ingewand, / Dat Isacx overschot geen ramp meer op zich lade, / Dewijl ghy 't nu beveelt der Heydenen genade.'

⁵⁵ Vondel, *Hierusalem verwoest*, ll. 2060–62: 'Een vreedzaam volck, dat steeds op Iesus Christus hoopt / Der zielen Heyland: dien de Goddeloze Ioden / Zoo schelm's betichten, en zoo schandelijcken dooden.'

The Roman soldier turns out to be no mere heathen, but an instrument of God's providential wisdom. He encourages the Christians to settle in Jerusalem and serve their Saviour under the protection of Rome:

Sow this land, plant a vineyard, build huts there,
and serve your Christ: we will guard you,
and all those who are not Godless followers of the Jews
we will welcome, and the land will be freely available to them.⁵⁶

The Roman soldier's words of welcome serve as a prelude to the coming of the angel Gabriel, who in a long speech that takes up most of Act V and that is addressed both to the Christian settlers onstage and to Vondel's audience, living in what many of them will have seen as the New Jerusalem, explains the place of Jerusalem's fall in God's larger providential design. Gabriel's speech – my third locus – contains a literal reference to 'the New Jerusalem'. The destruction of the city should cause no wonder, Gabriel points out from the beginning of his speech, since it was prophesied by Daniel (*HV*, ll. 2118–19). Gabriel also points to the First Coming of the Messiah and his prediction, written down in Matthew 23 (one of Vondel's two epigraphs⁵⁷) that the Temple would one day be destroyed (*HV*, l. 2126). In fact, that prediction is here invoked as a proof of the identity of the Saviour, 'the Hero and Saviour of all / the great Siloa',⁵⁸ whose killing by the Godless Jews can therefore be only taken as a just cause for divine revenge.

The relationship between the old and the new Jerusalem is a refigurative one, Gabriel seems to suggest, a relationship of completion and fulfilment. In the central part of Gabriel's speech, Vondel structures that relationship around the contrast between the Mosaic Law and the Word of God. Deriding the inhabitants of the old Jerusalem for allowing themselves to be blinded by material riches and earthly power, he appeals to the New Christians to turn their eyes upward and bask in the special light of the New Jerusalem:

⁵⁶ Vondel, *HV*, ll. 2089–92: 'Bezaeyt dit ackerland, plant wijngaerd, bouwter hutten, / En uwen Christus dient: wy zullen u beschutten, / En al die 't Ioods geslacht niet godloos hangen aen / Ons zullen wilkom zijn, 't land zal haer open staen.'

⁵⁷ Matthew, 23:38: 'Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.' The verse is part of Jesus's speech against the hypocrisy of Jewish scribes and Pharisees ('Rabbis') who are scolded by Christ for their 'blind' love of outward splendour. The second epigraph is the famous 'sunt lacrimae rerum' passage in Book I of the *Aeneid* (l. 462). In Virgil's text Aeneas's tears are provoked by a mural that he sees in a Carthaginian temple, representing battle scenes from the Trojan wars.

⁵⁸ Vondel, *HV*, ll. 2130–31: 'den Held en Heyland aller menschen, / De groote Siloa.' Siloa means 'the One who has been sent'.

So let the fools brag and boast
of things that are but wilted flowers:
Fly away from the vanity, from earth to heaven:
climb to where Jesus is worshipped by the Angels:
where the host of Angels that never tires of cheering and jumping,
dreams of nothing but to praise him:
where the Elders skilfully strike their lyres:
where all the torches, stars, Sun and Moon,
are but darkness when compared to him
who fills infinity and shines upon everything:
where the New Jerusalem has a different glow:
where all the streets are golden and all the gates pearly:
there the Majesty of the Trinity is
a Temple to those in heaven on all sides: where all the diamonds
lose their splendour: where God is common to all,
and a thousand years are like one of our days.
Who will then doubt that the (Mosaic) Law with all its celebrations,
burning incense, slaughtering and sacrificing of animals,
cleansing, and whatever else the service involves:
is but darkness, compared to that which has more splendour?
Who will embrace the shadows as Truth?
Or choose Moses's glow over Christ's golden rays?⁵⁹

Gabriel's rhetoric of contradiction will be clear: the law of Moses leads one into darkness, whereas the shining example of Christ will ultimately allow his followers to reach God's light. Furthermore, the law of Moses is concerned with the outward spectacle of religion, whereas the Word of God is directed towards the purely spiritual.

Criticism of this sort in fact rehearses Saint Paul's conviction that, rather than take away man's appetite for sin, the Mosaic Law provoked the very thing that it was supposed to curb or forbid.⁶⁰ Paul's

⁵⁹ Vondel, *HV*, ll. 2161–82: 'Laet dan de dwazen gaen brageren en hoogh roemen / In dingen, die slechts zyn verwelckelijcke bloemen: / Vlieght ghy uyt d'ydelyheid nae boven van beneën: / Klimt op daer Iesus word van d'Eng'len aengebeën: / Daer 't heyr-schaer nimmer moe, met juychen, en met springen, / Droomt nergens anders af als van hem lof te zingen: / Daer d'Ouderlingen op haer herpen kunstigh slaen: / Daer alle tortzen, daer de sterren, Zon, en Maen, / Zijn enckel duysternis, ten opzien van den genen / Die 't end'loos Rond vervult, en niets laet onbeschenen: / Daer 't nieuw Ierusalem heeft gants een ander schijn: / Daer al de straten goud, de poorten peerlen zyn: / Daer 's Dryheyds Majesteyt verstreckt aen alle kanten / Der Hemel-lieden Kerck: daer alle diamanten / Verliezen haren glans: daer God zich maect gemeen, / En duyzend jaren zyn als onzer dagen een. / Wie zal nu twijff'len dat de wet met al haer feesten, / 'Twieroocken, 't slachten, en 't opofferen der beesten, / De reynigingen, en wat dienst daer meer aen kleeft: / Is donckerheyd, by 't geen dat schoonder luyster heeft? / Wie zal de schaduwen omhelzen voor de waerheyd? / Of kiezen Moses glans voor Christus gulde klaerheyd?'

⁶⁰ Cf. Grant, *Saint Paul*, pp. 46–48.

conversion, like that of Saint Augustine after him, involved the turning away from things earthly to things heavenly. The belief of the Jews, with its seeming obsession with materiality and outward splendour, is far too earthly, Gabriel seems to suggest, and it leads to idolatry, the wrongful attribution of divine characteristics to merely human beings or objects.

O Bride of my King, chosen Church,
 Turn your eyes freely away from the dazzling shield,
 which your high priest flaunted once a year,
 as if he were no longer human but deified completely:
 the glow that dazzled you is extinguished,
 those services are over: Look: the Jewish priests are plundered
 they are standing there naked without their robes and mourn the
 treasure
 and the gold, that Israel had devoted to its church.
 If you're looking for a Priest, leave behind this ephemeral land,
 go towards the stars, there you will find your Saviour,
 Not adorned with silk or silkworm's spinning, no,
 His robe is but light from top to bottom.
 Behold the halo of pure flames and radiance
 that circles his Majesty, and see the sweet Cherubs
 and Seraphs descend to
 gaze upon the beautiful countenance of the Heavenly Groom:
 they laugh sweetly and continue to gaze at him:
 follow them as they lead the way: let go of the dead Priests,
 and lay them to rest: do no longer lend your ear to Moses's mouth
 But to Christ's lips: embrace the New Covenant.
 Do not mix lead with gold. Have less appreciation for the sign [the Old
 Covenant]
 than for the life [the New Covenant] to which it points.
 This tragedy that has been played so bloodily and so long,
 and that has ended now with the Jews' demise,
 expresses the justice and severity
 of God who seeks revenge for evil and bad deeds,
 and displays this destroyed descent
 as a beacon to everyone.⁶¹

⁶¹ Vondel, *HV*, ll. 2193–2220: 'O Bruyt van mynen Vorst, verkorene Gemeente, / Keert vry uw aengezicht van 't vlamigh borstgesteente, / Daer uwen Phenix me' gingh brallen eens om 't jaer, / Als of hy niet meer mensch, maer gants vergodet waer: / Die glanssen zijn gebluscht waerom ghy stond verwondert, / Die diensten hebben uyt: ziet Levi eens geplondert / Zoo naeck staen zonder kleed, en treuren om den schat, / En 't goud, dat Israël zijn Kerck geheylight had. / Zoo ghy een Priester zoeckt versmaed dit driftigh Eyland, / Gaet nae de sterren toe, daer vindy uwen Heyland, / Niet opgesmuckt met zijde, of wormgespinsel, neen, / Zijn kleed is enckel

The last six lines of this quotation echo the subtitle of Vondel's play as printed on the title page of its first edition: 'Tragedy: Presented onstage for the Jews to consider, to admonish the Christians' ('*Treurspel. Den Joden tot naedencken, den Christenen tot waerschouwing als op het tooneel voorgesteld*'). The historical example of God's providential wrath should be taken as a warning to everybody, Gabriel stresses, and it should also be taken as an example of the right remedy for it: embracing the New Covenant that is the subject of the eighth verse of Paul's Letter to the Hebrews. Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant, Paul writes, whose necessity is clear. It is the breaking of the Old Covenant (the Mosaic Law as written down in the Torah) that provoked the necessity of a new, more perfect one, embodied in Christ:

7: For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

8: For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

9: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

10: For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

11: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

12: For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

13: In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

licht van boven tot benèen. / Ziet wat een ronde kringh van louter vlam, en stralen / Omzweeft zijn Majesteyt. ey ziet eens neder dalen / Die zoete Cherubijs, en Seraphynen om / 't Schoon aenschijn door te zien van's Hemels Bruydegom: / Zy loncken lodderlijck, en blyven op hem staren: / Volght haren voorgangh: laet de doode Priesters varen, / En rusten in het graf: leent niet meer Moses mond / Maer Christus lippen 't oor: omhelst het nieuw Verbond. / Vermengt geen goud met lood. waerdeert het beeld geringer / Als 't leven daer 't op heeft gewezen met de vinger. / Dit treurspel dat hier is gespeelt zoo bloedigh langh, / En nu besloten met der Ioden ondergang, / U Gods rechtveerdigheyd en strengheyd uyt gaet drucken, / Die wraecke neemt van 't quaed, en alle booze stucken, / En tot waerschouwingh van een ygelijck persoon / Stelt als een baecken dit verdelght geslacht ten toon.'

Gabriel's Christian imperative ('embrace the new Covenant', 'omhelst het nieuw Verbond') is directed at all those attending or reading Vondel's play, members of the Jewish nation included, much in the same way that God's dictum that he will from now on be merciful to those who have not been righteous to him is also potentially directed at everybody. The plea in Gabriel's speech, like that underlying Paul's letter to the Hebrews, is a plea for conversion, the plea that would eventually facilitate the Second Coming of Christ and the restoration of God's lasting Kingdom on earth in the New Jerusalem which Amsterdam was taken to be, not only by the Mennonite denomination with which Vondel has often been associated, but by many of the reformed creed. As I hope to have made clear, *Hierusalem verwoest* contains distinct traces of the theological discourse that centres upon the idea of the New Jerusalem and the opposition between the Jewish Law and the Christian Faith.⁶²

But, as its subtitle suggests, the play is also meant as a warning to the good Christians among Vondel's audience, for all those who wanted Amsterdam really to become the New Jerusalem, for the author himself even. In a city so abundantly affluent, any warning on the blinding effects of material wealth will have sounded healthy to many Christian ears, some of Vondel's most self-declared enemies included. Seen in this light, the Jews in Vondel's play (not unlike those in his age) can be said to function like Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*: they serve, at least in part, as the bad conscience of the good Christians whose counterpart they are meant to represent and whose deepest anxieties (including those about themselves) they are supposed to ward off. The deepest of those fears, as James Shapiro has shown,⁶³ also runs through Hugo de Groot's (or Grotius's) *Remonstrance*: the idea that Christians would turn into Jews and become part – either willingly or not – of the circumcised race. 'On November 8, 1616', Arend Huussen writes, 'representatives of the "Jewish Nation" were warned and instructed as follows:

⁶² It would be worthwhile, I think, to consider the two other texts that Vondel collected in one volume together with *Hierusalem verwoest* in the light of these findings: the epic poem *De heerlyckheyd van Salomon* and the *De helden Godes des Ouwden Verbonds*, a series of illustrated poems on the Old Testament prophets.

⁶³ Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*.

- to refrain from any spoken or written attacks against the Christian religion;
- not to attempt to convert Christians to Judaism or to circumcise them;
- to have no sexual intercourse with either married or unmarried Christian women, including prostitutes;
- to live in conformity with the general legislation of province and city, especially the burgomasters' order of May 1612 forbidding the construction of a synagogue.⁶⁴

It is true that Vondel's play seems to show no immediate trace of the fear that is addressed in the second and third items of this set of regulations. But, as I hope to have made clear, it does participate in a discourse that propagates the best possible solution for the alleviation of this fear: the ultimate conversion of all Jews to Christianity, which would remove the necessity of this specific sort of policy in the first place.

Conclusion

What, then, makes this New Historicist reading of Vondel's play so different from traditional readings of the play? The difference, I would argue, lies primarily in the conceptual presuppositions on which it is based. An 'Old' Historicist could have come up with the exact same findings about the historical relationship between Vondel's text and the Jewish Question, but would, probably, have made use of them in a different way. A New Historicist analysis, like the above one, continues to seek the fundamental heterogeneity of every historical context. There is no single 'context' to which this play can be related univocally and hence no single historical 'reason' as to why the play is what it is. By teasing out the historical significance of a number of potential references to the ideology of the New Jerusalem, I have tried to make clear that Vondel's play participates in this specific discursive context and that a more concrete historical analysis of this context sheds interesting new light on *Hierusalem Verwoest*. This is not to suggest, of course, that the entire play can be reduced to a mere illustration of the historical

⁶⁴ Huussen, 'The Legal Position of the Jews in the Dutch Republic', p. 33.

discussion on the Jewish presence in seventeenth-century Amsterdam, nor that Vondel's is an important voice in that discussion. My analysis does suggest, though, that certain *loci* in Vondel's play gain in meaning when considered against this specific background. It also suggests that it is worthwhile to consider this text as more than a straightforward and somewhat boring reflection on questions of mere religion. By inserting Vondel's representation of this piece of 'mere' religious history in the concrete political and ideological context of its production – a strategy that has defined the reading method of New Historicism in more than one way – I hope to have made clear the text's broader cultural relevance, both in terms of its historical moment and of our analysis of that moment.

CHAPTER TWELVE

POLITICS AND AESTHETICS – DECODING ALLEGORY IN *PALAMEDES* (1625)¹

Nina Geerdink

Allegory, Politics and Aesthetics

Many of Vondel's plays were part of the politico-religious controversies of his days. *Palamedes* (1625) was part of these controversies in a remarkable manner. The play is about the betrayal of the Greek army commander Palamedes, but was immediately recognised as an allegory of the execution of the former Advocate of Holland Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547–1619) in 1619. As is evident from several handwritten keys, throughout the seventeenth century it was in vogue to decode the play as a narration of the real-life drama of Oldenbarnevelt. In historiography too, *Palamedes* has been regarded as an allegory. The focus, however, has been specifically on the allegorical meaning of the play and the attempt to conceal this meaning. Such an approach does not consider the complex function of allegory. By means of a historical formalist analysis of the play, I hope to show how the allegorical layer is more than a thinly veiled political statement. Allegory functions within the renaissance culture of coding and decoding on both a political and an aesthetic level, and *Palamedes* is a good case in point.

The history of *Palamedes*' reception shows how literary historians have felt the urge to choose between politics and aesthetics. They wanted to decide whether *Palamedes* was foremost a tragedy, or a political pamphlet. Contemporary reactions show how the first readers of the play seem to have opted for the latter. However, the implied dichotomy between politics and aesthetics did not exist. Contemporary

¹ I would like to thank Helmer Helmers, Johan Koppenol and the editors of this volume for their comments on an earlier version of this chapter. Marijke Meijer Drees was kind enough to share literature with me as well as her ideas about *Palamedes* during an early stage of my work on this chapter.

readers did not choose to read the play as a political pamphlet, they choose to read the play *allegorically*, and that was a political and an aesthetic choice at the same time.

In literary studies, up until postmodernism that is, allegory has long been regarded as a simple and therefore not that interesting literary form. The suggestion was that an author simply wrote one thing, but meant another. Nonetheless, as early as 1928 Walter Benjamin highlighted the complex and typically baroque function of allegory,² and in recent decades (literary) historians have made up for the neglect that befell allegory in earlier years. Several studies show how there is a meaningful relationship between the two layers of allegory, which form part of a literary game that predominated in both political and literary cultures in earlier times. Moreover, allegory is no longer regarded as only a formal mode of writing, but also a historical way of thinking.³ Both for medieval and for early modern times, scholars have shown how the culture of these times strongly emphasised decoding literature.⁴ In his study on reading culture in seventeenth-century England, for example, Steven N. Zwicker has argued how the people's way of reading the bible became dominant in their way of living. 'Decoding' was thus a natural part of their reading.⁵ The aesthetics of literature in the early modern period were partly determined by this game of decoding, just as politics were determined by it.⁶ *Palamedes* was part of a culture in which the game of decoding predominated in both politics and aesthetics.

² Benjamin, *The Origin*, pp. 159–235.

³ Tambling, *Allegory*, pp. 1–6, 18.

⁴ Cf. Astell, *Political Allegory* about the Middle Ages and among others Zwicker, *Lines of Authority*; Potter, *Secret Rites*; and Van Stipriaan, *Leugens en vermaak* for the early modern period. In a more philosophical way, Benjamin shows in *The Origin* how the allegorical reading of baroque German tragedy is part of the culture of the time.

⁵ Zwicker, *Lines of Authority*, pp. 3–4. See also Zwicker, 'Reading the Margins', pp. 102–04. In both studies, Zwicker emphasises how the political situation of crisis in England in the second half of the seventeenth century increased the importance of decoding literature. The situation in the Dutch Republic in the first quarter of the seventeenth century may be paralleled to this period of crisis in England. Moreover, the importance of emblem books in Dutch culture can be considered as an argument providing grounds to suppose that emblematic thinking was important in everyday life of the Dutch, too; cf. Smit, 'The emblematic aspect', p. 554.

⁶ Potter, *Secret Rites*, shows how political and aesthetic principles turn out time and again to be the same. See, for example, Potter, *Secret Rites*, pp. 75–82. On the interaction between literary form and politics see also Sharpe and Zwicker, *Refiguring Revolution*. In *Art of the Modern Age*, Schaeffer provides a philosophical account both of unique characteristics of aesthetics in differing periods and of the importance of society in early modern aesthetics.

The suggestion that by writing an allegory Vondel aimed to disguise the topical relevance of the play in order to prevent himself being punished for it is therefore untenable.⁷ To be sure, a real cover-up could have protected him from accusations and measures of censorship, but it would also have prevented the play from being read and understood by the intended readers.⁸ By writing an allegory, Vondel set out to write a topical play that was both highly intelligible and highly unintelligible. This tension between two layers of meaning, which is one of the main characteristics of allegory, has both aesthetical and political consequences.⁹ Vondel pleased his readers with the game and subject of decoding, a literary game, and at the same time underlined the political message of the play with this game. Because of the decoding, the political point could be made more effectively.¹⁰ In the words of Benjamin: ‘the authority of a statement depends so little on its comprehensibility that it can actually be increased by obscurity’.¹¹ One of the contemporary reactions, by the unknown author ‘Q.D.C.V.’,¹² supports this argument, since it praises Vondel for the smart invention (‘kloecke Vond’) of the surface level narrative, which allowed him to underline a political point. This argument thus contains praise for both its political message and its aesthetic quality.

I will return to this and other contemporary reactions to *Palamedes* in the next section. Together with the whereabouts of *Palamedes*’ coming into being and the historiographical debate about the play, they preface my analysis.

The Genesis and Reception of Palamedes

The execution of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt in 1619 is one of the major events in Dutch history. It was the result of a complex set of

⁷ Smit, for example, believed this was the reason for Vondel to write an allegory; cf. Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, p. 121. Recently, Sierhuis has also argued that this position is untenable in Sierhuis, ‘A Babel Full of Confusion’, chapter 5.

⁸ For this argument see, for example, Potter, *Secret Rites*, pp. 209–10.

⁹ Wijngaards also highlighted the tension between the literal and the allegorical layer in *Palamedes*, referring to Fletcher, *Allegory (Palamedes)*, ed. Wijngaards, pp. 23–24).

¹⁰ Tambling, *Allegory*, p. 29, shows how this function of allegory was already acknowledged by St. Paul and, later, Boccaccio. See also Potter, *Secret Rites*, p. 51; and Benjamin, *The Origin*, pp. 206–07.

¹¹ Benjamin, *The Origin*, p. 207.

¹² Sierhuis, ‘A Babel Full of Confusion’, p. 265 identifies Q.D.C.V. as Geeraardt Brandt (1626–1685) (though the argument for this identification is not explicit).

politico-religious controversies in the Dutch Republic, dominated by divisions between Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants in the Dutch Reformed Church.¹³ What had begun as an academic debate about predestination between the theologians Jacobus Arminius (1559–1609) and Franciscus Gomarus (1563–1641) had by the second decade of the seventeenth century become a heated argument about religious toleration and the relationship between Church and state. The Remonstrants, followers of Arminius, were tolerant. The orthodox Calvinist Counter-Remonstrants, followers of Gomarus, were more strict. Oldenbarnevelt and the Stadtholder, Prince Maurits, tried to remain impartial for a long time, but when civilian riots and political unrest eventually became the order of the day, the situation became untenable. In 1617 Maurits publically declared his support for the Counter-Remonstrants. Public and political support for Oldenbarnevelt, who was sympathetic to the Remonstrants, decreased. In the end, Maurits settled the dispute by prosecuting Oldenbarnevelt, which led to his execution. The situation was to Maurits's advantage, since he had shown his resolve and was able to control the organs of the states and the cities without considerable political opposition subsequent to the execution.

Oldenbarnevelt was arrested on 28 August 1618. After a lengthy trial he was condemned to death on 12 May 1619.¹⁴ He was prosecuted by a team of twenty-four judges, appointed specifically for the occasion and representing the seven provinces of the Republic. The accusations were manifold. Among the most important were treason against the state and high treason. The charge of treason against the state was issued because Oldenbarnevelt was said to have initiated and supported peace negotiations with Spain; the charge of high treason was brought because allegedly he would have exacerbated the dispute between Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants with his politics of tolerance in spite of the risk of civil war. None of the accusations could be proven, however. This and Oldenbarnevelt's persistent denial of the

¹³ For the details of these disputes, see Tracy, *Europe's Reformations*, pp. 173–78. Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, pp. 421–60, deals with the friction between Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants within the larger framework of the politico-religious crisis in the Dutch Republic in the 1610s.

¹⁴ The trial and execution of Oldenbarnevelt are described in the most recent biography of Oldenbarnevelt: Knapen, *De man en zijn staat*, pp. 307–27. They can also be found in the older but more detailed Den Tex, *Oldenbarnevelt*, 3, pp. 627–747.

accusations made the trial long and difficult; it continued for almost nine months. After the conviction, however, everything proceeded quickly. The former Advocate of Holland, aged seventy-one, was beheaded on 13 May 1619, only a day after the verdict. The beheading was carried out at the Binnenhof, the Dutch political centre in The Hague. Oldenbarnevelt was executed before the eyes of a large crowd, including the twenty-four judges. Pamphlets spread the rumour that even Maurits was present, although he was said to have hidden behind a little window in the tower of the Binnenhof.¹⁵

The execution of the Advocate of Holland evoked many (written) reactions in the Republic, as every other event regarding the conflicts between Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants and between Oldenbarnevelt and Maurits had done in the preceding years. In 1619, numerous publications appeared that either celebrated the death of the Advocate of Holland and criticised his Remonstrant ideas, or were critical of the trial and the presumed bias of the judges.¹⁶ There was a certain danger, however, in voicing criticism of the events of 1618–1619 in the Dutch Republic, and this remained the case long after the execution of Oldenbarnevelt. Vondel's reactions illustrate this.

Immediately following the execution, Vondel kept quiet – or so it seems¹⁷ – although he had in fact engaged with the dispute earlier. In 1618 Vondel had anonymously published a critical poem in which he condemned the struggle between Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants: *Op de jongste Hollantsche transformatie (To the Latest Transformation of Holland)*.¹⁸ His preference for the Remonstrants and Oldenbarnevelt was evident. But this preference only becomes truly dominant in the publications of his more polemical reactions, which are all related to the execution of Oldenbarnevelt but were only published after the death of Maurits in 1625. These polemical reactions were very critical of the Stadtholder and of the Counter-Remonstrants and their intolerance.¹⁹ They also criticised the trial, which Vondel regarded as illegal. The most famous poem Vondel

¹⁵ Cf., for example, Knapen, *De man en zijn staat*, p. 326.

¹⁶ See Meijer Drees, 'Vondels *Palamedes*', p. 81.

¹⁷ Wijngaards presumes that Vondel must have expressed some criticism of Maurits, but that it did not survive. See Wijngaards' edition of *Palamedes*, p. 13. Den Tex, *Oldenbarnevelt*, 3, p. 751 claims Vondel did write some of the poems published after the death of Maurits in 1625 as early as 1619, immediately after the execution.

¹⁸ See WB, 1, pp. 789–91.

¹⁹ Vondel himself was, at that time, a Mennonite.

wrote about the execution, *Het stockske van Oldenbarneveldt* (*The Cane of Oldenbarnevelt*, referring to the cane with which Oldenbarnevelt was said to have walked to the scaffold) was not written until 1657.²⁰

The fact that the execution of Oldenbarnevelt was still a relevant issue in 1657 shows how great its impact was. The same is true of the fact that the execution did not go unnoticed outside of the Republic. In England, for example, several pamphlets were written and translated – most of them rebuking Oldenbarnevelt and praising Maurits, who was regarded a hero by the Calvinist Brits. The majority of both public sentiment and the government favoured Maurits's side in the conflict.²¹ A play about Oldenbarnevelt was staged in London only a couple of months after his execution, on 27 August 1619: *The Tragedy of Sir John van Olden Barnavalt*. It was written by Philip Massinger and John Fletcher.

The play by Massinger and Fletcher portrayed, remarkably, both Maurits and Oldenbarnevelt as leading figures with serious shortcomings. The play was therefore suspected of criticising the monarchy of James I. *The Tragedy* thus offers an interesting analogy with *Palamedes*, although the narrative of the execution of Oldenbarnevelt occupies surface level in this English play, whereas in *Palamedes*, it is situated on the allegorical level. It seems the English topicality of *The Tragedy* was, although controversial, not considered too dangerous, since Massinger and Fletcher were able to perform the play. Although the first staging of the play was postponed, the staging of a revised version was allowed.²² Vondel, in contrast, was not able to see *Palamedes* performed until 1663. *Palamedes* was one of the first of Vondel's publications that responded to the execution of Oldenbarnevelt, and the only reaction in the form of a play, but it could not be performed because of its political criticism and the censorship this elicited.²³

According to Vondel's first biographer Geeraardt Brandt (1626–1685), the Amsterdam city regent Albert Burgh (1593–1647) had

²⁰ See WB, 8, pp. 625–26.

²¹ Kamps, *Historiography*, pp. 141–42.

²² Kamps, *Historiography*, p. 144. On *The Tragedy*, see also Frijlinck, *The Tragedy*.

²³ It is possible, for that matter, that Vondel did not aim at performance for *Palamedes* immediately after its publication. If this was the case, however, this decision must have been influenced by the dangers of censorship.

encouraged Vondel to write a play about the execution of Oldenbarnevelt in the spring of 1625. Vondel initially considered it too dangerous, but Burgh did not give up, and is said to have given Vondel the idea of dealing with the subject allegorically. Vondel chose the ‘cover’ of the mythological narrative of Palamedes, a Greek army commander betrayed and executed during the Trojan War. Brandt does not explain why Burgh wanted Vondel to write a play. He only mentions Burgh’s love of poetry (‘Poëzye’). Vondel started writing with the idea of not publishing the play until times were less dangerous. When Maurits died while Vondel was writing the play, he supposedly finished it quickly.²⁴ The tragedy, of which the full title was *Palamedes oft Vermoorde Onnooselheyd (Palamedes or Murdered Innocence)*, was published in October 1625, little more than a month after Maurits’s funeral.

The thin veil of classical tragedy could not prevent *Palamedes* from being censored. Since Vondel’s name was on the title page, charges were brought against him. The author went underground in fear of the sanctions of the severe Court of Holland in The Hague but resurfaced after it became clear that the Amsterdam city government had refused to hand him over to The Hague. Instead, they prosecuted him themselves. Some of the Amsterdam city regents were kindly disposed to Vondel, which probably explains the light sentence; he only had to pay a penalty of three hundred guilders. The fact that *Palamedes* took the form of a play was used as an argument by some of the judges to regard it as open to manifold interpretation, rendering it not obviously intended as a political statement.²⁵

Other contemporaries, however, seem to have particularly appreciated that political statement. While the first performance only took place in 1663, *Palamedes* sold out quickly after its prohibition had been lifted and was reprinted clandestinely many times. Immediately people began decoding the narrative of Palamedes, making keys for the references to the events of 1619. Decoding *Palamedes* remained in vogue during the whole of the seventeenth century. This appears from notes in handwriting in the margins of several prints of *Palamedes*.²⁶ Vondel himself is said to have written down some clues for his sister, but to

²⁴ Brandt, *Het leven van Vondel*, ed. Leendertz, p. 14.

²⁵ Beekman and Grüttemeier, *De wet van de letter*, pp. 15–19.

²⁶ Cf. Kemperink, ‘Een bijzonder exemplaar’.

have burnt this manuscript out of fear for sanctions.²⁷ Brandt collected some of the keys from contemporaries in his 1705 publication of Vondel's satires. They must have circulated before in handwriting.²⁸

In his biography of Vondel, Brandt tells us how some people 'praised the purity of the language, and its grandiloquent smoothness' ('preezen de zuiverheit der taale, en hoogdravende vloeijentheit') after its publication in 1625, but the primary reaction to the play was surprise at the political content and the fact that Vondel had dared to put his name on the title page.²⁹ In the supporting pamphlet by the above mentioned 'Q.D.C.V.', the author criticises the play being regarded as a 'pasquil' (pamphlet).³⁰ Q.D.C.V. himself considers the play to be more than that, but nonetheless focusses his attention on its political value rather than on its literary merit. The author praises Vondel for the clever and brave way in which he tells the truth in *Palamedes*. Vondel is encouraged to ignore the critical reactions to his play and keep up the good work, mostly because of the useful purpose it serves.

The political content of the play dominated critical reactions even more. In a pamphlet by 'Den Gereformeerden Momus' ('The Reformed Momus'), for example, Vondel is rebuked for criticising the Counter-Remonstrants and Maurits. The 'play with Palamedes' is regarded as a failed attempt to conceal the political content. Moreover, the author of the pamphlet blamed Vondel for instigating once more the religious and political debate, which had lost its vigour after the execution of Oldenbarnevelt in 1619.³¹ This argument was one that even Remonstrants – who of course appreciated the allegorical meaning of the play – expressed in their reactions. They were critical of Vondel's play because it could spark new arguments between them and the Counter-Remonstrants.³²

The reception of *Palamedes* in later periods continued to focus on the play's political content. Time and again the play was used in recurring controversies about the role of the Dutch stadtholders.³³ It is no

²⁷ Cf. Brandt, *Het leven van Vondel*, p. 69.

²⁸ See Smits-Veldt, *Samuel Coster*, pp. 344–45; and Kemperink, 'Een bijzonder exemplaar'.

²⁹ Brandt, *Het leven van Vondel*, p. 15.

³⁰ Q.D.C.V., *Aan (...) Ioost vanden Vondelen*.

³¹ Anonymous, 'Den gereformeerden Momus'.

³² Unger, *Vondeliana*, pp. 52–54.

³³ Meijer Drees, 'Vondels *Palamedes*', p. 86. Helmers, 'Cry of the Royal Blood' shows how it was also used in controversies about the English regicide.

coincidence that the first performance of *Palamedes* in Rotterdam took place in 1663, around the time when republicans felt a threat of Willem III claiming the position of stadtholder. Vondel himself promoted the reuse of his play in this way several times, for example by referring extensively to *Palamedes* in his 1663 play *Batavische gebroeders*.³⁴ The handwritten key to the political references in *Palamedes* that Geeraardt Brandt had created some years after its publication was published in the so-called ‘Amersfoortse uitgaven’ (‘Amersfoort editions’) along with Vondel’s satires during the second period without a stadtholder (1702–1747), in 1705, 1707 and 1735.

In twentieth-century literary studies, the general view is that *Palamedes* is a play that stands on its own within the collection of Vondel’s plays. In his study of the dramatic oeuvre of Vondel, Smit regards *Palamedes* as an ‘intermezzo’. He regards the political allegory in *Palamedes* as more important than the literary conventions of tragedy.³⁵ He even proposes not to call *Palamedes* a tragedy since the piece was:

so unconventional that we must ask ourselves if he [Vondel] actually wanted to indicate that this play should not in fact be seen as a tragedy. Even though generally speaking it has the shape of tragedy, it should not be regarded as such, because for a large part, non-dramatic factors determined its structure.³⁶

The opposite, however, has also been claimed. Bomhoff, for example, defends *Palamedes* as a tragedy, focussing on its aesthetic value, which in his view should be regarded as separate from the allegorical references.³⁷ This brings me back to the political-aesthetical entanglement that this play, in my reading, embodies, and of which I will explore the formal, textual embodiment. I will do so in a historical formalist analysis.

³⁴ Duits, *Van Bartholomeusnacht tot Bataafse opstand*, pp. 262–63. See also Meijer Drees, ‘Vondels *Palamedes*’, p. 86. On *Batavische gebroeders*, see the contribution by Gaakeer in this volume.

³⁵ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 2, pp. 99–131.

³⁶ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 2, p. 119: ‘[*Palamedes*] is zelfs zó ongewoon dat wij ons moeten afvragen of hij [Vondel] daarmee niet te kennen heeft willen geven, dat dit spel, al had het in het algemeen de vorm van een tragedie, toch niet als zodanig moest worden beschouwd, omdat andere dan dramatische factoren voor een belangrijk deel de structuur hadden bepaald.’

³⁷ Bomhoff, *Bijdrage tot de waardering van Vondels drama*, pp. 34–35, 143–45. Another example of an aesthetic reading of the play is in Jorissen, *Palamedes*, pp. 1–56.

In recent decades, attention to form in literary texts has diminished in Anglo-American literary studies. This is not to say that literary studies has not performed any formal analyses, but form has not been regarded as an aspect of major importance; it appeared to be something that spoke for itself, and that could, consequently, be overlooked. In reaction to this so-called 'anti-formalism', there has been some explicit attention to form recently. It concerns a form of research that has been defined as 'New Formalism'.³⁸ My analysis can be connected to an important point of interest within this movement, also called 'Historical Formalism'.³⁹ Herein, form is connected to history, culture and politics.⁴⁰ Literature is regarded as one of many media in which discourses on culture and politics are represented, but still as a medium with specific formal characteristics. These formal characteristics, however, are not regarded as static, but as dynamically interrelated with the discourses on culture and politics.

The work of Heather Dubrow has been of great importance within Historical Formalism, and particularly helpful in my analysis of *Palamedes*.⁴¹ Dubrow, focussing on literary genres, proceeds from the assumption that an author's choices in literary conventions are meaningful – whether they follow the conventions or deviate from them. Form and ideology are thus regarded as interactive.⁴² In the following analysis of *Palamedes*, then, I will focus on genres and discourses to which the play can be connected and on the use of the conventions that are part of these genres and discourses. I will show how Vondel follows conventions, ignores them or emphasises them,

³⁸ This may be too grand a name for a movement without much coherence and which is still developing into a 'theoretically self-conscious movement' (Rasmussen, *Renaissance Literature*, p. 3). See Levinson, 'What is New Formalism?', for reflections on the plurality of ideas, theories and methods within 'New Formalism'. Among recent publications most explicitly arguing for form are Wolfson, *Reading for Form* and Rasmussen, *Renaissance Literature*.

³⁹ For the most straightforward example, see Cohen, *Shakespeare and Historical Formalism*.

⁴⁰ Which, most interestingly, is also the focus of recent studies by historians such as Sharpe and Zwicker (see, for example, the above-mentioned publications). Both these historians and the literary historians of 'Historical Formalism' present their work as a continuation of New Historicism, with comparable questions, yet with more attention to the interaction between formal elements and politics.

⁴¹ Esp. Dubrow, 'The Politics of Aesthetics' (which is a revision of Dubrow, 'Guess Who is Coming to Dinner?') and Dubrow, *A Happier Eden*.

⁴² See also Cohen, 'Between Form and Culture', p. 32; and Cohen, *Shakespeare and Historical Formalism*.

and I will try to explain how these choices may have motivated readers to recognise the allegorical game of decoding in the play. Firstly, I will show how readers must have been urged to decode even before they had actually started reading the play. In two subsequent sections, I will focus on formal stimuli to decode within the play itself and in the final section, I will present the framework of references to the game of coding and decoding that is at work within both the play and its preface. It will become clear how in *Palamedes* both form and subject matter motivated the contemporaneous reader to lift the veil that for so long has been regarded as a necessary protective measure.

Decoding Extra-Textual Stimuli: Orchestrating Expectations

Even without reading the play, the public's attention would have been directed to the possibilities of decoding. In the first place, this was the case because of the simple fact that Vondel was the author. Vondel was known as someone actively engaged in politics, within his plays too.⁴³ Readers would have expected a political debate of some kind to be present in a new play by Vondel. This expectation was further supported by the fact that the play was published shortly after Maurits's death, with Vondel's antipathy for the stadtholder being known. Furthermore, the universal moral in the subtitle, 'Vermoorde Onnooselheyd' ('Murdered Innocence') was an incitement for reading the play as a code, since it did not refer to the specific case of Palamedes. Benjamin has shown that titles of allegorical plays are often characterised by having a main title that refers to the surface layer, and a more general subtitle, referring to the allegorical content of the play.⁴⁴

The main title of Vondel's play, *Palamedes*, does indeed refer to the surface layer. Yet it may even have been a stronger incitement to read the play as a code than the subtitle. The narrative of the mythological figure Palamedes has its own tradition, with which many of the future readers must have been familiar. Reading or hearing the title of the play, the tradition of the mythological figure probably resounded and functioned as an incentive to read it allegorically. Palamedes was one of the characters in the stories about the Trojan War, but he was not mentioned in Homer's famous epic. Only in later works was Palamedes

⁴³ See, for instance, the contributions by Grootes, and Smits-Veldt and Spies.

⁴⁴ Benjamin, *The Origin*, p. 195.

introduced as a Greek commander-in-chief of the army, who acted in close conjunction with Agamemnon. Accused of treason by Ulysses, he was killed by his fellow warriors. After playing a leading role in tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, Palamedes became a symbol of those unjustly condemned to death. Although few of those plays had survived, Vondel and his contemporaries knew the story of Palamedes had been used by Euripides in an allegorical play on the death of Socrates. Moreover, prior to the publication of Vondel's play, the character Palamedes made his first appearance on the Dutch stage in the allegorical play *Iphigenia* (1617) by Vondel's colleague Samuel Coster (1579–1665). Palamedes is only a supporting character in *Iphigenia*, but the fact that Vondel's main character had recently turned up in an allegorical play, along with his earlier allegorical appearances, was undoubtedly important in the *Palamedes* of 1625. It was indeed, next to *Iphigenia*, the second play in the Dutch Republic in which a classical-historical narrative was used to represent contemporary events. Moreover, the political arguments in *Iphigenia* resemble those of *Palamedes*.⁴⁵ The title *Palamedes* thus contained several connotations to older plays with topical content, which may have warned future readers to expect something similar.

In some of the early editions of *Palamedes*, there was also a visual incentive to decode. A drawing by the Amsterdam engraver and art publisher Salomon Saverij (1587–1679) depicted a man being crowned with a laurel while he is threatened by all kinds of dangerous animals.⁴⁶ The man is far too old to represent the young hero Palamedes and even resembles Oldenbarnevelt to some extent, as depicted by other contemporary pictures. The contrast between Palamedes and the depicted figure as well as its resemblances to pictures of Oldenbarnevelt may have motivated readers to start reading *Palamedes* as an allegory about the execution of the latter.

⁴⁵ *Iphigenia* could be read as a satire about the politico-religious situation in Amsterdam in the years 1616–1617, pleading against the strict Counter-Remonstrant preachers. In 1621, the play was discussed in the Church Council and performances were forbidden, but the real controversy about the political meaning of *Iphigenia* only broke out in 1630, when some politically delicate issues had been added. *Iphigenia* and *Palamedes* have often been criticised together as being one of a kind. Cf. Smits-Veldt, *Samuel Coster*, pp. 305–455, and Smits-Veldt, *Het Nederlandse Renaissancetoneel*, p. 85.

⁴⁶ The depicted scene is described in the play in ll. 2023–41.

Decoding Textual Stimuli: The Realities of Staging

In the play itself too, references are made to the old age of the main character, which makes him incompatible with the image of Palamedes as passed down from the classical period.⁴⁷ The Palamedes of antiquity was a young and vital warrior, whereas Oldenbarnevelt was an old, resigned statesman. The character Palamedes introduces himself in a long monologue in Act One. He feels uncomfortable in the Greek army, since he is regarded as insincere and has been accused of several crimes by his fellow warriors. In his monologue, he refutes every single accusation and is thus presented as a just man. In the following acts, however, Ulysses and his companion Diomedes plot to 'prove' some of the accusations. They kill an imprisoned Trojan slave and plant a letter among his clothes which is addressed to Palamedes and has supposedly been signed by the Trojan king Priam. The letter implies that Palamedes is a traitor, and Agamemnon is of course willing to believe this about someone he regards as a competitor. He decides Palamedes will be judged by three of his greatest adversaries and this, unsurprisingly, results in Palamedes' execution. Friends and family of Palamedes try to prevent the conviction but are overruled by the power of Agamemnon and the cunning of Ulysses and the priest Calchas. In Act Five, the desperate brother of Palamedes, Oeax, calls upon their ancestor Neptune and asks him for revenge. Neptune predicts how Palamedes will be honoured in the end, whereas the future of the other Greeks is not that bright at all. Neptune describes in detail the future sufferings of Agamemnon and Ulysses. After this preview we are presented with a short look at the Trojan leaders Priam and Hecuba, who are celebrating the death of Palamedes.

For all of the figures in Vondel's play, readers could find contemporary counterparts. They saw Palamedes as Oldenbarnevelt and Agamemnon as the stadtholder Maurits. To them the Greeks represented the Dutch and the Trojans the Spaniards. Vondel's appropriation of the figure of Palamedes invited the reader to decode allegorical meanings like these. First of all, there are the significant differences between the Palamedes of classical mythology and Vondel's Palamedes. As we saw earlier, the most important of these differences is their age. Secondly, Palamedes clearly uses words ascribed to Oldenbarnevelt.

⁴⁷ Cf. Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, p. 117.

He does so, for example, when he addresses the crowd immediately before his death (ll. 1882–1885). The words are appropriate to Oldenbarnevelt's position – not to Palamedes's – and contemporaries must have recognised them, as they had been reproduced several times in pamphlets and other media. Several other characters, for that matter, use words that were said to be expressed by their Dutch counterparts in the real-life drama of the execution of Oldenbarnevelt *verbatim*. In pamphlets circulating after the execution, the so-called words of the protagonists of the drama had been repeated time and again.⁴⁸ These references would thus have been recognised immediately by contemporary readers and they could – and did – proceed, as the reception of the play proves, to decode more detailed or less familiar references.

Let me offer two examples of how this might work. Agamemnon and Ulysses are both more rational and less emotional figures than the other characters in the play, but they do not use many stoic maxims. Accordingly, their style and language reflect their characters' rationality. They use few passionate words or stylistic devices, such as exclamations or hyperboles. Both, however, sometimes use expressions that nevertheless exceed the theatrical confines of their characters. A good example of this is when Agamemnon calls Palamedes a 'scoundrel' ('hondsvot', l. 1659) after hearing him and predicting his execution. Maurits was said to have used this word to refer to Oldenbarnevelt while he was looking at the execution out of his window.⁴⁹ The word's dissonance with Agamemnon's otherwise well-balanced use of language urges the reader to recognise it as belonging to the historical Maurits.

Another example can be found in a monologue in Act Two, in which Ulysses speaks about his plan to lead Palamedes into a trap:

The more he defends himself, and tries to prove his innocence,
The more the insults grow. He remains suspect.
The military are divided: some praise him like a father,
Some spit at him and call him a traitor.
In addition to this trouble, the spokesman of God
Cultivates and nourishes the lies of slander among the people.

⁴⁸ See for example Den Tex's sources for his description of the execution Den Tex, *Oldenbarnevelt*, 3, pp. 718–47.

⁴⁹ Cf. Den Tex, *Oldenbarnevelt*, 3, p. 746.

My vindictiveness will strip him of his pride forthwith,
And make old wounds and ills fester and ooze pus.⁵⁰

The last two verses of the quote were ascribed to count Willem Lodewijk (relative of Maurits) in the seventeenth-century keys to *Palamedes*. They deviate from Ulysses's typical use of language in the play, which is more rational. The Willem Lodewijk citation is less balanced and more vehement and brutal. Moreover, the use of the first person in combination with 'vindictiveness' ('wraecklust', l. 431) is remarkable. In the preceding and following verses, Ulysses describes the necessity of Palamedes's downfall in terms of fate. He sketches a situation in which Palamedes will be ruined in any event – whether Ulysses can trick him or not. Except for one expression, 'my enemy' ('Mijn vyand', l. 422), Ulysses's personal feelings towards Palamedes are not apparent. In referring to his own vindictiveness, however, he shows his own particular emotional motivation. The obvious deviations in the last two verses of the passage could serve to make the reader aware of its topicality.

The striking differences between the character Palamedes as created by Vondel and his literary classical forebear, combined with the citations – theatrical and real – form the most obvious reference to the layer of contemporary politics in the play. Yet there are many more of these references. They can be traced, for example, by taking a closer look at the way the play associates itself with the Senecan tradition of playwriting.

Decoding Textual Stimuli: The Conventions of Senecan Tragedy

During the years preceding the publication of *Palamedes*, Vondel gained in-depth knowledge of the Senecan tradition of playwriting. He studied Latin by translating Seneca's *Troades*⁵¹ with the help of the learned writers Hooft and Reaal, and he probably read Heinsius's

⁵⁰ Vondel, *Palamedes* ll. 425–32: 'Te meer hy sich verweert, en na sijne onschuld tracht, / Te meer het lastren groeyt. hy is, en blijft verdacht. / Het krijsvolck is gedeelt: d'een looft hem als een' vader, / En d'ander hem verspuwt, en scheld voor landverrader. / By dese swarigheyt koomt, dat der Goden tolck / De lasterlogen queeckt, en koestert onder 't volck. / Mijn wraecklust sal eer lang hem sijnen trots verleen, / En d'oude lemten gants tot etter wt doen sweeren.'

⁵¹ This resulted in the publication of the Dutch play *De Amsteldamsche Hecuba* (1626).

annotated edition of Seneca's plays (1611). It may even have been in the commentaries in this edition that Vondel found his model for the allegory of the execution of Oldenbarnevelt, since Heinsius mentioned Euripides's play about Socrates as a fitting example of allegory. Be that as it may, the Senecan tradition, with its stoic philosophy, horrifying scenes and a good share of maxims, was well-known and popular among Dutch dramatists in the first decades of the seventeenth century. Obviously it was very apt in articulating the emotions and viewpoints of political debate, since both subjectivity (*pathos*) and rationality (in the dialogues and *sententiae*) are present in the genre. Readers had been used to searching for ethical meaning in Senecan tragedy since antiquity.⁵² Moreover, one could carefully characterise the early Dutch Senecan tradition as a Remonstrant or pro-Oldenbarnevelt tradition, since its most important preachers, Hooft and particularly Coster, articulated Remonstrant and pro-Oldenbarnevelt views in their Senecan tragedies. In his study of English Royalist literature from the second half of the seventeenth century, Lois Potter has shown how genre and political colour could become entangled.⁵³

Vondel's play meaningfully fits in with the Dutch Senecan tradition of the first quarter of the seventeenth century. *Palamedes* uses most of the Senecan conventions,⁵⁴ which in many cases are highly suited to emphasising the immediate relevance of the play. The most striking example is the role of Palamedes as a somewhat resigned character. Rather than being a tragic hero, he serves as a classic example of moral rectitude, uncompromising in his sincerity – in Seneca's theatrical characters, one characteristic was often emphasised. The character of Palamedes in the play fitted the heroic position Oldenbarnevelt was to obtain as a consequence of the publication of *Palamedes*.⁵⁵ The horrifying passage at the start of Act Two, where the fury Megaera brings Ulysses's uncle Sisyphus from the underworld to earth to advise the sleeping Ulysses on how to deal with Palamedes (ll. 287–406), can also be seen as typical of Senecan tragedy. The fury, thoroughly bad of course, was recognised as the Amsterdam burgomaster Reynier Pauw,

⁵² Smits-Veldt, *Samuel Coster*, p. 67.

⁵³ Potter, *Secret Rites*, pp. 72–112.

⁵⁴ There are also some passages that are reminiscent of the plays of Seneca in *Palamedes*, especially of *Hercules furens*. See Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 2, pp. 123–24.

⁵⁵ Cf. also Vondel, *Palamedes*, ed. Wijngaards, p. 28.

one of Oldenbarnevelt's judges. The conventions of the Senecan character of the Fury thus enabled Vondel to defame Pauw as thoroughly bad.

Even more significant than the use of Senecan conventions, however, are the deviations from traditional Senecan tragedy. In this respect, the final act of the tragedy is the most striking. In the first of its three parts, the desperate Oeax asks Neptune for revenge (ll. 1863–2278). The second part is a short dialogue between the Trojan Priam and Hecuba (ll. 2279–93) and the third part is a choir of Trojan girls, celebrating the death of Palamedes (ll. 2293–2380). The dialogue between Priam and Hecuba ignores the required unities of place and action and the choir of Trojan girls violates the convention that a (Senecan) tragedy should not end with a chorus.⁵⁶ These deviations may have functioned as stimuli for informed readers to read the act allegorically.

In the first scene of Act Five, Neptune had predicted the terrors that would face Agamemnon, Ulysses and the other agitators of Palamedes after his death. His prediction, a narrative well-known to the reader of classical texts, contains only few parallels to the topical layer of *Palamedes*. The betrayal by the Greek housewives, the destruction of Greek kingdoms, Ulysses's roaming – all of these familiar themes were at that point in opposition to the consequences of the execution of Oldenbarnevelt in the Dutch Republic. Only the death of Agamemnon perhaps motivated an allegorical reading. The death of Maurits may have been interpreted as a fulfilment of Neptune's prophecy in the play. Although Maurits was not killed by his wife, like Agamemnon, their resemblances were underlined by the tempest they both encountered: Agamemnon on his way home, Maurits during the attack on Antwerp.

The subsequent scenes of Act Five, breaking with Senecan conventions, are more obviously topical and may have forced readers also to interpret the first scene as such. Priam and Hecuba were recognised as the Spanish rulers of the Southern Netherlands, Albrecht and Isabella of Austria. As such, their dialogue is very topical in its references to Dutch history. It urges the reader to remember, above all, that the play has a topical meaning. The closing chorus serves to reinforce this reading. The happiness of the Trojan girls in the chorus represents that of the Spanish and Southern Netherlanders following the division

⁵⁶ On these deviations, see Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 2, pp. 118–19.

within the Republic and thus points to the plot against Oldenbarnevelt and its enormous consequences.

Another difference between *Palamedes* and Seneca's tragedies is found in its style and language. Unlike Seneca's tragedies, the play offers relatively few stoic maxims or excessive ornamentation.⁵⁷ The absence of these Senecan conventions may have reduced the distance between readers and the events described, thus making it easier to identify the allegorical narrative. This is not to say, however, that the whole play employs the language of common parlance. There are significant differences in the use of style and language by the characters in the tragedy. Palamedes himself is the only one who speaks almost entirely in poetic language and employs the occasional Senecan stoic maxim. He is indeed the stoic hero of the play. His style and language reinforce the image of Palamedes as a quiet and wise old man – an image that is in opposition to the classical figure of Palamedes but conforms to the image Vondel wanted to create of Oldenbarnevelt.

The use of style and language is more striking in the choruses, however, which also deviate from common Senecan choruses in other respects. In the Senecan tradition, the chorus was a lyrical passage propagating universal moralism whilst often presenting a story independent of the plot, for variety's sake. In *Palamedes* only the third and fourth chorus can be interpreted in this way. An apt example of a deviating chorus is the one at the end of Act One. After the monologue of Palamedes, the antiphonal singing of the Euboeans (Palamedes's people) and the Ithacans (Ulysses's people) depicts their argument about the accusations against Palamedes and his refutations thereof. Their language is more passionate than that of Palamedes in the preceding monologue and is free of stoic maxims. Whereas Palamedes describes Ulysses's campaign against him as a fact he has to endure, without really blaming him, the Euboeans speak of Ulysses as the man 'whose tongue is sweet-sounding, but who carries poison inside' ('wiens tong van Nectar dout, / En draeght vergift inwendig', ll. 197–98). The contrast between the monologue and the chorus and the way the chorus deviates from common Senecan choruses, underscores a topical interpretation. It can be interpreted as a representation of the dispute between Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants, which was also

⁵⁷ See also Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 2, pp. 123–24; and Vondel, *Palamedes*, ed. Wijngaards, pp. 28–29.

reciprocal and more passionate than rational. Style and language again support a topical reading.

Another departure from traditional Senecan tragedy provides the framework of satirical elements, in which the use of style and language again plays an important role. The play is simultaneously a tragedy and a satirical drama.⁵⁸ Satire in the lofty genre of tragedy was uncommon and is therefore dissonant in *Palamedes*. An example of a clearly satirical passage is the entreaty of priest Calchas in Act Three (ll. 947–86). I cite the passage in which he describes the power of the priests:

We are bound to the Gods by an unbreakable pact.
 Those who contradict us, contradict God's word.
 We are copies of God, ambassadors of immortality.
 We are honoured, anointed Jupiter's attendants,
 And we wear his livery, form his retinue,
 And through our saintliness, one speaks to God.
 A worldly power that dares audaciously to counteract
 Will lose his seat and stand on tottering feet,
 Our signs are lightning bolts, our words crashing thunder.
 We are a wall around the state, the keys of the city gate,
 The torches that set a country easily alight.
 Being provoked, we give free rein to the vomit
 And curses of hell: no Monarch is able to mobilise his army
 As quickly as we are able to mobilise the fierce people.⁵⁹

The image sketched here of priesthood by a priest himself is replete with hyperboles.⁶⁰ Calchas represents himself as a proud person, hungry for power. He cannot be taken seriously as a sincere spokesman of God. The satirical layer of the passage interacts with references to the Counter-Remonstrants, who as a consequence lose their credibility

⁵⁸ For an interpretation of *Palamedes* as a satirical drama see for example Wijngaards' edition of *Palamedes*, pp. 33–34.

⁵⁹ Vondel, *Palamedes* ll. 973–86: 'Wy staen met Goden in onbrekelijk verbond. / Al wie ons wederspreekt, die wederspreekt Gods mond. / Wy zyn afdrucksels Gods, onsterflijckheysds gesanten. / Wy zyn gehult, gesalft tot Iupiters trawanten, / En voeren syn levrey, en maken sijnen stoet, / En door onse hayligheyd men Godheyd spreken moet. / Wat wereldlijcke maght ons stout derf tegenwroeten, / Diens setel sijght, en staet op waggelende voeten, / Ons wencken blixems zyn, en donders yeder woord. / Wy zyn een muur om 't rijck, de sleutels van stads poort, / De fackels om een land in lichten brand te stellen. / Gezart wy geven aen d'wtbraecxelen der Hellen, / En vloecken vryen toom: en geen Monarch soo gauw / Syn heyr brengt op de been, als wy het woeste graeu.'

⁶⁰ Sierhuis has shown how the image of Counter-Remonstrant 'fanaticism, ambition and hypocrisy' in *Palamedes* is derived in large part from pamphlet literature from the 1618–1619 controversy: Sierhuis, 'A Babel Full of Confusion', pp. 275–281.

together with Calchas. Satirical passages of this nature can be found throughout the tragedy, which emphasises the strong satirical connotations of the play as a whole and thus encourages allegorical reading.

The World as a Stage: A Framework of References to Allegory

The web of references to contemporary politics motivated by the use of formal conventions is supported by a framework of references that is both formal and thematic. These references do not point to contemporary political events as such, but subtly refer to the possibility of allegory in literature as well as reality. That is to say, the theme of *theatrum mundi* is present in *Palamedes*, even in its preface. The larger part of that preface describes what is known about Palamedes from earlier literature and historiography, particularly from the classical period. The description places considerable emphasis on the comparison between Palamedes and Socrates, based on the allegorical tragedy by Euripides.⁶¹ It posits the plays by Euripides and Vondel as representative of the important function of drama in eulogising fallen leaders.

In general, the contradictions between the named sources lead Vondel to take a sceptical approach to history and literature in the preface. More than once, the sources are said not to have been faithful to the truth. When that concerns a literary source, it is justified by referring to poetic licence. The 'poetic freedom' ('poëtische vryheid') is specifically mentioned in l. 207, when Vondel gives his motivation for the location he chose for the execution in *Palamedes*, which is an aberration of some of the sources. Poetic freedom is identified elsewhere too, for example in ll. 165–68, when Homer is explicitly called a poet, in order to explain why he had ignored Palamedes.

In the end, however, literature and reality do not appear that dissimilar. Several references can be found to an idea of universal theatricality: acting is regarded as not uncommon in either literature or reality. An example of such a reference can be found in the description of the misuse of religion at the beginning of the preface, where Vondel argues that good leaders will always be deceived in the end. The heathens claiming to be Christian are said to perform their 'role' ('personagie') very well.⁶² Later, the deceit which led to the execution of Palamedes is

⁶¹ The tragedy is mentioned in ll. 67–72, but Vondel refers to the comparison between Palamedes and Socrates two more times, in ll. 43–53 and 97–102.

⁶² l. 17.

referred to, in Vondel's translation of Ovid, as 'the versified prank' (l. 130, 't Gedichte schellemstuck'). In the following lines, this prank is regarded as being appropriate for Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, because it led to a 'transformation'.⁶³ The boundaries between literature and reality are diminishing as a consequence of this argumentation. The preface thus points to the entanglement of the world of literature and reality and the intrinsic possibilities of theatricality in both worlds.

In an article on the *theatrum mundi* metaphor in Dutch plays, René van Stipriaan has shown how the use of words with theatrical connotations is part of a larger framework within the text of Vondel's *Palamedes* itself.⁶⁴ For example, he draws attention to the description of the location of Palamedes's death as a 'stage' (ll. 1896, 'schouwtoneel') and the execution itself as a 'tragedy' (l. 1929, 'treurspel'). I would include the use of words like 'play' (ll. 13, 49 and 108, 'stuck'), 'versified' (ll. 392 and 1957, 'erdight') and 'role' (l. 433, 'rolle'). Time and again the use of words like these urges the reader to be aware of the theatricality of everything, not only in the theatre, but also in the rest of the world. The word 'stuck' for example refers in *Palamedes* respectively to: proof or evidence (l. 13), which can also be false, as becomes clear later in the play; to a plan (l. 49), in this case the plan to offer the daughter of Agamemnon, Iphigenia, as a sacrifice, which Palamedes regards as an unjust plan; and finally to a story (l. 1866), specifically the story of Palamedes's downfall.

The level of the theatrical characters also contains several markers of the overt presence of theatre and betrayal. This is not just because the characters represent both a 'real' person involved in the execution of Oldenbarnevelt and a fictional character in the play. It rather concerns the fact that the characters occasionally become interchangeable with the people they represent as well as with other people too.

Some characters represent more than one person. Ajax, for example, friend of Palamedes, was recognised as both Van Matenes and Schagen, two friends of Oldenbarnevelt. And Ulysses, who was only recognised as one enemy of Oldenbarnevelt, viz. François van Aarssen, nevertheless appears able to act like someone else when he uses the words of count Willem Lodewijk, who in the rest of the play is represented by Ulysses's companion Diomedes.⁶⁵ The way in which the two roles of

⁶³ ll. 132–34.

⁶⁴ Van Stipriaan, 'Het *theatrum mundi* als ludiek labyrint.'

⁶⁵ In ll. 431–32, see the above quotation: p. 239.

the character Palamedes – the Greek Palamedes and the Dutch Oldenbarnevelt – become interchangeable during the play is the best example of theatricality at the level of character. The character Palamedes is not consistent. He is easily recognisable as Oldenbarnevelt when he lives up to the image of docile old man, as in the first act, but in some later scenes he acts more like the figure of Palamedes. Using an exceptionally passionate tone in certain dialogues, the character shifts from Oldenbarnevelt to Palamedes. Moreover, the events in the play occasionally correspond with what we know about Palamedes, sometimes with what we know about Oldenbarnevelt, and other times with both.⁶⁶ For the reader, Palamedes and Oldenbarnevelt could become one and the same person.



J.W. Delff, portrait engraving of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt after Mierevelt (1617).

⁶⁶ Cf. Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 2, pp. 124–25.



Drawing by Salomon Saverij, in: Joost van den Vondel, *Palamedes oft vermoorde onnooselhejd: treur-spel*. Amsterdam: Jacob Aertsz. Colom, 1625. University Library VU University Amsterdam.

Something similar happens in the fourth chorus, which seems to function only on the surface level of the play at first sight. In this chorus, Palamedes is compared to Hercules and the two become interchangeable. It has always been argued that this chorus is one of the few parts

⁶⁷ Cf., for example, Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 2, pp. 125–26.

of the play in which the allegorical layer is absent,⁶⁷ but when interpreted as part of the discourse on theatricality, it does have relevance to the allegorical interpretation of the play. It is abundantly clear that in this chorus, Palamedes is a young, vital warrior and not the Oldenbarnevelt-like wise old man, but in fact another allegory is at work here: Palamedes represents Hercules. This allegory within the allegory of *Palamedes* shows the possibilities of the genre and the universality of theatre and betrayal. As such, it supports the larger framework of references to allegory in both preface and the play itself.

For that matter, the same thing applies to the description of the threatening of Palamedes by all kinds of animals in ll. 2023–41. The animals represent the enemies of Palamedes in the play, and at the same time readers were motivated to recognise in them the enemies of Oldenbarnevelt, particularly in editions that contained the picture of Saverij on which an Oldenbarnevelt-like man was surrounded by the animals described. Using allegories within the allegory could incite readers to search for more allegorical meanings than they had already found.

The discourse on theatricality in the preface and in the play itself emphasises what *Palamedes* is able to do, namely to give a coded account of reality. My formalist reading of the play aimed to clarify how the allegorical narrative of *Palamedes* simultaneously hides and displays the topical meaning of the play with extra-textual and textual stimuli. This seemingly paradoxical movement can be regarded as stemming both from the culture of coding and decoding and the allegorical genre itself as well as from the heated political debate in the Dutch Republic during the 1620s. In that context, allegory is both more than rhetoric or a literary game and more than a thin veil to cover a political statement. The interaction between politics and aesthetics is pivotal to *Palamedes*.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

TRANSLATION STUDIES – VONDEL'S APPROPRIATION OF GROTIUS'S *SOPHOMPANEAS* (1635)

Madeleine Kasten

Life, Text and Interpretation

On 15 July 1634, Hugo Grotius presents his esteemed and loyal friend Gerard Vossius with a play by his hand entitled *Sophompaneas*. As he explains in his dedicatory letter, the piece has three points to commend it. First of all, it is a tragedy and thus belongs to the 'royal' genre that was not disdained by prominent men such as Sophocles, or the emperor Augustus. Secondly, although the plot conforms to the Aristotelian ideal it is drawn not from the misfortunes of Troy or Thebes – matter that has been tainted by the story-telling Greeks! – but from biblical history, which is free from falsehood. Finally, the play offers a portrait of an exemplary ruler, and in this respect it complements the examples of the first three Patriarchs, on whose lives, according to Philo Judaeus, Moses the lawgiver intended us to model our own.¹

The exemplary regent in question is Joseph, son of Jacob and Rachel, whose history we find recorded in Genesis 37–50. More specifically, Grotius's play centres on the episode in which Joseph, having been exalted to the position of governor of Egypt, confronts and forgives his brothers, who had sold him into slavery in his youth. As a humanist, Grotius presents his protagonist in the light of those qualities that mark him out as a universal example, and the play may thus be classified as a

¹ Grotius, *Sophompaneas*, pp. 126–33. Unless stated otherwise, all references to Grotius's play, including the translations, are from the edition by Arthur Eyffinger. Daniel Heinsius, a Dutch humanist and former friend of Grotius, had singled out the popular theme of Joseph in Egypt as the only one in the Bible to answer Aristotle's preference for a complex plot where the moment of recognition (*agnitio*) coincides with a reversal of fortune or *peripeteia* (Eyffinger, *Sophompaneas*, pp. 3–4). In his dedicatory letter, Grotius forestalls any possible criticism concerning the *exitus felix* of his tragedy by mentioning a number of classical tragedies that likewise lack a sad ending, including Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, a play he had recently translated into Latin himself.

mirror for magistrates. However, various readers and critics have pointed out that the author must have been aware of certain striking similarities between Joseph's story and his own vicissitudes.²

A brilliant and internationally acclaimed jurist, theologian, classicist, and historian, Grotius had been intended for a career in politics. After a promising start, however, he got caught up in the politico-religious controversies of his day and was sentenced to life imprisonment in the Dutch castle of Loevestein (1618), from which, helped by his wife, he managed to escape in a book chest three years later. His subsequent years were spent in exile, first in Paris and later, after a failed attempt to return to Holland, near Hamburg. Moved by feelings of bitter resentment towards his home country he had long been looking around for new prospects. At last, in 1634, an opening presented itself as the Swedish chancellor Axel Oxenstierna offered him the post of ambassador to the Swedish crown in Paris.

This appointment, as Grotius may have perceived it, would enable him to further European-Christian unity and promote his ideas for a universal system of natural law set forth in his treatise *De iure belli ac pacis* (*On the Law of War and Peace*, 1625). It would thus afford him an opportunity to prove his statesmanship, in circumstances which may well have put him in mind of Joseph's foreign career. Like Joseph, Grotius had been forced into exile; like his protagonist, he may have sensed the hand of God in the reversal of fortune that was once more to call him to public office. His conciliatory letters to the States of Holland and the Dutch stadtholder, Frederick Henry, suggest his intention to follow Joseph's example in repaying evil with good,³ while the play itself contains several possible allusions to the parallel, notably Grotius's confusion, in the original draft, between his own term of exile and that of Joseph.⁴

One early reader on whom this parallel was certainly not lost was Vondel, who, like Grotius's son Pieter, produced a Dutch translation of the play in the year of its first appearance. The personal relationship between Vondel and Grotius dates back to 1631, when Vondel came to visit his countryman in the latter's temporary hiding place in

² Eyffinger, *Sophompaneas*, pp. 67–72.

³ Eyffinger, *Sophompaneas*, p. 66.

⁴ *Sophompaneas*, pp. 999–1000. This slip, among other possible clues, was first noted by Van Vollenhoven, whose interpretation of the play's genesis I am following here (*Verspreide Geschriften I*, pp. 238–39).

Amsterdam. In 1628, Vondel had already dedicated his Dutch translation of Seneca's *Hippolytus* to Grotius. In 1637, two years after his work on *Sophompaneas*, he honoured Grotius again with the dedication of his play *Gysbreght van Aemstel*. Vondel's much later *Adam in ballingschap* (*Adam Exiled*, 1664) is an adaptation of Grotius's *Adamus exul* (*Adam Exiled*, 1601), and as late as 1668 he was to render Grotius's Latin translation of Euripides' *Phoenician Women* in Dutch.

In the preface to his *Sofompaneas* Vondel reflects that as he was engaged in the delightful task of translation, he 'sometimes imagined that either Joseph had been resurrected in the poet, or the poet had followed in Joseph's footsteps' ('[Ick] hier mede vast in 't vertolcken en rijmen bezigh en verruckt zijnde, liet my zontijds voorstaen, dat Iosef, of in den treurspeelder verzezen was, of dat de treurspeelder Iosefs spoor moest bewandelt hebben').⁵ This comment, disarming in its show of admiration for Grotius, may nevertheless be seen to serve a double purpose. First of all, its chiasmic structure (Joseph-poet/poet-Joseph) suggests a relationship of reciprocity to the point of interchangeability between the Genesis account and Grotius's poetic adaptation. Yet where could such a relationship exist except in the perception of a reader/translator sufficiently skilled to register the similarity and eager, for his part, to cap this *tour de force* by achieving an analogous relationship to his original and its biblical pretext? Vondel's subsequent statement that he has tried neither to follow too closely on the heels of Grotius's Latin nor to stray from his illustrious predecessor too far does little to mask this aspiration, despite his modest assurance that whether he and his two helpers have struck the right balance in this respect is for the Great Intellect himself to decide.⁶

Vondel's desire to revive the image of the Patriarch through Grotius is characteristic of an age and culture which saw *translatio* as a first step towards the time-honoured ideal of *imitatio et aemulatio*. Yet we may ask to what extent he succeeded in his endeavour, even if Grotius declared himself thoroughly satisfied with the job.⁷ It is this question that I will try to answer here, although I should make it clear from the

⁵ *Sofompaneas*, p. 435. Unless stated otherwise, all translations from Vondel are my own. To distinguish between Vondel's translation and Grotius's original I will refer to Vondel's work by means of its Dutch title, *Sofompaneas*.

⁶ *Sofompaneas*, p. 435. Vondel's fond epithet for Grotius, 'the Great Intellect' (Dutch 'het Groote Vernuff'), is a pun on his Dutch name, De Groot. Vondel's two helpers were the playwright Daniël Mostert and the lawyer Joan Victorijn.

⁷ Eyffinger, *Sophompaneas*, p. 88.

start that the issues I want to highlight do not begin or end with Vondel's translation. They are far more pervasive and cannot be properly separated from more general problems of imitation and interpretation. Significantly, the Latin noun *interpretatio* encompasses both the translator's and the interpreter's activities, and the latitude for ideological appropriation created by these overlapping meanings compromises the notion of 'translation proper' from its very beginnings.⁸ In the case of *Sofompaneas*, the difficulty is moreover compounded by the circumstance that Vondel's Neo-Latin source text was itself both a linguistic and generic adaptation *and* a radical cultural appropriation of the Hebrew Bible story. In Grotius's play, Vondel encountered a version of the Genesis story that had already been mediated by the perspective of a contemporary who was, moreover, a western intellectual and a Christian.

Grotius's play and Vondel's translation represent only two among numerous early modern adaptations of the popular Joseph theme. To determine Vondel's position within this larger intertextual framework it is not enough merely to judge his labour in terms of its faithfulness to Grotius's original. Although the scope of this paper does not allow me to follow up all of the intertextual leads, I will make a start by referring Vondel's and Grotius's achievements to their common biblical source. After all, even though Vondel's own stated intention on this occasion was to produce a 'translation proper' we will see that the dominant paradigm of translation in his time would have allowed him scope for considerable alterations with regard to his original. Before embarking on my analysis, however, it will be necessary – however briefly – to outline this paradigm, and to mark some historical shifts in the western approach to translation.

Invisibility in Translation

Although translation studies as an academic discipline established itself only in the second half of the twentieth century, the reflection on translation as a practice goes back to antiquity. Frederick Renner, in his

⁸ Roman Jakobson, in his essay 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation', distinguishes between three types of translation: intralingual translation or 'rewording', intersemiotic translation or 'transmutation', and interlingual translation or 'translation proper' (p. 114).

history of translation from Cicero to Tytler, argues that changing views with regard to literary translation over the centuries are directly attributable to changes in perception concerning the relationship between language and the world. Until the end of the eighteenth century, he explains, this relationship was largely defined in terms of the classical distinction between *res* and *verba*. Whereas words might be seen to differ from one language to another, their referents were regarded as universal and unchangeable. This outlook, in its turn, presupposed a relationship of full, unproblematic equivalence between the individual languages.

Following Cicero, translators generally took a liberal view of their art. Interestingly, they often compared their labour to a change of costume.⁹ Vondel, in the preface to his translation of the French poet Du Bartas' *La Magnificence de Salomon*, resorts to this very *topos* to justify his enterprise:

But even though fear at times made me shrink [from the task of translation], a secret passion would compel me to see how I might adorn and embellish this French Venus with a Dutch apparel and costume [...].¹⁰

Where the preservation of meaning – the body underneath the changed apparel – was taken to be *a priori* guaranteed, the translator's ideal would be to produce a fluent text which strove to conceal its derived nature at any cost.

Partly through the influence of Descartes and Locke, the eighteenth century sees a change in this respect. By this time, the insight is growing that our perception of reality is to a large extent shaped by language, and the old distinction between *res* and *verba* comes under fire. Friedrich Schleiermacher, in his essay 'Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens' ('On the Different Methods of Translating', 1813), advocates a new approach to the translation of scholarly and literary texts. Unlike his predecessors he rejects the idea that a translation could or, indeed, should copy the meaning of its original. After all, every text is produced within a specific cultural and historical context, and this context is rooted primarily in language. Even apart from being impossible an exact translation would be undesirable since, in Schleiermacher's view, the purpose of a translation should be to expose

⁹ Rener, *Interpretatio*, pp. 24–26.

¹⁰ 'Maer gelijk my vreeze zomtjids dede deynzen, alzo noopte my wederom een heymelijcke hertstocht om eenmael te zien hoe ick deze fransche Venus met een neerlands gewaed en hulsel zoude mogen toijen en opsmucken [...]; *Heerlyckheyd*, p. 229.

its reader to a foreign language and culture. Accordingly, he declares himself in favour of a more 'alienating' mode of translation designed to preserve the characteristics of the source text as far as possible. The resulting target text, he asserts, should not gloss over the traces of the translator's pains to achieve this goal.

With regard to the *theory* of translation it is safe to say that Schleiermacher's relativistic approach has withstood the test of time. Particularly the advent of (post)structuralism, with its insistence on the arbitrary and unstable nature of the linguistic sign, has done much to reinforce the insight that a translation can never be more than an interpretation of its original.¹¹ By contrast, Schleiermacher's call for an alienating *practice* of translation has met with little response.

Lawrence Venuti, in *The Translator's Invisibility*, examines the consequences of what he deems to be a constant of the art of translation through the centuries. Although Venuti's survey is primarily concerned with dominant practices of translation in the Anglo-Saxon world its relevance is not restricted to this context. In order for a text to gain approval, he argues, it has always been essential that it should read fluently – an effect which the translator achieves by adapting his style and usage to the audience of his target text. As a result, however, the translated text is likely to give the impression of being an original rather than a translation. By erasing the traces of his own interference, the translator disguises the secondary status of his work. The typical result is an illusion of *presence*: presence of the 'voice' of the original, to which the reader has direct access. To put it in Venuti's words, '[t]he more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably, the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text'.¹²

This brings us back to Vondel's assertion that while he was translating, he sometimes imagined that he was either encountering Grotius in Joseph, or vice versa. On the one hand his desire to lend presence to not one, but *both* of these sources seems wildly ambitious even in terms of the ubiquitous tendency signalled by Venuti. On the other hand, it is important to note that Vondel produced his translation at a time long before *interpretatio*, in its double sense of translation and interpretation, came to be conceived as a problem at all. In the closing sentence

¹¹ An interesting survey of new approaches is *Difference in Translation*, a collection of essays edited by Joseph Graham. See especially Graham's introduction, pp. 13–30.

¹² Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, p. 2.

of his preface, where he refers the judgement of his work to Grotius himself, he significantly invites the Great Intellect to ‘rebuke our Dutch Sofompaneas in his stammering, and to render him in Dutch as perfectly as in Latin.’¹³ This open invitation to the author to emulate his translator is telling in several respects. Firstly, it confirms the idea, prevalent in Vondel’s time, that perfection in translation is an attainable goal: the true master can render his text in one language as well as in another. Secondly, it reduces the question of perfection to one of ‘mere’ words, of masterly eloquence as opposed to the beginner’s stammer. Finally, and perhaps most fundamentally, it obscures the difference between ‘translation proper’ – if such a thing should indeed exist – and the prior act of *interpretatio* by which Grotius had translated ‘his’ Joseph from the Book of Genesis to his own Neo-Latin play, drawing inspiration from a great many other sources in the process.¹⁴

This blurring of the different senses of *interpretatio* is entirely of a piece with the fact that translation, in Vondel’s era, was regarded as an integral part of a learning programme whose goal was to train the student in the imitation of the classical masters.¹⁵ Vondel himself, in his *Aenleidinge ter Nederduitsche dichtkunste* (*Introduction to Dutch Poetry*), claims that

Knowledge of foreign languages is a great advantage, and translating the illustrious Poets will help the aspiring Poet in the same way that the Painter’s apprentice may benefit from copying great masterpieces. [...] Thus one copies the art from the best masters, learning, through artful theft, to leave to others what is theirs.¹⁶

¹³ ‘Maer of wy hier in de rechte maete houden, dat zal het Groote Vernuft [...] kunnen oordeelen, wanneer het zich gewaerdige onzen Neerlandschen Sofompaneas in zijn stamelen te berispen, en hem zoo volmaeck in het Duitsch als in Latijn te leveren [...]’ (*Sofompaneas*, p. 435)

¹⁴ I quote Grotius’s own account: ‘The history of this tragedy is recorded by Moses in *Genesis*, chapters 44 and 45 and the adjoining context. It is furthermore to be found in *Psalms* 125, in chapter 7 of the *Acts of the Apostles*, in Philo’s *Life of Joseph*, in the second book of the *Antiquities* by Josephus, the father of Jewish historiography, and parts of it also in Justinus’ excerpt from book 26 of Pompeius Trogus. It is also recorded in Artapanus, who drew on Alexander Polyhistor, and in Demetrius; the relevant references are listed in Eusebius’ *Preparation of the Gospel* (*Sophompaneas*, p. 147). In addition to these listed sources, Grotius’s play contains countless allusions to, and stylistic resonances with, the classical masters.

¹⁵ See Jansen, *Imitatio*, esp. ch. 4, pp. 144–53.

¹⁶ ‘Kennis van uitheemsche spraecken vordert niet weinigh, en het overzetten uit vermaerde Poëten helpt den aenkomende Poet, gelijk het kopieeren van kunstige meesterstukken den Schildersleerling. [...] Zoo ziet men den besten meesteren de

The term 'theft' suggests that there is more involved here than a simple drill. Indeed Venuti, in his study, makes it clear that precisely where the art of translation appears most effortless, the translated text reveals its thieving designs upon its original. For its illusory transparency does not come to it naturally: it is the result of appropriation and suppression of the cultural other. The audience within the receiving culture finds its standards and values confirmed in the translation, which thus helps to deflect any 'foreign' influence that might endanger those values.

In the foregoing I have tried to outline the cultural framework within which Vondel operated, linking my observations at the same time to a more general problem of translation. Within this broader context, it remains to be determined why he chose to undertake this particular project, and to assess the result. As a first step towards my analysis I now turn to Grotius's *Sophompaneas*, a play whose very title presents a vexing problem of translation.

Grotius's Sophompaneas: An Outline

The title of the play refers to the Egyptian name given to Joseph by Pharaoh in Genesis 41:45, Zaphnath-paaneah. This name, which presents an etymological riddle, has been variously translated as 'the man who discloses secrets', 'a man unto whom secrets are revealed', 'a man and Interpreter of secrets', 'a discoverer of secrets', or, as in Jerome's *Vulgate*, 'Saviour of the world'.¹⁷ I will return to Jerome's translation at a later stage in my argument.

The beginning of the first act finds Joseph alone while pondering his duties as governor of Egypt. Like Socrates' model ruler in the allegory of the cave, Joseph, too, avows to spurn the trappings of his office: 'I maintain the image, but get no pleasure from it' (*utor hoc ego, non fruor*, l. 28). He contrasts his carefree youth in Canaan with his present,

kunst af, en leert, behendig stelende, een' ander het zijne te laten.' (Vondel, *Aenleidinge ter Nederduytsche dichtkunste*, pp. 487–88).

¹⁷ Jerome omits the name Zaphnath-paaneah altogether. He merely states that Pharaoh changed Joseph's name, calling him in the Egyptian tongue the saviour of the world ('*veritque nomen illius et vocavit eum lingua aegyptiaca Salvatorem mundi*'). Eyffinger notes that Grotius himself appears to have preferred the Hebrew rendering, 'the man who discloses secrets' (*Sophompaneas*, p. 148). This reading corresponds to Joseph's self-stated intention in the first act of uncovering the secrets of his brothers' hearts, which are usually veiled in mists (ll. 97–98).

precarious state as a stranger in a high position, calling attention to the seven years of crop failure which are devastating Egypt and giving praise to nature's almighty Father, who has made him, Joseph, the instrument of the country's salvation.

God has made the dreams he sent Joseph as a child come true: from far and near strangers come flocking to Egypt for the grain stored there through the governor's foresight during the previous years of abundance. Even his own brothers have now undertaken the journey for the second time, without, however, having recognized him. Joseph declares himself a mild man who is willing to forgive his kin for their past crimes against him. Yet he feels he must put these brothers – who are actually his half-brothers – to the test, since he fears that the same hatred which drove them to sell him into slavery long ago might cause them to harm young Benjamin, his only full brother and the favourite of their father Jacob in his old age. To this end Joseph has devised a plot by which he hopes either to find them good men, or to make them so. He counsels his son, Manasseh, to follow his own example in repaying evil with good lest he might lose God's favour.

At the opening of the second act Benjamin is taken to Joseph's palace in fetters: his luggage has been found to contain a sacrificial bowl which belongs to Joseph, and which was actually planted there at the latter's command. Judah, one of the brothers, tries to put in a good word for him but is told by Joseph's steward, Ramses, that the supplicants had better examine their own conscience. God's vengeance may be slow, but it is sure, and the adversity which has befallen Benjamin might well be a punishment for a wrong committed by his kin long ago. This admonition does not fail to strike home. At that point, however, the governor himself makes his entrance. He expresses his feigned surprise at the 'crime': how could the brothers have hoped to get away with theft? Were they unaware, then, of his prophetic gift? Judah pleads Benjamin's case once more. He implores Joseph to temper justice with mercy for the sake of old Jacob, who will surely not survive the loss of a second child. Joseph pretends he needs more time to consider the matter.

In Act Three a messenger informs Joseph of a rebellion in Egypt's easternmost province. The trouble has been caused by the greed of the local authorities, who have made good profit by selling the grain intended for the hungry people to buyers abroad. Joseph's interrogation of this messenger allows him to expose the evils of bad government and at the same time to demonstrate his own statesmanship.

He issues orders to restore the peace without unnecessary bloodshed and henceforth to entrust power to the reliable middle class: '[T]he backbone of society is the middle class – less prone to luxury and free from sordid baseness'.¹⁸

This scene is overheard by Joseph's brothers Judah and Simeon. The latter, who has spent a year at Joseph's court as a hostage, extols the virtues and political insight of the governor. He shows Judah a picture gallery – a gift to Joseph from Pharaoh – which surrounds the palace courtyard on three sides. Each tablet depicts a scene from Joseph's career in Egypt, starting with the attempt made on his virtue by the wife of Potiphar, his first master. Looking over Judah's shoulder we next follow the protagonist into the dungeon where this woman's false accusations have landed him, but where he also rises to fame thanks to his powers as a dream interpreter. Called upon by Pharaoh himself in this capacity, he confidently predicts a seven-year spell of abundant harvests followed by an equal period of failing crops. He is then elevated to his present dignity and seen to reform the country's government, dividing society into three estates and promoting the arts and sciences. Joseph's crowning achievement, however, has been his counsel to Pharaoh to store up as much grain as possible during the seven years of plenty. By selling these reserves to the people in the subsequent years of famine Pharaoh has become owner not only of all the land, but likewise of the Egyptians themselves and their live stock. Thus he has been able to evict his own people from their dwellings, commanding them to go and expand the empire by colonizing foreign lands.

Interestingly, Simeon now discloses that there is a fourth side to the gallery where Joseph has depicted what the future holds in store for the Egyptians. However, he declines to show Judah these last pictures, explaining that they are unlikely to be of interest to him.

The fourth act centres on Benjamin's trial before Joseph. The governor, on being reminded that Jacob already lost a son long ago, soon elicits Judah's confession that he would give his life to see father and child reunited. Satisfied with this answer, Joseph now proceeds to reveal his own identity by degrees. First he demonstrates his knowledge of the Hebrew tongue by giving the etymology of Benjamin's name, leaving it to Judah to unveil the meaning of his own name,

¹⁸ *Quod civitatem continet medium est genus, luxu remotem, sorde contemta vacans* (ll. 649–50); *Sophompaneas*, p. 205. This wisdom actually stems from Aristotle's *Politics* (IV.11).

Joseph: ‘the increase of a happy family’ (*incrementa felicitis domus*, l. 951). Indeed, a joyful reunion ensues in which Joseph fully forgives his brothers for their past misdeeds. Accordingly, he orders them to go and fetch Jacob in order that the whole family may come to live in Egypt, sharing Joseph’s power and privileges.

In Act Five, Pharaoh himself arrives at Joseph’s palace to offer his congratulations on this happy ending. Joseph seizes the opportunity to secure a promise that his family will be given fertile pastures in Egypt for their cattle. In addition, he asks that they be allowed freedom of religion as well as permission to leave Egypt if they should ever wish to do so. Pharaoh swears a solemn oath that these wishes shall be granted. Joseph concludes the play with a prophecy concerning Egypt’s future ties with Israel and the coming of Christ, who will join the two peoples’ religions one day.

Each of the five acts is followed by a chorus of Ethiopian women, the maid servants of Joseph’s wife Aseneth. The main function of this chorus is to sing Joseph’s praises and to highlight particular episodes in his life so as to justify the special favours bestowed on him by God. In Act One, the women begin by setting off the governor’s marital fidelity against the sexual excesses of ‘barbarian’ rulers.¹⁹ They continue their eulogy by contrasting Joseph’s chastity in youth to the lasciviousness of Potiphar’s wife. The keyword here is constancy. Unlike ‘barbarian’ monarchs, Joseph has never allowed himself to be swayed by passion, a claim that is indeed supported throughout the play by his prudent handling of the confrontation with his brothers.

On its second appearance, the chorus raises the broader theme of man’s innate capacity for evil. This proneness to sin, in its turn, leads the women to celebrate Joseph’s strict and just leadership, which is next demonstrated in Act Three as the governor unfolds his strategy for quenching the rebellion.

God works in mysterious ways which defy human understanding. This mystery is exemplified by Joseph’s history, but also, in a more negative sense, by the Nile’s present lack of water, a disaster which the

¹⁹ The Latin adjective used here is ‘*barbaricus*’ (*‘barbaricae more potentiae*’, l. 157), strictly meaning ‘non-Greek’, ‘non-Roman’, or simply ‘foreign’. Significantly, the Ethiopian servants in Grotius’s play identify with the ‘foreigner’ Joseph to the point of denouncing their own origins as ‘foreign’; a phenomenon that has been discussed within the context of postcolonial studies by Homi Bhabha (*‘Of Mimicry and Man’*). Eyffinger’s translation of ‘*barbaricus*’ as ‘Oriental’ (*Sophompaneas*, p. 167) misses this point.

chorus, on its return, explains as a punishment by God designed to recall man to a life of virtue. The chorus rejoices at Joseph's reconciliation with his brothers and ends the play with the wish that the Ethiopians, too, may one day come to share the benefits of divine providence.

Vondel's Sofompaneas

In the introduction to his translation, Vondel hails Joseph's appearance on the Neo-Latin stage in the following words:

After the passing of so many centuries the Hebrew enters the Latin drama, playing his character in Latin so excellently that antiquity wonders at it and he can stand his ground next to her unabashed; an honour that is not even granted all of the ancients.²⁰

Within a single sentence Vondel not only establishes continuity between the biblical story and Grotius's contemporary drama; he also stages an encounter between the biblical protagonist and the personified classical tradition. This last move allows him to compare Grotius's achievement favourably to that of the ancient masters. Indeed the figures of the playwright and his character appear to blend in the image of the eloquent, Latinized Joseph, an impression that is confirmed a few lines further down as Vondel relates how, in Act One, Joseph lays the foundation for his *artfully constructed* argument by contrasting his past and present states.²¹ Here, the character becomes indistinguishable from the figure of the *artifex* himself.

Throughout the introduction the translator's tone is one of unqualified admiration for the author of his original. In his discussion of Vondel's *Sofompaneas*, Smit notes how, at the time of its appearance, Vondel and Grotius had for years been engaged in friendly correspondence. In the early 1630s Vondel had conceived the idea of writing an epic devoted to the life of Constantine the Great, the Roman emperor who, after his own conversion, had made Christianity a state religion in 324 CE. The project became bogged down after the untimely deaths of two of Vondel's children, followed by that of his wife Maeyken in 1635,

²⁰ 'Na verloop van zoo veele eeuwen kooft de Hebreeuw op het Roomsche tooneel, en speelt zijn personagie zoo deftig in 't Latijn, dat d'aeloudheid zich des verwondert, en hy onbeteutert neffens haer magh stand houden; een eere, die allen ouden zelfs niet gebeuren en magh.' (*Sofompaneas*, p. 434).

²¹ *Sofompaneas*, p. 433.

and was never resumed. Yet in its initial stages Vondel had felt greatly inspired by the encouragement of Grotius, with whom he shared a deep nostalgia for those early ages when, as they both saw it, the Christian Church still constituted a relatively harmonious unity. In his letter of condolence to Vondel on Maeyken's death Grotius expressly counselled his friend to seek comfort in his work on Constantine.²² Instead, however, Vondel immediately began his translation of Grotius's *Sophompaneas*.

Why did Vondel give priority to this 'humble' task over his own ambitious enterprise? Grief at his recent loss, which may have prevented him from immersing himself in more original work, presents one possible reason. However, Smit convincingly argues that Vondel may have drawn consolation from Joseph's story as an example of how man's life is guided not by blind fate but by God, who alone is capable of turning every evil to good. In this context Smit points to a passage in the introduction where the translator praises 'God's wondrous Providence, which may use and manipulate the evil perpetrated by blind people irrespective of their own aims for the preservation of entire kingdoms, lands, and peoples' ('[...] Gods wonderbaere voorzienigheid, die de boosheid der blinde menschen buiten hun wit weet te bezigen en te beleiden tot behoudenis van geheele koninkrijcken, landen en volcken').²³ On the other hand Smit speculates that Vondel may have thought of his translation as being fundamentally connected with his own *Constantinade* project, since he regarded both the emperor and Joseph as emblems of the just ruler.²⁴

The question presents itself to what extent and in what ways we find Vondel's admiration for Grotius reflected in his translation. First of all, I propose to look at some technical aspects. An important intervention to which the Dutch combination of syllabic and accentual verse compelled Vondel concerns his prosody. Where Grotius uses a highly complex pattern of alternating metres, predominantly iambic trimeters and anapaestic dimeters, Vondel sticks to his familiar rhyming alexandrine. Compare his opening, for instance, to that of Grotius, who employs iambic trimeters²⁵ here:

²² Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 1, pp.155–56.

²³ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 1, pp. 167–68; *Sofompaneas*, pp. 434–35.

²⁴ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 1, pp. 156–57.

²⁵ Aristotle recommends the iambic trimeter as the metre that most resembles the natural rhythm of spoken ancient Greek (*Poetics* 1449a 24–26; cf. Davis and Finke, *Literary Criticism and Theory*, p. 63).

Iosephus: *Rursum fugata nocte formosum caput
Sol promit orbi, qualis e thalamo novus
Surgit maritus veste purpurea nitens.* (Grotius, *Sophompaneas*,
ll. 1–3)

Joseph: Nu alle duisternis voortvlughtigh is geweken,
Zoo komt het zonnlicht al weder uitgestreecken
Met heerelijcken glans, gelijk in 't purpren kleed
Een prachtigh bruidegom uit zijne kamer treed.

Now that all darkness has fled
the sunlight comes shining forth
with royal lustre, just as, in his crimson robe,
a splendid bridegroom steps forward from his chamber.
(*Sofompaneas*, ll. 1–4)

Only in his choruses and in one especially emotional passage (ll. 381–414), where Judah laments Benjamin's misfortune, does Vondel shift to a shorter, four-foot iambic line:

Judah: O teere spruit van onzen bloede,
Nu in uw bloem en eerste vreughd,
Hoe ongeluckigh is uw jeughd
En jongkheid, die niet eens bevroede
In welcke rampen datze leit
Gedompelt (*Sofompaneas*, ll. 381–86).

O tender offshoot of our blood,
now in the joy of thy first bloom,
how unfortunate is thy youth,
which not even suspects
the disasters into which it has been
plunged.

Grotius, at this point, shifts from iambic trimeter to anapaestic dimeter, a marching metre that is commonly reserved for chorus entries. The fact that this is the only occasion – apart from the choruses – where Vondel diverges from his standard alexandrine lends Judah's exclamation special dramatic force, suggesting an intentional effect which, because of Grotius's more frequent changes in metre, is less evident in his source text.

Dramatic intensification also occurs in some of the instances where Vondel expands Grotius's terse Latin expressions to make them fit his own more loosely constructed verse lines. To this end he frequently makes use of the *hendiyads*, the figure which renders a single idea by two substantives. An example is to be found in the last quote given above, where the synonyms 'jeughd' and 'jongkheid' for 'youth' serve to emphasize the idea of Benjamin's innocence.

A third feature that deserves attention is Vondel's use of generalizing or popularized Dutch terms for Latin cultural references. One such type of generalization occurs in his translation of the scene in Act Two where Judah, eager to allay the suspicion of theft, sums up the gifts which the brothers have brought Joseph from Canaan. Among the items mentioned is a kind of fruit resembling human fingers ('mortaliū imitata digitos poma', ll. 248–49). Vondel, perhaps taking his cue from a reference in Pliny, brings the mysterious fruit down to the proportions of the comparatively common date ('dadels', l. 323). Elsewhere, Grotius has a messenger report that the starving mob has taken to eating ibises (l. 552), while Vondel renders the unlucky bird in the Dutch by substituting the familiar 'stork' ('oyevaer', l. 681).²⁶

Another category which may be distinguished in this context concerns the names of planets and stars. Grotius, referring to one of Joseph's prophetic dreams in which he sees the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bow down to him (Gen. 37:9), splits up the number of stars into two separate constellations: the four Hyads and the seven Pleiads (l. 86). Vondel, on the other hand, retains the addition four plus seven but omits the classical names: 'vier en zevenstar' ('four and seven stars', l. 100). On two occasions Grotius mentions Sirius, a star venerated in ancient Egypt because its appearance spelled the annual floodings of the Nile (ll. 176; 871). The first time Vondel translates 'heat' ('hitte', l. 222); the second time, 'Hondsgestarnt' ('Dog Star', l. 1031).²⁷ Similarly, Grotius's mythological names for the sun, such as 'Titan' (l. 88, here metonymically invoked as the father of Helios) and 'Phoebus' (l. 730) are rendered as 'Zon' (Vondel, ll. 101 and 882 respectively).

As is illustrated by this last example, Vondel tends to replace the names of classical divinities with the natural elements and goods attributed to them. Thus Grotius's 'Ceres' is in numerous instances rendered as 'grain' ('graen'). When the rebels in Act Three are setting fire to the Egyptian town of Coptos, Grotius has Eurus, god of the east wind, fan the flames (l. 589); Vondel, for his part, contents himself with 'wind' (l. 727). Finally, the sea god Nereus (Grotius, l. 1208) is ousted by Vondel's 'the salty flood' ('de zoute sprinck', l. 1383).

²⁶ Both the ibis and the stork belong to the order of *Ciconiiformes*. Another name for the ibis is 'Egyptian stork'.

²⁷ The star's Latin name, Sirius, derives from Greek '*seirios*', meaning 'hot', 'burning through the heat of the sun'. Sirius is the brightest star in the sky and appears in the constellation *Canis Majoris*; hence its popular name, Dog Star.

Geographical references are also frequently made less specific or even omitted. Where Grotius has Joseph recall how, in his youthful days when he tended his father's herd, he had a reed-pipe which would sing to Syrian tunes, Vondel omits the geography completely by translating 'to the tunes of the land'.²⁸ Similarly, Benjamin's hair, which has the colour of Lybian gold becomes 'shining hair, which dulls [the colour of] gold'.²⁹ When Simeon names the tasks pertaining to the office of Egypt's priests, Grotius has them literally offer fragrances from the people of Sheba on the altars,³⁰ while Vondel simply translates 'wieroockt' (to offer 'wieroock', or frankincense, l. 956).

To be sure, all of these transformations may be explained by the fact that Vondel intended his translation for a Dutch theatrical audience likely to be less versed in the classics than Grotius's reader. Conversely, in classical Latin texts we commonly find the names of the gods substituted for the things associated with them. Nevertheless, Vondel's interventions clearly reflect the cultural mechanism described by Venuti: the obscuring or 'making invisible' of cultural difference.

In order to expose the ideological implications of this mechanism I will discuss one last example of what I would call 'geographical blurring' in Vondel's *Sofompaneas*. This concerns his rendering of Grotius's 'Chorus Aethiopiassarum' as 'Rey der Moorinnen' ('Chorus of Moorish Women'). Latin 'Aethiops' has the double meaning of 'inhabitant of Ethiopia' and 'black African' (through Greek etymology, which yields the literal translation 'sun-darkened face'). By opting for the translation 'Moorinnen', Vondel obliterates the geographical reference, foregrounding the racial connotation in its stead. After all, the term 'Moor', in Dutch as in English, could refer to any person of a dark complexion.³¹ This one-sided translation may well have been prompted by the chorus's stereotypical blackness, which it is made to advertise on its first appearance.³² Yet where Grotius gives the women a specific geographic and cultural origin when he makes them declare that they were 'sent

²⁸ *Syrios modos* (l. 42); 'na 's lands wijzen' (l. 52).

²⁹ *Lybico concolor auro coma* (ll. 315–16); 'glinstrigh hair, dat goud verdooft' (l. 390).

³⁰ *Sabaeos [...] altaribus adolere odores* (ll. 808–09).

³¹ An interesting discussion of the Moor's appearance in Vondel's *Palamedes* and, more generally, in medieval and early modern European culture appears in Frans-Willem Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, pp. 129–37; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, pp. 119–26.

³² 'You will recognise us by our curly hair which runs riverlike, not forced by iron needles but by sunbeams. We have flat noses and wide nostrils and our skin is marked by the heat of the all too closely shining sun. Like thick fences our lips protect the dazzling whiteness of our ivory teeth' (Grotius, *Sophompaneas*, ll. 147–52, pp. 165–67).

from remote Nubian nations on the banks of the River Niger by order of our king, who is descended from the noble line of Cush' (ll. 144–46), Vondel, striking a more generalizing note, translates 'Sent by the King of the Moors, born from a noble family' (ll. 166–67),³³ although he does mention Nubia and the Niger in the same passage.

Summing up the general characteristics of Vondel's translation I would say that he lives up to his aim not to follow too closely on the heels of Grotius's Latin, at least with regard to his prosody and the semantic issues mentioned above. In all other respects, however, Vondel maintains the structure of his original. In a cultural context where the art of translation was intricately bound up with *imitatio*, such loyalty was not self-evident. To give just one example: Vondel's much later *Adam in ballingschap* is an adaptation of Grotius's *Adamus exul*, a play likewise inspired by a theme taken from Genesis. While Vondel contains many verbal echoes of Grotius's text, he does not shrink from changing some of the characters, adding a wedding banquet in honour of Adam and Eve and skipping Grotius's third act entirely.³⁴

Smit agrees with the Dutch poet Albert Verwey in finding the diction of Vondel's *Sofompaneas* unequal to that of his two translations from Seneca, *De Amsteldamsche Hecuba* and *Hippolytus*. The verse contains many enjambments that fail to generate any prosodic effect, he notes, and at times it becomes downright trivial.³⁵ Smit reads this inequality as an indication that Vondel had no particular wish to excel with his *Sofompaneas*. When working on the Seneca plays he had first made prose translations, allowing himself time to devise elegant solutions for the difficult poetical problems he encountered. Smit concludes that these latter translations had been intended as exercises in verse-making, whereas Vondel's chief purpose with his *Sofompaneas* was to make Grotius's work accessible to a non-Latinate Dutch audience as quickly as possible. In this context he draws attention to Vondel's full title, which reads: *Hvigh de Groots Iosef of Sofompaneas. Treurspel. Vertaelt door I. v. Vondel (Hugo Grotius's Joseph or Sophompaneas. Tragedy. Translated by J. v. Vondel)*. In most of his other translations Vondel includes his own name in the main title, as with *Vondelens*

³³ 'Gezonden van den vorst der Mooren / Uit een doorluchtigh bloed geboren' (ll. 166–67).

³⁴ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 3, chapter seven.

³⁵ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 1, pp. 169–70.

Hippolytus. Only in the case of *Sofompaneas* and two Greek tragedies which he put to verse in his old age, working from his own previous prose translations, does he mention the author of the original in the main title, taking credit 'merely' for the translation.

As far as I am concerned, however, there is more to be said about Vondel's absence from the title of his *Sofompaneas*. Invoking Venuti's argument concerning the invisibility of the translator I would venture that Vondel takes responsibility for his acts of cultural appropriation as a translator precisely in those instances where he does advertise his own name in the titles of his translated work. That he refrains from doing so in the case of *Sofompaneas* may be explained by the fact that this time he was dealing with the work of an author who was not only his contemporary but a venerated fellow countryman and a Christian, whose religious views were moreover intimately related to his own. The cultural distance that separated Vondel from Seneca's antique world must have seemed much greater to him than that which separated him from Grotius's biblical setting.

I have noted how Vondel repeatedly alludes to the parallel between Grotius and his protagonist Joseph in his introduction. However, his most remarkable gesture in this direction occurs in the play itself. At the end of Grotius's third act, Simeon concludes his tour of the governor's picture gallery with the observation that Joseph, in his prescience, has reserved the fourth wall of the courtyard for the depiction of his prophecies concerning the Egyptians:

[... for there,] in his prescience, he [i.e. Joseph] has depicted what destiny holds in store for the people of Egypt in centuries to come.³⁶

Vondel translates:

Simeon: [...] een profecye
 Van al wat Faroos volck bejeegnen zal, gestelt
 Door last van 't Groot Vernuft, dat veele dingen spelt [...].
 ([...] a prophecy
 of all that will befall Pharaoh's people, decreed
 by the Great Intelligence which predicts many things [...]).
 (Vondel, *Sofompaneas*, ll. 1000–02)

In substituting his own fond epithet for Grotius – 't *Groot Vernuft*' – for 'Joseph' in this passage, Vondel pays his crowning tribute to his

³⁶ *Simeon: Saeclis cuncta quae populo Phari / venient, futuris fata mens ibi praescia / disposuit.* (Grotius, *Sophompaneas*, vss 848–50).

friend. At the same time this act of identification marks his blind spot for the cultural difference dividing him and Grotius from the ancient Hebrew setting of the play. For Grotius had taken his theme from the Hebrew Bible, a religious pretext that had itself been appropriated by Christianity long ago. By way of an epilogue to my analysis I will devote a few words to the problem of ‘translation proper’ as exemplified by a revealing passage in the play’s closing act.

Afterword: How Zaphnath-paaneah Came to Save the World

In Genesis 45:17–20 Pharaoh, having heard of Joseph’s reunion with his brothers, sends the latter back to Canaan to fetch their father. They are not to worry about their possessions, he reassures them, for ‘the good of all of the land of Egypt is yours’ (Gen. 45:20, KJV). When the brothers have returned, Joseph appears before Pharaoh with a delegation to request a place to live and pasture grounds for their flocks: ‘And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee: The land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen make them dwell [...]’ (Gen. 47:5–6). Somewhat further on we read that ‘Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions therein, and grew, and multiplied exceedingly’ (Gen. 47:27).

Grotius, abiding by the Aristotelian unities, condenses this episode by making Pharaoh pay a visit to Joseph in Act Five. The ruler of Egypt shows himself eager to honour his governor, and when Joseph asks him for the land of Goshen he generously consents. However, Joseph has two more stipulations to make: first, that his kinsmen may retain their religion, and second, that they will never be prevented from leaving Egypt should they wish to do so. Pharaoh, who in this play appears as willing to pay homage to the Jewish God as the rest of his household,³⁷ immediately proceeds to swear an oath. Should any future king of the Egyptians fail to honour this oath, he vows, then may Egypt be visited by ten horrible disasters varying from insect plagues to pestilence and the death of its children, and may the sea engulf all of its people.³⁸ In other words, Pharaoh unwittingly calls down upon his people the

³⁷ Compare, for instance, Ramses’s pious exhortations in Act Two (Grotius, *Sophompaneas* ll. 264–65 and 268–85).

³⁸ Grotius, *Sophompaneas*, ll. 1192–1209.

Ten Plagues as well as the drowning of Egypt's army in the Red Sea – events related in the subsequent book of the Hebrew Bible, Exodus 7–14.

This instance of tragic irony is immediately followed by a speech in which Joseph predicts a number of events recorded in the Hebrew Bible that will likewise affect the Egyptians. As a true diplomat, however, he omits the disasters related in Exodus, although he does add that Egypt's future prosperity will last only as long as it continues to cherish God's chosen people (ll. 1212–13). Grotius has Joseph conclude his prophecy by predicting the advent of Christ and the New Covenant, which will one day unite the Hebrews and Egyptians as well as their respective religions. The three closing verses are given to the chorus of Ethiopians, who concur in expressing their wish that they, too, may be included in this future blessing:

Let us hope that these good things will come to us and may this celestial ardour, which is warmer than the sun's rays, also kindle the hearts of the Ethiopians.³⁹

The rhetorical device employed in Pharaoh's oath and Joseph's subsequent prophecy is the so-called *vaticinatio post eventum*, the prophecy after the fact. This figure enhances the play's denouement in that it completes the tour of the gallery which had been left unfinished in Act Three, linking past, present, and future in a continuum that is indeed from beginning to end orchestrated by 'God's wondrous Providence', as Vondel had observed in his introduction.⁴⁰ By the same stroke, however, the Genesis account is emptied of its historical content and made to serve Grotius's and Vondel's own Christological perspective as well as their shared vision of a unified Christian world. For this appropriating move Grotius could draw on a long tradition of Judaeo-Christian exegesis which, as early as late antiquity, had come to interpret the Hebrew Bible in its entirety as foreshadowing the coming of Christ and the New Covenant.⁴¹ Significantly, this tradition looked upon Joseph the Patriarch as one of the chief types of Christ; a circumstance which explains why Jerome, in his *Vulgate*, 'translates' Joseph's Egyptian name as *Salvator mundi*.

³⁹ Chorus: *Ventet et ad nos tam grande bonum / Et coelestis melior Phoebus / Calor Aethiopum corda perurat.* (Grotius, *Sophompaneas*, ll. 1228–30).

⁴⁰ See my note 18#.

⁴¹ See Auerbach, 'Figura'.

One fundamental reason why Vondel contented himself with the secondary role of translator in his *Sofompaneas* must have been that he felt himself to belong to the same continuum of Christian salvation history as Grotius. Despite the differences that I have pointed out above it is this attitude which, above all, is reflected in his translation. If this seems a rather predictable conclusion it is perhaps time to call in one last exegete. The philosopher Jacques Derrida, in his essay ‘Des Tours de Babel’ (‘Towers of Babel’), dismisses ‘translation proper’ as an unattainable ideal from the start. To this end, he too invokes the Book of Genesis. God’s deliberate confusion of speeches at Babel, he argues, triggers an uncontrollable proliferation of meaning which forever closes the door on a return to the divine *Logos*. Henceforth, any original will require translations to make itself understood. On the other hand, no translation depends on its original for its survival.⁴²

With regard to Vondel’s *Sofompaneas* we may note that this last insight, too, is borne out by the play. For whereas Grotius’s Latin version enjoyed only one recorded performance during the humanist period, Vondel’s translation became one of his greatest successes on stage. Five years after its appearance he composed two more dramas centring on the life of Joseph, *Joseph in Dothan* and *Josef in Egypten*. To make his *Sofompaneas* fit in with these other two he changed its title to ‘*Jozef in ’t Hof*’ (*Joseph at Court*).⁴³ ‘*Per flexuosas ambages*,’⁴⁴ then, he ended up by claiming the play for his own.

⁴² Derrida, ‘Des Tours’, p. 184.

⁴³ ‘*Joseph at Court*’ (Eyffinger, *Sophompaneas*, p. 118).

⁴⁴ Grotius, *Sophompaneas*, l. 976, ‘in a roundabout way’; compare Vondel, ‘door zoo veel ommewegen’, l. 1145. The phrase occurs in Act Four, as Joseph explains the reasons for his devious course to his brothers.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

INTERTEXTUALITY – GYSBREGHT VAN AEMSTEL (1637)

Marco Prandoni

Intertextuality

The term ‘intertextuality’ (*intertextualité*) emerged halfway through the 1960s, as a product of the so-called antihumanistic project of French-speaking (post)structuralism.¹ The scholar who coined it, Julia Kristeva, integrated the theories of the Russian formalist Mikhail Bakhtin regarding the intrinsic ‘dialogism’ of every linguistic utterance and the ‘polyphony’ of every text – among literary texts, most particularly the novel – with Saussure’s structural semiotics. Every individual text is generated at the intersection of a potentially infinite number of previous texts and bears in it the echoes of a plurality of codes, systems, conventions – and not just linguistic ones. Every text, every act of writing or reading thus depends on prior codes. The shifting of the critical concern from an author-centred attitude was evident. With Roland Barthes, who together with Michel Foucault heralded in the same years the ‘death of the author’, this view was further developed: he stated that the meanings of a work do not reside in any unified authorial power, but in the mind of its readers. The readers connect every utterance in a work with what they have already read and in doing so they orchestrate their interpretations of it.²

Poststructural theories of intertextuality were mainly grounded on linguistic-semiotic notions which postulated an uncontrollable dissemination of the meaning of a work. Kristeva called each text a ‘mosaic of quotations’ and Barthes labelled it as a ‘tissue of quotations.’³ However, this made it difficult to use intertextuality as a practical tool

¹ For a first introduction to intertextuality, see Allen, *Intertextuality*, and Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts*.

² Barthes, *The Death of the Author*; Kristeva, ‘Word, Dialogue and Novel’.

³ Kristeva, ‘Word, Dialogue and Novel’, p. 37; Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, p. 146.

for literary studies. This was why, somewhat later, two alternative routes were developed. As a cultural theorist, Maaïke Meijer wanted to develop a reading theory instead of a theory of texts. In that context she had to specify the ideological uses made of intertextuality. What she called 'cultuurtekst' ('culture text') concerned those forms of intertexts that by means of repetitions, or dominant usage, embodied the basic tenets of a culture. Others, such as the literary theorist Gérard Genette, wanted to limit intertextuality to the (semi-)autonomous and closed field of literature.⁴ He described a taxonomy of possible intertextual relations, mapping virtually 'all' possible forms of presence of a pre-existent text in another text in the Western literature – 'literature on the second degree' – from Homer to Joyce: citations, serious imitations, transpositions, parodies, pastiches, plagiarism, etc.

Although Genette's perspective was all but author-centered in its consideration of literature as a synchronic field, this approach made intertextuality come closer to the old notion of the 'influence' of one author on another – or the 'reception' of an author by another one – key notions in literary studies, at least since Romanticism. With respect to this, intertextuality has often been used in an impoverished way, as a vogueish substitute for the traditional source-hunting, conceived to trace in a literary work the intentional authorial activation of pre-existent models. Even more author-centred, but not at all interested in detecting such details as the exact sources of a work, was the theory put forward by the American Harold Bloom, who warned of the humanistic loss caused by (post)structuralism and conceived the history of literature as an oedipal struggle of sons, led by an 'anxiety of influence' toward their fathers.⁵ And despite all the criticism Bloom's proposal has encountered,⁶ it might still prove of some interest for the study of Vondel's attitude towards his adored model Virgil, especially in *Gysbreght van Amstel*. However, a more fruitful application of intertextuality seems to lie in a combination with hermeneutics and reader-response theories, keeping in mind that specific intertexts can also be specimens of recurring patterns. The focus remains, then, on the

⁴ Meijer, *In tekst gevat*; pp. 33–34; Genette, *Palimpsestes*.

⁵ Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*.

⁶ Poststructuralist critics have judged this book conservative, imbued with patriarchal ideology, with a neo-romantic claim of the genius of the poet and with a universalistic theory of poetry.

readers/spectators as centres of production of meaning and on their reconstructed horizons of expectation.

In this respect, Bourdieu's critique to intertextual and reader-response approaches remains valid. In Bourdieu's eyes, this sort of analysis tends to construct a reader-spectator (like Iser's *implied reader*, Eco's model *lector/spectator*, Fish's *informed reader*, or Riffaterre's *archi-lecteur*) whose competence coincides with that of the interpreter himself.⁷ Keeping this in mind, one can nevertheless try to reconstruct 'intertextual' horizons of expectations that consist of implicit or explicit links to specific, clearly definable literary antecedents, which are framed by generic conventions and, more generally, by diffused sets of literary, social or, broadly speaking, 'cultural' codes (e.g. concerning gender representation). These codes shape the way in which readers/spectators act in a given historical time and particular sociocultural context.

In the case of *Gysbreght*, these readers/spectators make up the public of the Amsterdam Theatre or the readers of dramatic texts that were published halfway through the seventeenth century. In one sense they formed a rather homogeneous interpretive community since they were mainly middle-class bourgeois citizens (men and women) with good reading and writing skills. In general, the audience was well-accustomed to theatrical practice. It was an audience trained also to understand, judge and interpret a literary work. When I focus, now, on this community in terms of its reading strategies, I will bear in mind that any reconstructed horizon of expectation remains an abstraction. Such a horizon cannot fully take into account the situatedness of every peculiar reader/spectator, as poststructural studies have contended. Any member of an audience is determined by all sorts of differing factors concerning gender, provenance, social class, confession, political views, etc., which besides literacy and theatrical competence determine modes of reading and experience. If one sticks to individual members and to these alone, however, it becomes hard to define a text's broader cultural implications. To be sure, a culture consists of many strings and domains, but it can be defined as one culture nevertheless, even when that definition has to remain, in a sense, abstract.

⁷ Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art*, p. 415.

Gysbreght van Aemstel and History

With his *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, the fifty-year-old Joost van Vondel made his comeback to theatre after a long absence.⁸ With this play he rediscovered his *theatralische Sendung* (theatrical mission). In fact, the tragedy would consecrate him as an outstanding playwright in Amsterdam and therefore in the whole Republic, of which Amsterdam was the undisputed capital of theatre after 1637. The occasion for his grand return was the opening of the first stone theatre in the Republic.

The playwright sought inspiration in the mediaeval history of Amsterdam and of the County of Holland, specifically in the events following the death of Count Floris around 1300. Vondel's inaugural play met with the resistance of the Calvinist Church, but found the support of the liberal city council. It eventually debuted on 3 January 1638 and established a performance tradition that from 1641 would continue uninterrupted for centuries. It thus became a milestone in Dutch cultural history.

The play can be summarized as follows. In the prologue Gijsbreght van Aemstel, Lord of Amsterdam, explains the play's preliminary history: for one year, Amsterdam has had to withstand the besieging efforts of troops who want to avenge the capture and death of Count Floris V. Gijsbreght's relatives were responsible for this, since they wished to punish the misdeeds of the Counts who had repressed the nobility and raped a noble dame, Machtelt van Velsen. Gijsbreght was tricked into involvement in these plans and had to suffer the consequences: first exile, later the siege. But now the siege has suddenly ceased. During the celebrations stemming from this unexpected event (on Christmas night, in fact), Gijsbreght pardons a young boy, Vosmeer, an outcast belonging to the enemy. He allows him to help the population by bringing into the city a ship, the Sea Horse, which the fleeing enemy has left behind. But Vosmeer – a revealing name meaning the Fox, as with Jonson's *Volpone* – is a wily spy: hidden inside the horse are enemy soldiers, ready to infiltrate the city by surprise. Gijsbreght's wife, Badeloch, has a terrible dream vision which turns out to be true: while everybody was at Christmas Mass, the concealed soldiers came out of the ship and started burning the city. Despite heroic resistance

⁸ Joost van den Vondel, *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, ed. Smits-Veldt. The English translations are drawn from Joost van den Vondel, *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, transl. Kristiaan P. Aercke.

on the part of Gijsbreght, his brother Arend and their valiant kinsfolk, Amsterdam gradually falls into the enemy's hands and collapses.

Gijsbreght's defence of the New Church and of the City Hall fails. He must also face the decision of his uncle, former Bishop of Utrecht, Gozewijn van Aemstel, and his niece, Abbess Klaeris van Velsen, not to flee and to await martyrdom in their convent. Gijsbreght is thus confronted with the impossibility of fulfilling his role as protector of his citizens and of all the people for whom he is responsible. He eventually retreats to his castle. Arend dies in a sortie and Gijsbreght refuses a capitulatory deal. He still intends to defend his castle to the last, preserving his military honour through a glorious death, but first he wishes to organize the embarkation of the refugees, including his wife and children. Although Badeloch passionately objects to leaving without him, eventually she is obliged to obey. At this point angel Raphael appears as a *deus ex machina* and orders Gijsbreght to listen to his wife and to abandon Amsterdam. Raphael's prophecies of Amsterdam's future splendour in the Golden Age – a connection to the present of the audience – and the happiness of his descendants console the pious hero. And thus the refugees flee to distant Prussian shores, where they will found the small city of New Holland.

This play is not just the dramatization of mediaeval events. It also offers a Christianized analogue of Virgil's widely known second book of the *Aeneid*, the burning Amsterdam and the exiled Gijsbreght being easily recognizable *figurae* of ancient Troy and of the fleeing Aeneas, albeit with significant new emphasis: Gijsbreght is the Lord of the city, unlike Aeneas, and is thus in charge of its defence. It is even more important that in the end he has no great mission to accomplish – the obscure New Holland in Prussia can hardly be compared with the destined city of Rome – and exits the Great History, towards a prospect of future personal happiness, unknown to the fatal hero Aeneas. By watching the staging of the destruction of the city and the banishment of its eponymous protagonist, the audience of fellow citizens is confronted with an anything but simplistic 'reading' of its history. This was not just mediaeval history, but it also mirrored the turmoil of the recent Dutch Revolt – when the Catholic and loyalist Amsterdam was besieged by the rebels, for instance. In other words, the play was far from a shallow, panegyric, patriotic work. It was full of problematic hints to open wounds in the recent past of the city and of the whole land.⁹

⁹ Cf. Parente, 'The Theatricality of History', and, with new emphasis, Prandoni, 'The Staging of History'. In this article I distance myself from those critics who contend that

The seventeenth-century spectator/reader sees the new drama take shape in the light of Virgil's *Aeneid* – very prominently, sometimes almost inescapably – and innumerable epic and tragic antecedents. *Gysbreght* uses a texture of interwoven references to other texts from classic contemporary works since, beside the *Aeneid*, many theatrical intertexts can be mobilized. In particular, the Senecan subgenre of history plays comes to mind, which was given a new impulse in the Republic after Heinsius's dramatization in Latin of William the Silent's death. Heinsius was quickly followed by many tragedies dealing with this and other national topics, such as Willem van Hogendorp's tragedy on Orange's murder, staged in Amsterdam in 1617.¹⁰ In this context, Hooff's *Geeraerdt van Velsen* (1613) also needs mentioning, a play that dealt with the mediaeval municipal history of the Republic's informal capital and by now growing international metropolis.¹¹

The audience in Amsterdam must have been familiar with the Senecan tradition and its recent revitalization. But even non-theatrical intertexts could be activated in the interpretation of *Gysbreght van Amstel*, this work serving as a good example of osmosis between the fields of theatre and literature in the Renaissance culture. As a result, the spectator/reader could recognize a rich interplay of multiple genres, one that need not lead to a coherent and consistent end result, however. The different textual traces and fragments continued to interact and often continued to clash with one another. The 'generic path' that the audience was induced to take (e.g. by blunt references to well-known models such as the *Aeneid*) could at times be rewarding, but more often it could be treacherous too. Dealing with *Gysbreght* implied a continuous activation and frustration of interpretive expectations, based on cultural conventions that were shaped by seemingly stable generic codes. Nevertheless, in some cases pretexts were so completely altered, reshaped or contaminated with other intertexts, that the interpretation of the new text could only rely on them with reservation, or could only take them as a first step toward a totally new and daring production of meaning.

the *Gysbreght van Aemstel* is an overtly pro or anti-Catholic work (Maljaars and De Waard: 'O christelijcken knoop!'; and Koppenol: 'Nodeloze onrust').

¹⁰ Daniel Heinsius, *Auriacus, sive Libertas Saucia*; Gijsbrecht van Hogendorp, *Truerspel van de moordt, begaen aen Wilhelm by der gratie Gods, prince van Oraengien*.

¹¹ Important contributions to the study of intertextuality in *Gysbreght* are Hermann, *Joost van den Vondels 'Gysbreght van Aemstel'*; Van der Paardt, 'Vondels *Gijsbreght* en de *Aeneis*'; Smits-Veldt, 'Vondels *Gysbreght van Aemstel* onder de loep'; and, recently, Prandoni, *Een mozaïek van stemmen*.

'A Hopeless Hope'? An Intertextual Analysis of the Female Protagonist

Modern critics have expressed totally different views on the character of Badeloch. She has been considered as an exemplary wife,¹² a hysterical woman and unnatural mother,¹³ to name only a few characterizations of her. Critics were mainly interested in the interpretation of the male protagonist and tended therefore to marginalize her role or to interpret her as a function of her husband's characterization.¹⁴ An intertextual analysis that focuses on her appears to be fruitful. It may help us to consider up to which point the audience's expectations were determined by 'generic paths' and prior conventions and how these determined what role the female protagonist could have in the play and what her ultimate fate would be. It may also help us to see with what subtlety and how surprisingly these expectations were ultimately thwarted, with the staging of an almost unprecedented model of feminine subjectivity.¹⁵

Badeloch's first appearance on stage is in the third act. She is panicking after an ominous dream. Her dead niece Machtelt van Velsen has warned her that the enemy has penetrated the city and that Amsterdam is collapsing. Gijsbreght has apparently little difficulty in dismissing the prophetic power of dreams and reassuring her (ll. 745–826). In Badeloch's dream narrative to Gijsbreght there resonates a web of famous literary dream narratives, like the passage from the *Aeneid* – the poem that is constantly evoked in *Gysbreght van Aemstel* – in which Aeneas describes a terrible dream vision (*Aeneid* 2, 270–97). But in the Renaissance the episode of the dialogue between a woman who reacts in panic to an ominous apparition and another character who tries to calm her by assuring her that dreams are delusions, constitutes a set ingredient of Senecan theatre, well-known to everyone with any acquaintance with classicist theatre. A good example is provided by the Dutch 'Orange plays' about William the Silent's murder, such as that of

¹² Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 1, pp. 215–16.

¹³ Recently Maljaars, 'Niet min godvruchteliĳck als dapper'.

¹⁴ Van Stipriaan, 'Gysbreght van Aemstel als tragische held' and Konst, *Fortuna, Fatum en Providentia Dei*, pp. 136–52, base their interpretation of the play mainly on the analysis of Gijsbreght's character.

¹⁵ The first modern critic to draw attention to Badeloch was Szarota, *Stärke, deine Name sei Weib!* Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, p. 184; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, p. 165, underlines the subversive elements of this character who dares question God's plans, or rather the way her opponents onstage, Gijsbreght and Peter, use them rhetorically to persuade her.

Van Hogendorp. In the latter's play the ghost of Louise's father – Gaspard de Coligny, murdered on Bartholomew Night in 1576, together with Louise's first husband – appears to his daughter.¹⁶ This intertext is certainly not gender-neutral. It may almost be termed 'gendered genre' par excellence, with a set gender pattern. Women act highly emotionally, whilst it is the role of men to reassure. The spectator/reader who interprets this scene in the light of the intertext can be expected to have precise expectations about the development of the plot. Although the female character is the only one who perceives the seriousness of the situation, due to a 'tragic irony' she will not be believed by her male partner.¹⁷ The panic she now experiences is a precursor of the suffering that will probably befall her later, and which she will not be able to avert in any way whatsoever. With this scene the spectator/reader may therefore begin to align Badeloch with a particular tragic female character type. The type frames a woman impotently full of ominous premonitions, afraid of the future, powerless, not capable of influencing her own fate.

In terms of premonitions, it is remarkable that Badeloch's dream spoke the truth. The priest Peter runs into the castle to announce that Amsterdam is collapsing. Gijsbreght immediately climbs a tower to get an impression of the situation. In the meantime, Badeloch abandons herself to a lament. A frequent gender-related distinction occurs here between exterior-deed-activity (male) and interior-reflection-passivity (female). In these dialectics of inside and outside the woman is usually assigned an inward-looking place, that of someone offering a commentary on what takes place outside, over which she has no control whatsoever.¹⁸ We need only think of the 'matière de Troie' – the wide-ranging cycle on the fall of Troy which flourished again in Renaissance culture, and most particularly in epic poems and on the tragic stage – to realize to what extent the female character is stereotypically associated with plaintive outbursts.¹⁹ Victims of history, marginalized and excluded from the male realm where decisions are taken and actions performed,

¹⁶ Cf. Van Gemert, 'Hoe dreef ick in myn sweet', p. 173.

¹⁷ Strengholt, 'Dromen in Vondels drama's', p. 31.

¹⁸ In Hooff's *Geeraert van Velsen*, Machtelt is at a certain point victim of a pathological 'inwardness', as a consequence of sexual violence: when she knows that her rapist Count Floris has been captured, she refuses to look out of the window to see him (ll. 382–85).

¹⁹ Cf. Smits-Veldt, *Samuel Coster*, pp. 278–94.

there is often little else for female characters to do than to lament the fall of their city or the death of their loved ones. Homer's *Iliad* and Euripides' *Hecabe* and *Troades* (*The Trojan Women*), known in the seventeenth century especially through the theatrical adaptation of Seneca's *Troades* (which Vondel had translated for the public of Amsterdam in 1626), offer exemplary illustrations of women who abandon themselves to endless lamenting in a variety of ways and in differing degrees of intensity. Likewise, in the Dutch stage of the 'Orange dramas', Louise de Coligny amply fulfils the role expected of her, that of mourner. After William's death she can abandon herself openly to her grief. Her passionate mourning is no longer even viewed negatively: she just does 'what a woman should do'.²⁰

This type of female character often has to resign herself in advance to her role as mourner, even before the death of her loved ones, about which she has ominous premonitions.²¹ This may be a case of 'proleptic lament' (as Elaine Fantham calls it, on Andromache's premature mourning of her son Astyanax, who is still alive, in Seneca's *Trojan Women*).²² The epic archetype of this is Homer's Andromache, in her last conversation with Hector in *Iliad*, Book 6. In her opinion, he will almost certainly fall in battle and that she will become a widow. After he eventually leaves, Andromache returns weeping to the royal palace, surrounded by the laments of her female servants, who already regard him as dead. The audience of *Gysbreght van Amstel* may regard Badeloch's complaint as a proleptic lament for Gijsbreght too.

Badeloch draws such conviction from her pragmatic assessment of the situation, but perhaps even more from her own life experience. Since her wedding day, life has brought her nothing but misery:

When I reflect on my entire life so far,
Beginning with my wedding, no, my betrothal,
For how many tempests have I not bowed my head?
Which tower is so high, from which I could see across
The endless stormy ocean of my crowded life?²³

²⁰ Daniel Heinsius, *Auriacus*, ed. Bloemendal, p. 110.

²¹ In the prologue of Hooft's *Geeraerd van Velsen*, Machtelt says that her husband has prohibited her from wearing the dress of a widow while he is still alive (ll. 95–98).

²² Fantham, Seneca's *Troades*, p. 315.

²³ 'Als ick den ganschen tijd mijns levens overreken, / Van mijne bruiloft af, van dat ick zat verlooft: / Wat stormen zijn my niet gewaet al over 't hoofd? / Wat toren is zoo hoogh, van waer ick deze baeren / En zee kan over zien van al mijn wedervaeren?' (ll. 866–70).

Badeloch looks back on her own life, which is a never-ending series of disasters as a result of which she now has every reason to fear that her husband will die. This painful act of remembrance emphatically helps the audience to place her within a specific female typology: that of women with broad experience of suffering, who are ‘survivors’ of sorts, and who are continually sounding the depths of their past losses and miseries, as a result of which they constantly have to fear the worst for the future. These are women like Hecuba and Andromache in the ‘matière de Troie’, as well as Louise in the ‘Orange plays.’²⁴ The spectator/reader can therefore see the figures of Andromache and Louise de Coligny, and of so many other – classic and modern, epic and tragic – heroines, clearly profiled behind the figure of Badeloch. Updating these antecedents gives rise to ominous portents with respect to Gijsbreght’s fate and that of Badeloch.

In this intertext the female protagonist, as the victim who is left behind, is assigned only the function of mourner honouring her deceased husband. And it is precisely the role Badeloch adopts, even before Gijsbreght’s death. When Arend comes back to the castle, she assaults him, asking twice if Gijsbreght is dead (ll. 1074–75), as if she knew it already. After hearing Arend’s tale of how the New Church was plundered, she gives up hope of seeing him again:

A hopeless hope! Oh Gijsbrecht, dearest lord!
I’m sure he’s dead, and never will we meet again.²⁵

Then the fourth chorus compares her to a turtledove on a withered branch, a common emblematic representation of widowhood.²⁶ At this moment, Badeloch hears the voice of her beloved in the distance. Her joy can hardly be expressed in words but very soon turns to sorrow once more, since Gijsbreght wishes to stay in Amsterdam with his men to fight the enemy until the bitter end, whilst dispatching her, the children and the refugees. A conflict erupts within Badeloch because she absolutely refuses to board a ship without Gijsbreght. In this confrontation between husband and wife the spectator/reader can realize a broad and prismatic intertextual field or, rather, a combination of multiple and subtly interconnected intertexts.

²⁴ Louise recalls the ‘tempests’ that have raged in her life (l. 1276) – the same allegorical image as in Badeloch’s lament.

²⁵ ‘Een hoopelooze hoop. och Gijsbreght, lieve heer, / Ick reken hem als dood, en zie hem nimmer weer’ (ll. 866–68).

²⁶ Scholz-Heerspink, ‘Vondel’s *Gysbreght van Aemstel*’, p. 572.

The first that one would think of is probably the *Aeneid*, with Creusa asking her husband Aeneas to let her and their child share in his fate, if he wishes to remain in burning Troy, then falling to her knees to implore him (*Aeneid* 2, 675). But this intertextual activation appears to be quite deceptive as Creusa plays a very marginal and passive role in the second book of the *Aeneid*. In *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, on the other hand, two highly distinct personalities clash, placed in direct opposition to one another, like in the farewell scene of *Iliad*, Book 6 between Hector and Andromache. There too the focus is on the future fate of the family – of the child and the future widow, if the husband dies in battle. As we have seen, this ‘marital intertext’ often echoes in *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, in part with the mediation of the Renaissance history plays. One could think of the long dialogues between Louise and William, as well as the conversations, lasting no less than three scenes, between Machtelt and Geeraerdt in Hooft’s well-known and frequently staged *Geeraerdt van Velsen* (ll. 349–87; 805–32; 1214–39).

But besides these ‘marital’ intertexts – all governed by the subordination of the female character to her husband – there is yet another intertextual field that may be opened in this respect. The point is that Gijsbreght and his wife do not agree, but are quarrelling. In this context the fierce, hostile dispute in Seneca’s *Trojan Women* comes to mind between Andromache and Ulysses, demanding that the young Astyanax be handed over for sacrifice. The importance of this intertext lies in the fact that it places the woman in a spirited confrontation, but not with her husband and therefore outside the dimension of the family. The difference with *Gysbreght* is that, in classical drama, the conflict does not take place in the intimate sphere, and that it develops counter to the hierarchical relationship between husband and wife: Andromache is confronted with a deceitful and hated enemy. This makes it the more provocative that, again and again and sometimes literally, we hear echoes from Andromache’s resistance to Ulysses in Badeloch’s responses to Gijsbreght. The intertextual allusion contributes to the disruption in part of the idyllic framework of the marital relationship. Husband and wife become slowly but clearly estranged from one another. Badeloch’s militancy is embedded in an intertext that calls to mind the gentle Andromache who, despite her gentleness, is prepared to fight for what she loves: a loving mother who would nevertheless not flinch at sacrificing her only child, for the sake of her husband or even only his ashes, out of marital fidelity. Badeloch is in fact determined to risk everything to reach her goal, which is to save her husband and retain the unity of

her family. To achieve this she does not hesitate to defy the gender conventions. She refutes Gijsbreght's accusation that she is not a good mother since she had considered the extreme possibility of sacrificing her children for the sake of her husband, under the pressure of her interlocutors (ll. 1701–02). She responds by combining the physical implications of motherhood and of being married:

I bore this child under my heart, gave birth in pain.
My husband is my heart. Without him, there's no life.²⁷

The response testifies to the forces that have produced a radical change in Badeloch's attitude after Gijsbreght's unexpected return from battle. The desperate woman who had resigned herself to her tragic fate, who had even taken on mourning for Gijsbreght and was slowly sinking into widowhood, has now changed into a warrior who is prepared to do anything to keep her head, and the head of those she loves, above water. This constitutes a break with the generic gender-intertext.

With the exception of *Andromache*, the culture text here offers only female characters with no control whatsoever over the course of the events that affect them directly. In Dutch history the plaintive, anxious Louise and the traumatized Machtelt – the former on the verge of illness, the latter without doubt ill – are given large amounts of text, but without creating even the slightest impression that they are driving forces for the action. They act only as victims and must resign themselves to this role from the outset. In the case of Badeloch, the spectator/reader sees her slowly rise above the intertext to become a new character who interprets her role in her own way, with a striking self-possession and assertiveness.

Still, as it becomes clear to her that her arguments will not be heeded, Badeloch begins to lose control over her emotions. She even asks Gijsbreght whether he will kill her and the children. Gijsbreght assumes he has brought the discussion to a final close by calling on his confidants (l. 1769). He thus turns away from Badeloch and directs his words to his men. Badeloch has been sidelined and is panic-stricken by what she hears and sees. Terror and powerlessness force Badeloch into an extremely emotional state, which, as we have seen, was presented in seventeenth-century theatre as something typically feminine. In the end, therefore, Badeloch is not only forced into obedience, but also into

²⁷ 'Met smarte baerde ick 't kind, en droegh 't onder 'thart. / Mijn man is 't harte zelf. 'k Heb sonder hem geen leven' (ll. 1708–09).

a state of mind that belongs much more to a generally accepted feminine pattern of behavior than the militancy she exhibited previously. No wonder, then, that Gijsbreght deals with this emotional reaction with relative ease. He appears to have regained his male authority and authoritarian voice in the face of a weakened opponent. For her part, Badeloch is no longer capable of a real response. At the end of the confrontation, her surrender seems to be complete. She says she will obey her husband, 'as is fitting for a Christian wife' ('gelijck een Christe vrouwe past', l. 1781) and even calls Gijsbreght in her despair 'father' ('vader'), adding 'it's all my fault – don't be so irate' (''t is mijn schuld, en weest zoo niet verbolgen'). She sees in him now the gendered roles of father and husband, controlling a woman's destiny respectively before and after marriage and punishing abuses and transgressions, all rolled into one.

There is then another twist. Before the final catastrophe takes place, a celestial wonder changes everything completely: the appearance of angel Raphael as *deus ex machina*. Not only does he order Gijsbreght to leave the city, he states also clearly that Gijsbreght must listen to his wife: "So resist your faithful wife no longer [...]" (l. 1827).²⁸ In the end Badeloch's resistance to her husband is thus placed in a new light. Her actions towards her husband were not the improper response of an irresponsible woman, but a justified plea for the best way to tackle an emergency situation. The involvement of the supernatural, which bypasses the realm of human discourse, restores dignity to the woman's voice, and grants her a divine seal of approval. The voice that had been marginalized is restored to its central place. The 'divine approval' has a liberating effect on Badeloch. As a result, the spectator/reader sees her finally break out of the frame of a powerful culture text, from which she had struggled so tirelessly to escape. At the end of the previous scene this seemed to have been in vain, when the ghosts of other epic and tragic female characters became visible again behind her, embodying sombre omens regarding her fate and that of her family. For in the *Iliad* Andromache loses Hector in battle; in the Orange plays Louise becomes a widow following the murder of William; in *Geeraerd van Velsen* Machtelt is left behind alone by Geeraerd, soon to be killed; in Seneca's *Trojan Women* the Greeks throw young Astyanax from a tower; in *Aeneid* Creusa herself disappears without a trace before the departure

²⁸ 'Dus wederstreef niet meer uw trouwe gemaelin' (l. 1827).

of the exiles. Yet, unlike all these scattered and diffused intertexts, Badeloch's struggle for the preservation and unity of her family can triumph.

The audience is confronted and seduced, then, by the staging of a daring model of femininity. In the beginning, this model appears to be well-embedded in intertexts that propagate determining cultural conventions, but it eventually outgrows them or breaks through them. This brings the play dangerously close to the edge of gender transgression. The end must be experienced as rewarding to the audience in many different shades. For those who can hear it, a new sound emerges from a polyphony of intertexts.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

DRAMATURGY – STAGING PROBLEMS IN VONDEL'S
GYSBREGHT VAN AEMSTEL

Peter G.F. Eversmann

In 1937, shortly before the third centennial of (almost) yearly performances in the city theatre of Amsterdam, Ben Albach concludes his study of the staging tradition of Vondel's *Gysbreght van Aemstel* with the following words:

Thus, after three ages, the Gijsbreght tradition is still central to the life and aspirations of the Amsterdam theatre. Independent of the theatrical circumstances, and independent of time, each New Year's day the Heer van Aemstel [i.e. Gysbreght] makes his appearance in the Stadsschouwburg before an auditorium filled with Amsterdam families, including (as always) the youngest generation, which at that moment is present for the first time at the celebration that delighted its ancestors and that at one time will be attended by its offspring. [...] Undoubtedly the 'Gijsbreght van Aemstel', being as it is one of the finest expressions of the Dutch language, will sound on the boards for many ages to come. The Gijsbreght tradition is like an old legend that comes to life each year. May 'Gijsbreght van Aemstel', the symbol of Holland's days of glory, forever roam the Municipal Theatre of the Dutch capital city!¹

It was not to be. In 1968 the final performance of *Gysbreght* according to the old tradition was staged in the Stadsschouwburg. And although there have been some productions of the play since then (a few of them explicitly attempting to revive the tradition), not all of these were performed at this theatre and one can no longer speak of an annual event. Moreover, a recent commentary in one of the leading national newspapers – *De Volkskrant* – characterised the drama as 'generally deemed to be unstageable'² So today it is safe to conclude that the play is rapidly disappearing from the collective memory of Amsterdam

¹ Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gijsbreght van Aemstel'*, p. 132; my translation.

² *De Volkskrant*, 10 March 2010. ('As a play generally deemed to be unstageable, Van Dis eased the text away from yellowed paper and tradition and even rapped a couple of lines of Vondel.')

theatre-goers. The older generation might still retain a dim image of the tradition that is so eloquently described by Albach, but for younger audience members the drama is only a famous title from the past. If one is lucky, some attention will have been given to it in high school and in a few very fortunate cases one will even have read the whole play (most likely in an abridged version in which the seventeenth-century language has been reworked into more intelligible modern Dutch) or have seen a (television) recording of an older performance. However, the annual opportunity to experience a live encounter with the characters onstage is now a thing of the past.

The question as to why this tradition that seemed so fiercely established has been broken after 330 years is a complex one that is not easy to answer. No doubt one can point to an amalgam of reasons, including financial ones, a general revolutionary and avant-garde spirit that pervaded the Dutch theatre at the time of the breach (emphasising renewal and doing away with repertory theatre), estrangement of certain features of the play with regard to both content and structure that became more and more alien to society at large (for example, intervening angels as *deus ex machina*, religious allusions, the portrayal of women, a male hero glorifying war, etc.) and the difficulties of delivering and understanding seventeenth-century poetic language. Furthermore, it can be argued that in this case the tradition itself can be held partly responsible for its cessation. After all the idea was not to bring museum theatre – ritualistically staging the play again and again in the same manner – but to renew and contemporise the drama each year so that it could be savoured afresh. However, after a certain number of interpretations it becomes harder and harder to come up with yet another one that does not artificially seek to be ‘new’ and that does not stress credibility. When – in the sense of Carlson – the ‘ghosts’ of actors interpreting Gijsbreght,³ Badeloch and the other characters become too numerous it is only understandable that a certain weariness is experienced.⁴ In this regard one should also notice that the history of the stagings of *Gysbreght* is not without problematic periods in which the tradition was endangered by continuity lapses for reasons of production or

³ Apart from quotes, I will use *Gysbreght* to designate the drama and Gijsbreght when referring to the character.

⁴ Cf. Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*. ‘Ghosting’ refers to the mechanisms by which theatre makers, actors and knowledgeable audience members will bring previous stagings and characterisations to bear upon the reception of new ones – coloring their perceptions and continuously comparing past and present performances.

politics. Conversely there have also been times when the staging was mindlessly repeated year after year, becoming so boring and superfluous that the critics strongly urged that the play be subject to drastic alteration.⁵ In this respect the 'tradition' is characterised by continuous transformations and modifications – changes in interpretation, text, set design, costumes and acting style – that reflect the ever-changing fashions in Dutch theatre history. In a way, then, the question as to how it is possible that the play was adapted to new circumstances time and again enabling the tradition to persist is just as astute and as difficult to answer as the question of why that tradition finally came to an end. However, the present-day situation, in which one is not hampered by an oppressive and in many ways stifling tradition but is also aware that the drama apparently had enough appeal to inspire theatre makers and their audiences for such a long time, has the advantage of allowing one to go back to Vondel's original text and study it with relatively fresh eyes. In the process one should then ask two questions: what are the problems and challenges when producing this play and what are its features that make adaptation possible for a wide diversity of theatrical conventions. In other words, how can it be that the drama has had such a long staging tradition but is now 'generally deemed to be unstageable'? In what follows I will try to answer these questions by concentrating on the structural characteristics and technical demands of Vondel's text. After all, these internal features of a dramatic text ultimately determine whether it can be adapted to changes in circumstances of production or – within the confines of a specific theatrical paradigm – whether it is regarded as principally unfit for staging.

I am consciously leaving aside matters of conceptual interpretation, of intertextual comprehensibility and of how the content of the drama can express present-day concerns or might be updated to appeal to a modern-day audience. Of course, these are important dramaturgical questions that should be answered by theatre makers before they decide to stage *Gysbreght*. However, these questions primarily pertain to content and to the reasons – the inner need so to speak – for producing the play. As such they are not concerned with the principal question of whether or not a drama is stageable, but rather they belong to the realms of artistic reflection, inspiration and justification. Besides, the existing literature that is addressing these interpretational and

⁵ See Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gysbreght van Aemstel'*, *passim*.

contextual matters is quite abundant and enables theatre makers to form a rather clear picture of what Vondel's text means, what certain passages are alluding to and where ostensibly there is room for disagreement among scholars. The secondary literature in the 'Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren' ('Digital Library for Dutch Literature') is a good starting point, and a very recent publication that extensively explores Vondel's inspirational sources and the intertextual aspects of *Gysbreght* is provided by Marco Prandoni's doctoral thesis *Een mozaïek van stemmen: Verbeeldend lezen in Vondels 'Gysbreght van Aemstel'* (*A Mosaic of Voices: Representational Reading in Vondel's 'Gysbreght van Aemstel'*).⁶ However, what I would like to do here is different from these predominantly philological approaches. My aim is to read Vondel's text⁷ from a directorial perspective and to explore its demands and challenges when staging the play. In other words, what are the immanent clues that one should consider when trying to give form to this text in a three-dimensional, multimedial and time-based event? It goes without saying that this is a virtual exercise and that one should not necessarily adhere to these clues in an actual production process. It is quite possible to ignore them or to express them onstage in such a way that the presentation supplements, contradicts or ironically comments upon the text. When, for example, Gijsbreght asks for his sword ('T'sa dienaers schaft geweer' [883]) it may very well be the case that in one particular production his servants will hand him an automatic rifle, while in another one he will be presented with a paintball gun or a children's toy sword. Furthermore, in this virtual exercise I will proceed from the assumption that the full text and the order of its scenes are adhered to and that, apart from translating the seventeenth-century language into a contemporary Dutch idiom, the source material is not being adapted into a principally different play. Of course,

⁶ DBNL, see <http://www.dbnl.org/titels/titel.php?id=vond001gysb01>; Prandoni, M., *Een mozaïek van stemmen*.

⁷ I will use the text of the first edition (tAmsterdam. By Wilhelm Blaeu. 1637) as it is found in the DBNL: Vondel, WB 3, pp. 514, 523–600. This text includes *Voorwerk* (the dedication to Hugo Grotius), *Voorspel* (address to 'Schout, Burghemeesters, Schepens en Raed van Amsterdam'), *Op den nieuwen Schouwburg* (address to the 'Raedsheer Nikolaes van Kampen'), *Kort Begrijp* (abstract of the story) and *Spreekende Personagien – Stomme* (the list of characters) and *Gysbreght van Aemstel. Treurspel* (the full text of the tragedy). When referring to specific lines, I will use the numbering as given by the DBNL in brackets – for the paratext with designation (e.g. *Voorwerk*, ll. 55–59) and for the full text of the drama without (e.g. ll. 16–17). The translations of the *Gysbreght* are taken from the one made by Kristiaan Aercke.

this is not particularly realistic and probably the first thing a director would do nowadays is omit lines or even whole scenes, reorder the text and maybe insert other texts into the performance,⁸ but this would only attest to the opinion that (part of) the subject matter of the play is indeed unstageable – either because a modern-day audience would lack the frame of reference needed to interpret certain phrases or because one feels an artistic need to change the content of Vondel's drama.

In addition, it is not my intention to reconstruct the original performance of 1638 as it was staged in the then newly erected Schouwburg. Several attempts to effect such a reconstruction have been put forward but it is my conviction that, although very worthwhile suggestions have been made on how the polytopic stage might have been used, the historic information is not sufficient to give a full-scale and detailed account of what the first production looked like and how the *mise en scène* was executed. However, I will occasionally refer to the historical evidence and the original production circumstances insofar as they have been documented because they can complement Vondel's text by providing information on the theatrical conventions for which it was written. It is these conventions that will at times highlight staging problems posed by the text and that will also enable us to appreciate how, in other times and with other theatrical conventions, different solutions had to be found. To cite an obvious example, in 1638 all parts were performed by men and this could have had direct consequences for the number of actors involved since in principle the doubling of male and female parts was possible. But in times when the cross-gender casting of female parts is no longer en vogue, this is clearly impossible, resulting in a larger cast.

Speaking of theatrical conventions it is interesting to note that Vondel himself remarks in the dedication of the drama to Hugo Grotius that – although he has taken certain poetic liberties – the work, as far as he is aware, does adhere to the laws of the stage, with the possibility of one exception: the large number of characters that ensues from 'the requirements of the work' (i.e. the nature of the story itself). He writes:

We decorated and furnished the same according to the laws, rules and liberties of poetry, and according to the laws of drama. If we violated the

⁸ This is precisely what Margrith Vrenegoor did when staging the drama in 1995. Cf. Deuss, 'De Gijsbrecht in 1995'.

latter it was not on purpose, save, perhaps, for the large number of characters (which we could scarcely avoid without depriving the work of what it requires).⁹

Indeed, it seems that *Gysbreght* requires quite a number of actors. The list of speaking characters consists of sixteen roles and one trumpeter. Besides these there are groups of characters indicated. These comprise four *reyen* (*Amsterdamsche Maeghden*, *Edelingen*, *Klaerissen* and *Burghzaten*, i.e. Virgins of Amsterdam, Noblemen, Clares and Denizens) and three other groups (*hoplieden*, *bondtgenooten* and *vlughtelingen*, i.e. captains, allies and refugees). On top of this there are also non-speaking characters. These comprise three groups (*Katuizer*, *Egmonds soldaten* and *Gijsbreght van Aemstels dienaers*, i.e. monks of the Carthusian convent, soldiers to Egmond and servants to Gijsbrecht) and one single role, the bastard son to Count Floris Witte van Haemstee. Even if one assumes a doubling of roles for the *reyen* and the other speaking groups and allows for only two persons per group this means that at least eleven more persons are needed, bringing the total to twenty-seven. It might be possible to reduce this number a little bit by doubling some of the speaking roles (Willebord and Raphael, Vosmeer and Heer van Vooren, Willem van Egmont and the messenger, Diedrick van Haerlem and Broer Peter), but still the cast would be quite large and the evidence from the seventeenth century strongly suggests that such doubling was not at all customary. Instead, one would assume the number of players to be even higher because two persons for all the *reyen* seems too low. Albach notes that in 1641 four singers were engaged for these sung parts – accompanied by three musicians – and he gives a total of thirty players (24 speaking actors and 6 ‘*Piekeniers*’, or pikemen) for the production in 1658.¹⁰ All in all one should conclude that an unabridged and unadapted version of *Gysbreght* would require a rather large cast and is therefore relatively expensive to produce – certainly if one also opts for a lavish set and elaborate costumes. This conclusion is more or less corroborated by the expenses of the first 13 performances in 1638: 1363 guilders–15 five-cent pieces–12 cents; quite a large sum indeed, but the income (2459 guilders–18 cents)

⁹ *Dedication*, ll. 55–59: ‘[...] en stoffeerden en bekleedden de zaeck na de wetten, regelen en vrijheid der poëzije; oock na de tooneelwetten, waer tegens wij wetende niet en misdeden, ’t en waer mischien in talrijckheid van personagien, dat wij qualijck konden vermijden, zonder het werck zijnen eisch te weigeren.’

¹⁰ Albach, *Drie eeuwen ‘Gijsbreght van Aemstel’*, p. 20 en pp. 142–43.

shows a tidy profit.¹¹ Let us now have a further look at the what the text of *Gysbreght* suggests for its realisation onstage in terms of setting, time, *reyn*, costumes and props and the action of the drama.

Spatial Configuration

First of all then it should be noted that there is almost no secondary text – no prescriptions of what the stage or costumes should look like, no explicit indications by the author on the behaviour of the characters or on their physical appearance. The only indications that are given are the headings of the acts and the names of the characters that speak. This is not to say that there are no clues whatsoever as to what can be perceived onstage, but almost all these clues are immanent in the clauses of the characters and have to be deduced by careful analysis. This is, of course, in line with other plays from the period, but it is good to realise that it is precisely this lack of prescriptive descriptions and staging indications that provides a lot of freedom for theatre makers. In terms of clues for the setting, the relative indefiniteness as to where the action takes place becomes particularly apparent. As justification for adhering to the norm of the unity of place Vondel writes that ‘the play takes place in front of and in the city and in the castle’ (‘het tooneel is voor en in de stad en op het huis’ (*Kort Begrijp*, l. 48), but the indications in the text are a little bit more specific. The first and second acts are indeed set outside the walls of the city. In Gysbreght’s soliloquy at the beginning of the play he describes the surroundings thus: ‘Here their troops encamped; littered is the entire field / With arms and gear.’ (‘Alhier, daer ’t leger lagh, is ’t veld alsins bezaeit / Met wapens en geweer’, ll. 16–17). Later on it becomes clear that this place is probably not far from the Carthusian monastery,¹² that one can discern a ship loaded with firewood from here¹³ and that one of the gates of the city is nearby.¹⁴ From these clues and the fact that Arend appears on the scene

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 138.

¹² Vondel, *Gysbreght*, ll. 158–59: ‘Maer ’k zie den vader daer van ons Katuizers klooster genaecken van ter zy [...]’

¹³ *Gysbreght*, l. 378: ‘Ghy ziet hoe daer een schip, het Zeepaerd, leit, vol rijjs.’

¹⁴ This can be inferred from Vosmeer’s lines ‘[...] ’k wil liever voor uw poort, [...] dit lastigh leven laeten’ (ll. 402–03) and from the invitation of the Rey van Amsterdamsche maeghden to enter the city: ‘Treck in, o Aemstel, treck nu binnen, [...] treck in o braeve burglary’ (ll. 445–48).

after having pursued the enemy along the 'Haerlemmer dijk' ('the Haarlem dike', l. 8) it has been rightly concluded that the first act is set in front of the Haerlemmer Poort, at the northwest corner of the city. At the same time one should realise that the old Amsterdam, in which *Gysbreght* is set, is not a historically accurate reconstruction of the situation 300 years before Vondel's time. Rather, both the old and the new Amsterdam form an imaginary amalgam that is based on older maps of the city coupled with the wish to present recognisable features of seventeenth-century Amsterdam for the contemporary audience.¹⁵ At any rate, one cannot maintain that the locations as portrayed in the drama describe definite settings to which theatre makers should adhere. Instead, one is faced here with a kind of *word scenery*¹⁶ in which the text leaves room for a lot of imagination. Thus the stage can be designed in an elaborate and detailed way, but at the same time it is possible to have a more neutral setting in which in their mind's eye the theatregoers complement the structural elements of the stage with the textual indications provided by the characters. And this general principle applies not only to the location of the first act but for the indications pertaining to the rest of the settings as well. The second act also takes place outside the city walls, near the Carthusian monastery and at its gate,¹⁷ but also at another, less distinct place near the city and a waterway leading into it.¹⁸

Together, then, the first two acts take place outside the city and one can envision them well on a polytopic stage where (for example) the city gate is located in a central part, the Carthusian monastery is to the right side of the stage and Vosmeer and Egmont meet somewhere on the left. As such this scheme would probably fit well on the stage of the new Schouwburg, but other solutions are possible as well¹⁹ and we

¹⁵ See the discussion by Smits-Veldt in Vondel, *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, ed. Smits-Veldt, pp. 11–12.

¹⁶ Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama* (tr. Halliday), p. 267. Often such 'spoken space' has the function to compensate for restricted means in scenic presentation and this might very well be the case with *Gysbreght*. The interesting feature here is that the spaces are not described *in extenso* but depend largely on the knowledge of the spectators who can activate their familiarity with certain locations when hearing their names.

¹⁷ 'Wy zijn by 't klooster weer' (l. 451); 't Katuizers klooster is ons 't reedst, het leit hier by' (l. 491); 'wie klopt'er?' (l. 503).

¹⁸ *Gysbreght*, ll. 498–99: 'Ick gae terwijl na stad, om Vosmeer noch te spreekken, Die ter gezette tijd kooft zwemmen door den boom.'

¹⁹ See (for example) Hummelen, *Inrichting en gebruik van het toneel in de Amsterdamse schouwburg*, pp. 44–45.

cannot be sure of the original *mise en scène*. In the third act the scene shifts to inside the castle. Not much more can be deduced from the text than that Gijsbreght shortly leaves the scene in order to assess what the situation with the surprise attack is from the parapet of one of the towers.²⁰ Whether or not we actually see Gijsbreght sprinting up a flight of stairs and – not long after – see him deliver the lines in which he describes how the taking of the town is proceeding (ll. 874–83)²¹ from a lofty vantage, is something that again is up to the theatre maker. In 1638 the new theatre with its permanent stage building that provided balustrade balconies on either side of the ‘heavens’ certainly did offer possibilities for such a *mise en scène*, but whether or not these possibilities were actually used is pure conjecture.

The fourth act starts inside the church of the Klaerissen nunnery. Not much more is said of this place than that there is an altar and a cross, a chair for Gozewijn to sit in, possibly chorister benches for the nuns and, nearby the altar, an alabaster tomb of a martyr.²² This part ends with Gijsbreght leaving the scene by going upstairs²³ again and – certainly in later productions but most probably also in 1638²⁴ – with a pantomime and a *tableau* of the murder of the nuns (see below). The rest of the act and the initial scenes of the fifth one – until the end of the messenger’s story when Gijsbreght and Arend leave to make a sally (l. 1520) – are situated inside the castle, most likely in a room. What happens afterwards is a little unclear, but most probably the scene shifts to another location within the grounds of the castle, either the courtyard

²⁰ ‘Ick zal terstond om hoog gaen zien van Schreiers toren’ (l. 851).

²¹ These lines are almost a *teichoscopy* (i.e. a character on stage describes spatially hidden action that takes place simultaneously) but different in so far as Gijsbreght describes what he hears and just saw (past tense!) and not what he sees. For an exploration into the nature, functions and effects of *teichoscopies* and messenger stories see Eversmann, ‘I Saw It with My Own Eyes.’

²² ‘This altar is our refuge’ (‘dit outer is ons wijck’, l. 977); ‘before this altar’ (‘voor dit outaer’, l. 988); ‘Now children, sit down here, ...’ (‘Nu kinders zet u hier, ...’, l. 1005) and later – in Act V – in the descriptions of the messenger (ll. 1393–1520, specifically 1418, 1457 and 1493–96). Smits-Veldt, ‘3 Januari 1638. Opening van de Amsterdamse Schouwburg met Vondels *Gysbreght van Aemstel*’, p. 207, assumes that the candle mentioned in the Schouwburg ledger in 1637 was placed on the altar.

²³ ‘Hold, the enemy is here, I must be off now’ (‘Daer is de vyand zelf, ick vliegh na boven toe’, l. 1070).

²⁴ This is concluded by Albach, *Drie eeuwen ‘Gijsbreght van Aemstel’*, p. 22 from the fact that Witte van Haemstee, who commits the murder, is specifically mentioned in the list of non-speaking characters and from visual as well as descriptive evidence of 18th-century productions.

or in front of the gate with the bridge over the castle moat.²⁵ We can infer this from Badeloch's teichoscopy (ll. 1521–27), which describes how the garrison falls back and is demolishing the bridge while Gijsbreght goes back to search for his brother. Furthermore, this episode of the sally might have been enacted onstage in a pantomime that would have served to bridge the apparent time gap between ll. 1520 and 1521. At any rate, at the behest of Gijsbreght to carry the dead in ('men draegh den doode binnen', l. 1550) it becomes clear from his entrance with the dying Arend that the action is set in an outside location. There might be a shift in focus for the negotiations with the Heer van Vooren but apparently the scene remains outside, near the moat ('We stand before this moat, ready to attack', 'Wy staen voor deze graft tot storremen gereed', l. 1552), so that one does not necessarily need a change of place or scenery here. After this scene Gijsbreght is reunited with Badeloch, their children, Broer Peter and the refugees, something that can be deduced from the fact that he has to inform them about his dealings with the enemy ('I think we gave Vooren a brief and clear reply', 'Wy gaven Vooren kort en duidelijck bescheid', l. 1655), so most likely this takes place indoors in a place to which Arend's body has been carried.²⁶ At any rate, from this moment on until the end of the play with the appearance of the angel Raphael there is no more change in location. One may assume once more that the polytopic stage of 1638 could well have been used to present the different castle locations needed in Acts IV and V – the inside room, the courtyard or a place near the gate and maybe even a somewhat higher location on the parapets which could have been used for Badeloch's teichoscopy and possibly also for the negotiations with the Heer van Vooren – but again there is a complete lack of clues as to the actual staging.

Temporal Configuration

A similar analysis is possible with the time that is portrayed in *Gysbreght*. It was noted earlier that the action took place some three

²⁵ There is also, however, a theoretical possibility that this shift is unnecessary; one has to assume, then, that the previous scenes with Badeloch and Arend (Act IV), as well as the scenes featuring the return of Gijsbreght and the messenger (Act V) are taking place outside – in the castle's courtyard.

²⁶ This indoor location fits with 'All the people leave first, then the body' ('Al 't volck ga voor, dan 't lijck', l. 1877) and also with Gijsbreght giving the cross he has inherited

hundred years before Vondel's time – as he himself writes: 'Three hundred years our stage will now leap back' ('Het nieuw tooneel drie eeuwen springt te rugh', *Voorspel*, l. 13). In accordance with the unity of time Vondel gives precise directions as to the beginning and end of the drama: the time represented spans a period commencing at three o'clock in the afternoon on Christmas Eve and drawing to a close during the early dawn of the following day.²⁷ Although it is a little harder to give exact times for each of the different acts and scenes, it is nevertheless possible to follow the timing of the portrayed events rather well. After Act I there is obviously a time leap because Act II begins in the evening after the Carthusian monastery has already closed its gate ('It's pitch dark; we don't really care for friends right now', 't is avond, en een tijd daer ons geen vriendschap dient', l. 504, and 'We never open / This late', 'Men opent hier geen deuren / Zoo spade', ll. 506–07). Later on in the act Egmont meets Vosmeer in the dark (l. 609) and the act ends with the '*Rey van edelingen*' ('Chorus of Noblemen') going to the mass at midnight (ll. 675–76). Act III picks up a little later with Badeloch recounting that she has slept past the time to go to church: 'But look, I overslept. / I will be late for church' ('ick heb mijn uur verslaepen, / Om na de kerck te gaen', ll. 825–26). In addition, it is said that the attack has taken place when all the citizens have gone to church to celebrate Christmas (ll. 844–45) – so just after midnight. The further scenes do not contain clear clues as to when exactly they take place, but working back from the indication 'dawn' (somewhere between 7 and 8 a.m.) for the last scene it is not too hard to give approximations for when the various events onstage and offstage are supposedly taking place. However, besides the utterances of the characters, there is no need to designate further the times of day or night with the help of other theatrical sign systems or to strive for realism with (for example) the lighting conditions. On the contrary, even, if one were to try and fully emulate onstage Vosmeer's 'it is dark' (l. 609), the ensuing conversation with Egmont would probably be lost on most of the audience. At the same time, however, it will be clear that the scene would lose its

from his forefathers to Broer Peter (l. 1879) since it is unlikely that he would have this to hand outdoors.

²⁷ Cf. 'Ter middernacht, zijnde kersnacht, eer de maen op' (*Kort begriip*, ll. 14–15) and 'Het treurspel begint na middagh ten drie uuren en eindigt in den morgenstond' (*Kort begriip*, ll. 50–51).

credibility when performed in a much brighter light than the preceding scene. In 1638 this probably would not have been of much concern, but a modern day performance with the extensive lighting techniques that are now available should certainly take such details into consideration.

Reyen – Choruses

In the above analyses of time and space as portrayed in *Gysbreght*, not much attention has been given to the *reyen* – the seventeenth-century equivalent of the chorus in ancient tragedies – that form a characteristic structural element of *Gysbreght* and pose particular problems for staging the play; both in terms of delivery and *mise en scène* as well as in terms of content. There are four such *reyen*:

Table 1: The *reyen* in *Gysbreght*

Act/verses	<i>Rey</i> (Chorus)	Content
I [415–50]	<i>Rey van Amsterdamsche maeghden</i>	Song of praise for the liberation of Amsterdam; invitation to rejoice both at the end of the hostilities and at Christmas.
II [675–744]	<i>Rey van edelingen</i>	Song of praise for the Christ child: at once divine ruler and humble child.
III [903–50]	<i>Rey van Klaerissen</i>	Lamentation on the massacre of the Innocents in Bethlehem.
IV [1239–88]	<i>Rey van burghzaten</i>	Song of praise for the love between Gijsbreght and Badeloch; pity for the latter who fears her husband to be dead.

The structural function of these *reyen* is clear: they demarcate the end of an act and lead on to the next one.²⁸ As such they stand apart from the continuum of the story, even though their names indicate groups of Amsterdam citizens that might be said to play a role in the narrative. In the case of the third one the members of the *rey* actually do have such a supplementary role and function as characters in the act that follows. However, these choral episodes are not on the same par as the rest of the scenes; the metre of the verses is different and we know that in Vondel's time the stanzas were sung to the accompaniment of musicians – probably by two singers taking turns.²⁹ Yet one cannot conclude that these are mere musical interludes. The content of the first two *reyen* is certainly designated to heighten the dramatic tension, throwing into sharp contrast the festive mood of the unknowing citizens and the holiness of Christmas night with the devious plans of the enemy and the preparations for the devastating attack. The *Rey van Klaerissen* is different in that their lamentation of the massacre of the Innocents not only comments on the slaughter of Amsterdam citizens that occurs simultaneously but also foreshadows their own martyrdom. Besides, after this *Rey* the nuns become directly involved in the action onstage together with Bishop Willebrord and Abbess Klaeris van Velzen. They even sing another song (ll. 1007–18), but this time at the behest of the bishop and – although taking up the theme of preparing for death – their singing is now embedded within the action, as is also attested by Gijsbrecht's commenting on it (l. 1019).

The fourth *Rey* is different to the previous ones; sung by *burghzaten* ('denizens of the castle'), it is likely that these are already present onstage at the preceding conversation between Badeloch and Arend. At any rate, they are clearly aware of the situation and are commenting directly on it, describing Badeloch's anxiety and praying with her for the return of her husband. Their involvement in the action is also clear from the fact that – contrary to the three other *reyen* – this one does not conclude the act proper. That is done by Badeloch, who hears

²⁸ On the functions that choruses can have in early seventeenth-century Dutch tragedy, see Van Gemert, *Tussen de bedrijven door?*, esp. pp. 48–94.

²⁹ For a general discussion of music on the Amsterdam stage in the seventeenth century see: Veldhorst, *De perfecte verleiding*, pp. 14–64. Specific references to music in Vondel's plays, including *Gysbreght*, can be found in Grijp, 'Theatermuziek uit de Gouden Eeuw', <http://www.camerata-trajectina.nl/display.php?l=nl&i=toelichtingen#theater>.

Gijsbreght's voice at the gate (ll. 1287–88). Nevertheless, just like the other *reyen*, this one also retains a certain aloofness, by using extended metaphors and by commenting (as it were) 'from the outside', causing epic distancing – an effect that was no doubt enhanced by the singing.³⁰ It is precisely this 'distancing' feature of the *reyen* that should be reckoned with when performing *Gysbreght*. It can be realised in a multitude of ways, one of them being, of course, actual distancing in the *mise en scène* whereby the performers are spatially separated from the rest of the action. But to conclude therefore, as Albach does,³¹ that all *reyen* in the first production were probably sung on the balconies of the stage building is a rather farfetched assumption that might be paying too little consideration to the involvement from the *reyen* on the level of the dramatic action – especially from the latter two.

Costumes and Props

The implicit indications for the characters' appearance, what they wear and what props they use are somewhat more extensive than those for places and times. Supposedly the characters that belong to certain religious or military groups and that are recognisable by their clothing – such as Carthusian monks, Klaerissen or soldiers from both sides – will have been dressed accordingly. But there is also quite a wealth of detailed clues for some of the single characters. Vosmeer is shackled (l. 347) and – probably – covered in mud (l. 301); later on he is wet and his teeth are chattering from the cold (l. 609). Badeloch appears in a fine and stately dress for Christmas night ('my Christmas gown and finery', 'mijn pronck en Kersnachts kleren', l. 745) and Gijsbreght, when going into battle, orders his servants to bring his helmet, armour and sword (ll. 851, 883). Likewise the dying Arend wears armour (Gijsbreght specifically mentions this and orders it to be removed from the body, ll. 1542, 1550) and it is quite safe to assume that in addition to this the other characters involved in the skirmishes will have worn battle dress and weaponry of some kind. The messenger probably enters with the armour, sword and plumed helmet he has taken from a dead enemy to disguise himself. Most extensively Vondel's text details how onstage

³⁰ In later productions the *reyen* were often not sung but spoken in unison by groups of actors in a bombastic and declamatory style.

³¹ Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gijsbreght van Aemstel'*, p. 19.

bishop Gozewijn is helped into his finest chasuble and is handed his full Episcopal regalia – mitre, golden ring and crosier:

But dress me first, before they swoop down upon us.
Adorn this feeble body with most precious copes
Appropriate for a Bishop, lest I die in shame.
Crown me with the mitre: I've always worn it well
On my anointed head. Then bring the golden ring.
Put on this finger – my hand trembles – the wedding-band
[...] Then hand me the shepherd's crook, [...].³²

Apart from the text there is also ample evidence from the ledger of the Schouwburg that quite some money was spent on the costumes and props for the extensive cast. One finds entries for payments to an armourer and to a swordsmith, for feathers, bows, gloves and jewellery, for boots, and for linen used to clothe the nuns and monks, for velvet, for silk and even for the wings of a swan – the latter undoubtedly having served for Raphael's costume.³³ So apparently the actors' attire merited a lot of attention and this is corroborated by Rembrandt's drawings of the *Gysbreght* characters with their elaborate clothing. However, none of this means that the costumes were historically correct. Albach supposes that the clothes were in essence seventeenth-century garments – ostentatious dresses for the women and parade armour with feathered helmets for the men³⁴ – and this might have helped a contemporary audience to identify with the characters, but at the same time it seems probable from Rembrandt's sketches that the clothing certainly was not ordinary and within the conventions of the time will have been recognised as 'historical'. So again one sees that in 1638, just as with the virtual configuration of the 'historical' Amsterdam, the costumes probably presented an amalgam of old and contemporary features. And one should further conclude that, although from a textual perspective dressing the characters in a certain way and giving them certain props cannot be avoided, the range of design and appearance is much greater than the indications might seem to suggest.

³² Vondel, *Gysbreght*, ll. 989–94: 'Maar treck me (dat mijn dood zy veer van schande en smaed) eerst aan dit lamme lijf mijn prachtigste gewaad, gelijk een Bisschop voeght, aleez zij ons verrasschen. Zet mij den mijter op: hy zal niet qualijck passen Op mijn gezalfde kruin. breng hier den gouden rings, En steeck aen deze hand, die beeft, den vingerling [...] Geef mij den harderstaf [...].'

³³ Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gijsbreght van Aemstel'*, pp. 135–38. Also: Smits-Veldt, '3 januari 1638. Opening van de Amsterdamse Schouwburg met Vondels *Gysbreght van Aemstel*', pp. 206–07.

³⁴ Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gijsbreght van Aemstel'*, p. 21.

The Angel Raphael

A particular problem with regard to staging and costuming is presented by the angel Raphael who appears as a *deus ex machina* at the end of the play. There can be little doubt that in Vondel's time this celestial being was presented in accordance with the conventional image that we encounter at large in the pictorial tradition: a youngster in white (?) robes with wings. One can also be sure that Raphael made his entrance from the 'heavens' (above the central compartment of the stage building) in a cloud that then descended to the ground level of the stage. This machinery was one of the technical features of the new Schouwburg that the management certainly would have liked to show to the curious audience. In modern times, of course, it would also be possible to call on all sorts of technical devices to stage a grand finale with a winged angel descending from above. However, the question is whether this would work as an acceptable end to the drama. Not only is it likely that today's audiences will have more problems than the spectators in Vondel's time with the divine intervention as such (and of course this cannot be helped: it is a structural given of the play), but also the appearance of the angel itself can be seen as a challenge that should not necessarily be tackled by reverting to the traditional depiction with wings. It is therefore no surprise that different solutions have been tried in this regard, including not showing the angel but presenting only a voice – one of the more popular options. Whatever approach a theatre maker adopts it should be remarked here that in Vondel's text the angel is not a private figment of Gijsbreght's imagination, but is perceived by all the characters onstage. The words of Broer Peter – 'Who was that? Raphael?' ('Zijt ghy dat Rafaël', l. 1865) – make this unequivocally clear.³⁵

Our explorations up to this point have indicated some problems and challenges inherent to any staging of *Gysbreght* but they do not seem to be insurmountable. Indeed, the very vagueness of a lot of the features that were discussed presents the possibility of staging the drama in a large variety of ways and can be seen as one of the reasons that the tra-

³⁵ This observation is also important because it throws some light on the interpretation of both Badeloch's dream and Gijsbreght's account of how he was led to the nunnery of the Klaerissen after having heard a divine voice and having been led by a holy light. Apparently both these admonitions to save the nuns and the bishop should be considered more or less 'false' visions insofar as it was obviously not the intention to save Gijsbreght's uncle and sister. Cf. Raphael's lines (ll. 1825–26): '[...] hadden wy 't in ons behoed genomen / 't En waer met Amsterdam zoo verre noit gekomen.'

dition was able to survive the many changes in production habits for well over three hundred years. And according to this analysis nothing seems to stand in the way of a modern staging. Should one conclude, then, that the verdict ‘unplayable’ for modern-day theatre makers has in reality little to do with the technical or structural demands of the drama, but is rather referring to matters of content, theme and unintelligible language? To begin answering this question one has to look at the more structural aspects of the play concerning the relationships of story and plot and of action onstage and offstage.

Theatricality of Gysbreght

In theatre, the action and characters are shown rather than described. The spectator perceives the events and does not have to conjure them up in the mind’s eye from a spoken or written text. It is this principle – known as *ostension* – that functions as one of the major characteristics in distinguishing theatrical performance from other art forms – especially literary ones – and it is also recognised as the leading principle that underlies the specific form and structure of a drama text. Such a text distinguishes itself from the literary story by the relative invisibility of a narrating instance and by mainly consisting of direct speech.³⁶

To give just one, rather normative example of this narratological reasoning on how stories are told in the theatre, I will cite a certain Hasselbach, who wrote in his *Overzicht der Stijllee* (‘Overview of Stylistics’) as early as 1890:

Drama too creates an image of life – just as the epic poem and the novel do – but here the events should not be narrated, they must be *shown*. [...] A drama – the word itself meaning *action* – should therefore consist of a sequence of important events that quickly, without unnecessary delay, develop before the eyes of the audience. [...] It follows that the main requirements for drama are action and delineation of character. But stories and lyrical utterances are not completely banned from the drama; they can even clarify or embellish the [dramatic] poem, provided that the playwright takes care that they do not take up too much room and are fittingly embedded at just the right moment in time.³⁷

³⁶ Cf. for example Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, transl. Halliday, chapters 1 and 2.

³⁷ Hasselbach, *Overzicht der Stijllee*, pp. 45–46: ‘Evenals het epos en de roman vormt ook het drama een beeld van het leven, doch hier mogen de gebeurtenissen niet

Yet the emphasis on the showing of action that is expressed in this citation is somewhat biased and is not altogether confirmed by theatrical practice. There are specific moments when, onstage, stories are told instead of shown and when, moreover, one should not designate these stories as 'clarification' or 'embellishment' but rather deem them to be quite important – if not crucial – in furthering the action and developing the plot. These are the moments when characters relate in words parts of the action that remain invisible to the audience and to the other characters.

Confronting the above with *Gysbreght* one realises immediately how much this play relies on narration to present the story and not on any action shown onstage. In the *Kort Begrijp* that precedes the drama text Vondel describes the course of events that make up the action of the play and that can best be summarised by its motto, taken from Virgil's *Aeneid*: '*urbs antiqua ruit*' ('the old city perishes'). The taking of Amsterdam on Christmas night, its destruction and the subsequent exile from the city of Gijsbreght, his family and the refugees are related in chronological order, but no distinction is made between what is shown onstage and what is narrated. In the analysis of the manner in which this story is staged – the plot – one learns, however, that very little of the events can actually be seen directly by the audience; almost everything pertaining to the hostilities is reported and has to be perceived through the narration by the characters.

Table 2 indicates the number of verses from each scene, the characters that are definitely onstage and a short description of its main content. In these descriptions it is also indicated whether this content actually shows events from the main story or is relating these events through narration. In more technical terms it is indicated whether in a scene the events related by the plot coincide with those of the story or whether they have happened before and offstage, outside the direct perception of the audience. The former are designated by *Action* or *Conflict* – all the other descriptions are essentially characterised by narration, leaving it to the spectators to conjure up before their minds eye

worden verhaald, ze moeten *vertoond* worden. [...] Een drama – 't woord zelf beteekent *handeling* – behoort dus te bestaan uit eene reeks van belangrijke feiten, die zich ras, zonder onnoodig oponthoud, voor de ogen der aanschouwers ontrolt. [...] De hoofdvereischten van het drama zijn dus handeling en karakterschildering. Evenwel verhalen en lyrische ontboezemingen zijn niet geheel en al uitgesloten; ze kunnen het gedicht zelfs verduidelijken en versieren, mits de dichter zorg drage, dat ze eene niet te groote plaats innemen en juist te pas zijn ingevlochten.' My translation.

what has actually happened. A special case of the *Action* scenes is provided by those marked *Conflict*. In these scenes the actions onstage are characterised by clearly opposed objectives of the characters: Diedrick meeting resistance when he wants to gain access to the Carthusian monastery; the refusal of the Klaerissen and Gozewijn to be led to safety by Gijsbreght; the Heer van Vooren trying in vain to negotiate the surrender of the castle; and Badeloch's refusal to obey Gijsbreght's orders to flee the castle. In a sense these scenes can be considered to be even more theatrical than the other ones in which the action dominates the narration but in which the characters comply with each other.³⁸

From the table it is now possible to estimate more or less accurately how much of *Gysbreght* is devoted to direct action and how much the play relies on narrative. The scenes actually showing parts of the military action itself or presenting a conflict between the characters present onstage take up only about 50% of the drama: 957 of the 1896 verses. And it should even be recognised that sometimes large parts of these action scenes still contain long passages that can be regarded as predominantly narrative: for example, Vosmeer's account of his past, Badeloch telling her nightmare and Raphael prophesying the future. So the actual number of lines that should be considered narration instead of action is even considerably higher; the vast majority of the play actually consisting of stories and reports about what has happened in the past, what is happening offstage and what will happen in the future.

In this sense *Gysbreght* should definitely be considered more of a literary play than a theatrical one and it would not be much of an exaggeration to say that the drama does in fact comprise only a series of messenger reports. The consequence of this is, of course, that the audience becomes somewhat removed from the events, focussing on them through the interpretations and reactions of the characters, but not experiencing these events themselves. This distancing effect might even be furthered by the fact that the events are not told in everyday language, but rather in elaborate, rhythmic and poetic verses – thereby possibly strengthening the awareness of dealing with aesthetic constructions rather than with realistic characters. On the other hand the

³⁸ The view that conflict is an essential element of drama is presented by various authors. Cf. for example Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama* (tr. Halliday), pp. 196–201 or Beckermann, *Dynamics of drama: theory and method of analysis*, passim.

Table 2: Scene analysis of Vondel's *Gysbreght van Aemstel*

Act/scene	Vs.	turns	Vs./ turn	Characters	Content
I, 1 [1-162]	162	1	162.0	Gysbreght van Aemstel	<i>Narration:</i> Soliloquy in which G. relates the events leading up to the siege of Amsterdam. The scene ends with the arrival of Willebrord whom G. sees 'genaecken van ter zy' ['approaching from the side'] [159]
I, 2 [163-286]	124	13	9.5	Gysbreght – Willebrord	<i>Narration:</i> W. relates how the Carthusian monastery has fared during the siege and reveals the reason for lifting it: disagreement among the enemies on how to proceed with the battle combined with fear of a sally
I, 3 [287-414]	128	15	8.5	Gysbreght – Arend – Vosmeer – (possibly: servants / soldiers?)	<i>Narration:</i> A. tells about the flight of the hostile army and how Vosmeer was captured. <i>Action:</i> V. relates his family lineage, tells of his ruse to take the city and points out the ship <i>Het Zeepaerd</i> loaded with firewood [378]. He also tells of being sentenced to death and how he managed to escape. G. releases V. and orders him to oversee hauling <i>Het Zeepaerd</i> in to within the walls of the city.

I, 4 [415–50]	36	1	36.0	<i>Rey van Amsterdamsche maeghden</i> [‘chorus of Amsterdam virgins’] – (Gysbreght, citizens)	<i>Narration:</i> Song of praise for the liberation of Amsterdam; invitation to rejoice both at the end of the hostilities and at Christmas
II, 1 [451–503]	53	12	4.4	Willem van Egmond – Diedrick van Haerlem – hoptlieden	<i>Action:</i> E. en D. disclose the ruse to the captains of their army and discuss the plans for the imminent attack with them.
II, 2 [504–31]	28	15	1.9	Porter – Diedrick – monk	<i>Conflict:</i> D. seeks to enter the monastery but is halted by the Porter; he demands to speak to the abbot.
II, 3 [532–605]	74	22	3.4	(Porter?) – Diedrick – Willebord – (soldiers?)	<i>Conflict:</i> W. refuses to let D. use the monastery. D. threatens to use violence and at the end of the scene his soldiers enter the monastery.
II, 4 [606–74]	69	7	9.9	Vosmeer – Egmond	<i>Narration:</i> V. tells E. how <i>Het Zeepaerd</i> has been hauled into the city
II, 5 [675–744]	70	1	70.0	<i>Rey van edelingen</i> [= chorus of nobles]	<i>Narration:</i> Song of praise for the Christ child, at once divine ruler and humble child
III,1 [745–826]	82	7	11.7	Badeloch – Gysbreght (servants?)	<i>Action:</i> B. recounts a nightmarish dream in which the fall of the city is prophesied.
III, 2 [827–92]	66	11	6.0	Badeloch – Gysbreght – Broer Peter – (servants)	<i>Action:</i> Broer Peter announces the attack. G. leaves to assess the situation from one of the castle towers and returns with (almost) a teichoscopy [874–82]
III, 3 [893–902]	10	5	2.0	Badeloch – Gysbreght – Broer Peter – (servants) – allies – Arend	<i>Action:</i> G., A. and allies leave in order to try to stop the attack and drive back the enemy

(Continued)

Table 2 (Cont.)

Act/scene	Vs.	turns	Vs./ turn	Characters	Content
III, 4 [903–50]	48	1	48.0	<i>Rey van Klaerissen</i>	<i>Narration:</i> Lamentation on the massacre of the Innocents in Bethlehem
IV, 1 [951–1018]	68	5	13.6	Gozewijn van Aemstel – Klaeris van Velzen – <i>Rey van Klaerissen</i>	<i>Action:</i> Goz. asks the Klaerissen and K. to leave the nunnery but they decide to stay. K. helps Goz. to put on his chasuble and mitre. The Klaerissen sing the song of praise of the 'old Simeon' [1006]
IV, 2 [1019–72]	54	6	9.0	Gozewijn van Aemstel – Klaeris van Velzen – <i>Rey van Klaerissen</i> – Gysbreght	<i>Conflict:</i> G. wants to escort Goz., K. and the Klaerissen to safety but they refuse to leave.
IV, 3 [1073–1238]	166	13	12.8	?? Entrance Witte van Haemstee with soldiers?? Badeloch – Arend (and <i>burghzaten</i> ['denizens of the castle']?)	<i>Action:</i> Pantomime of the murder of the Klaerissen, ending with a <i>tableau vivant</i> ?? <i>Narration:</i> A. tells B. how G. has been organising the defence of the city. He relates the struggle in the <i>Nieuwe Kerk</i> to free Kristijn, the fighting for possession of the Dam and how G. had to fall back to the city hall.
IV, 4 [1239–88]	50	2	25.0	<i>Rey van burghzaten</i> – Badeloch – Arend	<i>Narration:</i> Song of praise for the love between Gijsbreght and Badeloch; pity for the latter who fears her husband to be dead.

V, 1 [1289–1392]	104	5	20.8	Badeloch – Gysbrecht – Arend (and burghzaten?)	<i>Narration:</i> G. narrates what has happened after A. left him defending the city hall that was stormed and overtaken by the enemy. He relates how he managed to reach the nunnery of the Klaerissen, but that he could not persuade them to leave with him. He then crossed the Amstel in a little rowing boat and witnessed the nunnery going up in flames. In vain he tried to defend the Doelebrugh, but in the end was forced to flee to the castle with a host of refugees.
V, 2 [1393–1520]	128	9	14.2	Badeloch – Gysbrecht – Arend (and <i>burghzaten?</i>) – messenger Gysbrecht – Arend – soldiers from both camps	<i>Narration:</i> Story of the messenger relating the murder of Gozewijn, Klaeris van Velzen and the Klaerissen. G. and A. exit for a sally <i>Action:</i> pantomime of the sally and the fighting with the besiegers ending with a tableau vivant (?)
V, 3 [1521–27]	7	1	7.0	Badeloch – (<i>burghzaten</i> /refugees?) – (Broer Peter?)	<i>Action:</i> B. tries to find G.; teichoscopy?
V, 4 [1528–50]	23	11	2.1	Arend – Gysbrecht – Badeloch – Broer Peter – (<i>burghzaten</i> /refugees)	<i>Action:</i> A. dies
V, 5 [1551–1654]	104	22	4.7	Gysbrecht – Heer van Vooren – trumpeter	<i>Conflict:</i> HvV. demands the surrender of the castle, G. refuses.

(Continued)

Table 2 (*Cont.*)

Act/scene	Vs.	turns	Vs./ turn	Characters	Content
V, 6 [1655–1729]	75	40	1.9	Gysbreght – Badeloch – Broer Peter – refugees – Adelgund – Veenerick	<i>Conflict:</i> G. orders Broer Peter to flee with B. and the children to safety. B. refuses to leave.
V, 7 [1730–1822]	93	12	7.8	Gysbreght – Badeloch – Broer Peter – refugees – Adelgund – Veenerick – messenger	<i>Conflict:</i> in the end B. concedes, but faints.
V, 8 [1823–96]	74	7	10.6	Gysbreght – Badeloch – Broer Peter – refugees – Adelgund – Veenerick – messenger – Raphael	<i>Action:</i> Raphael sends G. into exile – foretelling his future and the coming glory of Amsterdam.

stories make an appeal to the audience to imagine things for themselves and as such they might well be more effective than a cumbersome staging of the events. The suggestive accounts of the battle and the atrocities – such as the murder of the nuns – could very well be more haunting than a meticulous enactment of the events themselves. Besides, from a producer's point of view it is much more efficient to employ a narrator than have to stage a whole battle. Obviously it is much easier to sketch in words how the Zeepaerd was hauled into Amsterdam or how Gysbreght tried in vain to defend the city hall than to present these events on a stage. And telling the story instead of showing it has the additional advantage that one need not worry about good or bad seats: the theatregoers in the back rows can enjoy the terrors just as much as those in the front and the narrative can focus on details that otherwise might be lost. Therefore these evocative accounts of bloody battles and unimaginable horrors form quite a challenge to the actors who have to draw in the spectators, stirring their imagination and invoking the necessary pity and fear by the powers of their declamatory skills. No wonder then that the role of the messenger in the *Gysbreght* was much sought after and has been enacted by the most famous actors.³⁹

Nevertheless, bearing in mind Hasselbach's requirements for good drama and his admonition to the playwright that stories and lyrical utterances should not take up too much room, one must confess that having more than half of the verses in *Gysbreght* devoted to them is rather a lot. It is therefore not too hard to understand or even sympathise with those critics who have found the play tedious and boring – such as the nineteenth-century author Busken Huet who criticised the drama fiercely and remarked that 'Gysbreght van Aemstel is a tragedy at the performance of which [...] everybody longs to get home.'⁴⁰ Maybe, then, it is this dominance of narrative scenes over action-driven ones that causes the drama to be thought of as unplayable for modern-day audiences. After all, today's spectator lives in an era where cameras are ubiquitous, where the importance of pictures seems to be ever-growing and where the means of communication make it possible to

³⁹ Cf. Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gysbreght van Aemstel'*, p. 9 and Prandoni, *Een mozaïek van stemmen*, p.13.

⁴⁰ Cf. Gemert, '3 januari 1638: De opening van de Amsterdamse Schouwburg' pp. 232–33 and Prandoni, *Een mozaïek van stemmen*, p.18. The latter gives the quote from Busken Huet: 'Gysbreght van Aemstel [is] een treurspel bij welks opvoering niemand treurt en de geheele wereld naar huis verlangt.'

witness events and their outcomes *as they happen* and with one's own eyes. As such it should therefore not be very surprising that nowadays in the theatre descriptive messenger stories after the fact, however eloquently worded, will be experienced as less exciting than the 'real' stuff: directly showing the actions and the characters in conflict with each other.

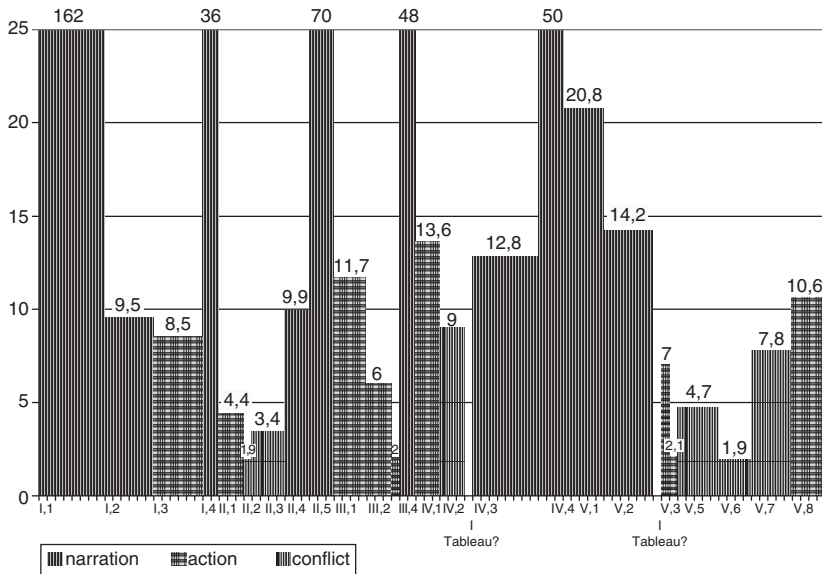
The narrative overload of the drama and its consequences become even more apparent when one calculates the average number of verses per speaking turn in each scene. Figure 1 provides a graphic representation that also takes into account the (approximate) length of the scene. The figure can be considered a rough blueprint of the overall 'rhythm' of the play, indicating the relative pace of each scene. The lower the bars are the more lively the play tends to become: either because the scene itself is very short and takes up only a few lines or because there is a multitude of dialogical turns between the characters. Conversely, longer bars mean relatively less turns and the drama will tend to have a slower tempo and become more monotonous.

The figure readily demonstrates the lengthy exposition of Gijsbreght's prologue (I,1) and the four *reyen* that function as resting points between the acts (I,4; II,5; III,4 and IV,4).⁴¹

It also becomes clear where the pace of the drama really quickens and one can find the more weighty moments of the action and especially of conflicts between the characters onstage. In chronological order these are:

- the beginning of the second act where Vosmeer's ruse is revealed by Diedrick and Egmont to their captains and the subsequent quarrel to gain access to the Carthusian monastery (II,1; II,2; II,3 – 155 verses)
- The news of the attack by Broer Peter; Gijsbreght rallying the allies and leaving for battle (III,2; III,3 – 76 verses)
- The fifth act after the story of the messenger till the appearance of the angel: Badeloch seeking Gijsbreght, his return with Arend who dies, the conflictual negotiation with De Heer van Vooren and the quarrel between Gijsbreght and Badeloch who refuses to part from the castle (V,3; V,4; V,5; V,6; V,7 – 302 verses)

⁴¹ For the sake of clarity of the whole figure the actual average number of verses per speaking turn of these five scenes is not represented by the length of the bars: they are cut off at 25.



Average lines per speaking turn.

All the other scenes – even the ones depicting actions directly connected to the battle (such as Gijsbreght trying in vain to persuade bishop Gozewijn and the Klaerissen to flee with him) – have a markedly slower tempo. This holds especially true for the relatively long tales by Arend, Gijsbreght and the messenger who relate the progress of the battle only to be interrupted by an occasional exclamation or short question from the party being addressed (VI,3; V,1; V,2). So one should conclude that the analysis of the overall tempo of the play corroborates the findings with regard to the large amount of narration in the play. Only in a few instances does the rather slow rhythm really pick up and strong (discordant) interaction between the characters or a sudden turn of events find expression. These are relatively short scenes, however, and the majority of them occur in Act V, so the spectator bent on seeing fast-paced action and quarrelsome dialogue has to wait quite a while before his appetite is finally sated.

Tableaux Vivants and Pantomimes

With this dramatic structure, which is characterised by a clear dominance of staged narrative and a rather drawn-out rhythm it is

unsurprising that theatre makers have more than once tried to enliven the drama; either by cutting considerable parts of the text or by providing the spectators with things to look at rather than to listen to. The elaborate costumes of the first performances have already been discussed and, although up till now we have only focussed on the characters that are mentioned in the text as being absolutely necessary for each scene, there is ample evidence from the *Gysbreght* tradition that, in addition to the main characters, a large number of supernumeraries have often been employed. Indeed, having a lot of actors onstage enhances the possibilities for the visual layer of a performance and the deliverance of large fragments of narrative can benefit from it – both with regard to *mise en scène* and with regard to the range of the story's emotional impact that can be shown. And, of course, one can also try to visualise the stories, thereby providing the audience with images of the spectacles that otherwise are only conjured up in words. Famous devices that have frequently been deployed to do this and that have been especially important in the performance history of *Gysbreght* are the pantomime and the *tableau vivant*. Indisputable evidence for the production of 1638 is lacking but it has been surmised that already at that time the taking of the Carthusian monastery, the murder of the nuns and Gijsbreght's sally from the castle were actually enacted as pantomimed skirmishes.⁴² Furthermore, it is well documented that *tableaux vivants* were very popular at the time and one or two of them might well have been inserted into the performance. At any rate, there is a lot of visual and documentary evidence from the 18th century and onwards to the effect that a *tableau vivant* showing the murder of the Klaerissen was an indissoluble and often much-praised part of the performances. In a report by Louis Riccoboni one learns how this was done in 1738:

Another peculiarity of the old theatre is what they call *Vertoning (tableau vivant)*: they lower the curtain in the middle of an act, and arrange the actors on the stage in order to represent, in the manner of the pantomime, some main action of the play's contents. Thus in *Gysbreght van Aemstel* they raise the curtain, & the theatre shows the soldiers of Egmont, Gijsbreght's enemy, who plunder a nunnery; each soldier takes hold of a nun and treats her as it pleases him. The Abbess lies down in the middle

⁴² Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gijsbreght van Aemstel'*, p. 20 and Smits-Veldt, '3 januari 1638. Opening van de Amsterdamse Schouwburg met Vondel's *Gysbreght van Aemstel'* p. 205. Also Prandoni, *Een mozaïek van stemmen*. p. 107.

of the stage, holding on her knees the venerable Goswin, the banned bishop of Utrecht, who is then slaughtered in his pontifical clothes, the mitre on his head and the cross his hand.⁴³

And Pierre Coste d'Arnobat is even more precise in his description dating from the end of the 18th century in which attention is also given to the emotional impact of the scene:

All of a sudden [...] an enemy chief, followed by his soldiers, forces his way into the convent. The sacrilegious troop bursts into the choir, slitting the throats of the bishop and the nuns, and desecration fills the sacred place. In order to preserve the effect of every detail of this coup de théâtre, in order to be able to guess at the same time, among such horrors, all those details that, due to the constraints of decency, cannot be shown in live action, the curtain is lowered when the action is rapid and chaotic; and it is raised the very next instant, in order to display the assassins and the victims scattered in various poses of fury and horror, also giving some indications of the soldier's licentiousness. On witnessing this huge, symmetrical pile of corpses and executioners, and how the scene is displayed in the utmost silence, the emotions of the Dutch are expressed in redoubled applause, and everyone seems to be completely overwhelmed by this beautiful, dramatic-tic [sic] image.⁴⁴

⁴³ As translated by Hogendoorn, 'Dutch Theatre, 1600–1848', p. 421. Original by Louis Riccoboni, *Reflexions historiques et critiques sur les differens théâtres de l'Europe*, p. 145: 'Une autre singularité de l'ancien Théâtre, est ce qu'on nomme *Vertoning* (Représentation): on baisse le rideau au milieu d'un Acte, & on dispose les Acteurs sur le Théâtre, de manière représentent, comme à la façon des Pantomimes, quelque action principale du sujet. C'est ainsi que dans *Gysbrecht van Aemstel*, on lève le rideau, & le Théâtre représente les Soldats d'*Egmond* ennemi de *Gysbrecht*, fui faccagent un Couvent de Religieuses, où chaque Soldat en a une qu'il traite comme il veut: l'Abesse est étendue au milieu du Théâtre, tenant sur ses genoux le vénérable Goswin, Evêque exilé d'Utrecht, massacré dans ses habits Pontificaux, la mître en tête & la crosse à la main.'

⁴⁴ Pierre Coste d'Arnobat as reproduced in Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gijsbreght van Aemstel'*, p. 139: 'Tout à coup, ... un chef ennemi, suivi de ses soldats force le couvent. La troupe sacrilege fait irruption dans le coeur, elle égorge l'évêque et les religieuses, et la profanation est dans le lieu saint. Pour que l'effet d'aucun détail de ce coup de théâtre ne soit perdu; pourqu'on puisse deviner à la fois, parmi tant d'horreurs, toutes celles dont la décence ne permet pas d'exposer le tableau mouvant, on baisse la toile au moment où il s'opère à grands traits et en confusion; et on la relève l'instant après, afin de déployer aux spectateurs les assassins et les victimes groupés pêle-mêle dans diverses attitudes du fureur et d'épouvante, qui laissent entrevoir aussi quelques indices de la licence du soldat. Au spectacle de ce groupe énorme amoncelé symétriquement de morts et de bourreaux, et que la scène étale dans le plus grand silence, les transports des Hollandais se manifestent par des applaudissemens redoublés, et tout le monde paroît pénétré de cette belle image dramatique [sic]. Cf. also Is. Disraeli (*Curiosities of Literature*, 1820; but written at the end of the 18th century) as reproduced in Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gijsbreght van Aemstel'*, p. 140: 'One of the acts concludes with the scene of a convent; the sound of warlike instruments is heard; the abbey is stormed; the nuns

From this latter quote it becomes clear how one should imagine this scene and the relation between pantomime and tableau: Witte van Haemstee and his soldiers enter the stage just after Gijsbreght has left and there is some struggling with the nuns. However, for reasons of decency all the atrocities as later told by the messenger (such as Klaeris van Velzen being raped) are not shown, but at some culminating point the curtain is lowered and almost immediately raised again to show the outcome of the slaughter.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Having thus explored some of the possibilities of *Gysbreght* for its staging we can now return once more to our initial questions – from the point of view of a theatre maker, what are the structural characteristics and the technical demands of this text that might explain both the very long, almost unbroken tradition of yearly performances from 1638 onwards and the ultimate cessation of that same tradition in 1968? With regard to the former it should be remarked that the immanent clues for spatial and temporal configuration, for costumes and props, for *mise en scène* and the delivery of the *reynen* are quite indeterminate. They leave a lot of room for different interpretations and can be accommodated by various and even opposed theatrical conventions. Realistic or stylised, on a monotopic or polytopic stage, in elaborate settings or on an almost bare stage, with choruses sung or spoken – *Gysbreght* is vague enough in its indications to conform to them all. The question as to the cessation of the tradition and why it has not been revived is somewhat harder to answer. I suspect that it has to do not only with the content of the play or the difficulties in understanding the seventeenth-century language and the direct references to the historical situation but also with structural characteristics of the play. The tragedy relies heavily on telling the story instead of showing it, resulting in a relatively slow and monotonous overall rhythm. In a time where visuality

and fathers are slaughtered; with the aid of 'blunderbus and thunder' every Dutchman appears sensible of the pathos of the poet. But it does not here conclude. After this terrible slaughter, the conquerors and the vanquished remain for ten minutes on the stage, silent and motionless, in the attitudes in which the groups happened to fall! and this pantomime pathos commands loud bursts of applause?

⁴⁵ In this respect it is important to note that the messenger story in act V is not recounting exactly what the audience has already seen but gives additional information on the gruesome events. Cf. also Prandoni, *Een mozaïek van stemmen*, p. 105.

and spectacle are regarded highly, where images are ubiquitous and often considered more trustworthy than just words, it is only natural that staging a drama in which many of the main events of the story are told and which has only a limited number of scenes in which something happens in terms of action or conflict is not so much en vogue. And yet... reading Vondel's verses with their almost magical power to conjure up so vividly the attack on Amsterdam and its subsequent destruction one wonders how a present-day theatre production might be able to overcome these inherent challenges presented by *Gysbreght*.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

CULTURAL ANALYSIS – THE JOSEPH PLAYS

Mieke Bal, Maaïke Bleeker, Bennett Carpenter and
Frans-Willem Korsten

Images that Move, Words that Touch

For several of his plays, Vondel found a source of inspiration, or a first impulse to write, in seeing a print, sketch, or painting.¹ In 1640, for instance, he was moved to write the play *Joseph in Dothan* after having seen a picture by Jan Simonsz. Pynas: *Jacob Being Shown Joseph's Bloodstained Robe*.² Vondel mentions the occasion in his dedication:

Joseph's being sold came to my mind through the painting of Jan Pynas, hanging next to other works of art by Pieter Lastman at the house of the highly esteemed and experienced doctor Robbert Verhoeven; on this the bloody cloak is shown to the father – just as we, at the end of this work, in close analogy, tried to imitate by means of words the painter's colours, drawing, and passions. If this tragedy, when being played or read, will affect someone, we will readily admit that this moving history itself has helped the playwright and has affected him many times.³

A number of aspects addressed in this quotation may help to introduce the issues discussed in this chapter. First of all there is the apparent equivalence between seeing and reading, and by implication between words and images or actions shown. Secondly these different forms of art operate not so much in terms of their meaning but in terms of how

¹ See the contribution by Grootes in this volume: 'Vondel and Amsterdam.'

² The painting was made in 1618 and can now be found in the Hermitage, St. Petersburg.

³ *Joseph in Dothan*, 'Dedication', ll. 23–31: 'Iosephs verkoopinge schoot ons in den zin, door het tafereel van Ian Pinas, hangende, neffens meer kunstige stucken van Peter Lastman, ten huise van den hooghgeleerden en ervaren Dokter Robbert Verhoeven; daer de bloedige rock den Vader vertoont wort: gelijk wy in 't sluiten van dit werck, ten naesten by, met woorden des schilders verwen, teickeningen, en hartstoghten, pooghden na te volgen. Indien dit treurspel, onder 't spelen of lezen, yemants gemoedt raeckt; wy willen gaerne bekennen, dat deze bewegelijcke historie zelf den toneeldichter geholpen, en menighmael aen 't harte geraeckt heeft.'



Jan Simonsz. Pynas

they affect their viewer or reader. The story and its visualization ‘move’. Then there is the curious statement that this story has ‘helped’ the playwright and has touched him many times. This suggests that the role of the story and its visualization contribute to the shaping of subjectivity, individually and, by implication, collectively.

Especially because of the constitution of individual and collective subjectivity, we will deal with this in terms of *cultural analysis*. This approach is concerned with the historically and culturally specific construction, or, in a terminology relevant for this chapter, staging of human subjectivity. In this analysis the scholar takes into consideration both the aesthetic and political forces operative in and through art. As the term analysis suggests, the object of study is not so much the object itself, about which we get to know more (in historical terms, for instance), but the active relation between object, individual and collective users, as well as the scholarly subject. In this analysis, framing is a key concept for three reasons, as Mieke Bal has indicated. Firstly, framing serves to avoid the quasi-normal use of context, by means of which the ‘unavowed motivation for the interpretation [...] becomes entangled in a conflation of origin, cause, and intention.’ Secondly, the act of framing indicates an event, whereas the noun context implies it will provide us with data. As a consequence, framing highlights the position

of the scholar in terms of accountability, whereas context veils that accountability. Moreover, framing indicates that one is both the subject and the object of framing, whereas context appears to exist without a positioned subject. Thirdly, framing implies a process, and here the important point is that we will not get to the end of the process in terms of knowledge, but will always be involved in a cultural practice in the present.⁴

When Vondel states that he has put into words what the painter had depicted before him, the phrase ‘ten naasten by’ may concern the way in which words are like images: *as if* or *close to*. The first meaning, of word and image being like one another, could well be a reference to Horace’s *ut pictura poesis* – poetry is like painting. Rendered as such, poetry and painting are analogous to each other, or they resemble one another. This relation is embodied most forcefully by one of the most popular seventeenth-century genres, the emblem. It is not coincidental that Vondel’s first appearance as a poet concerned his texts for a book of emblems. He contributed to the Dutch translation of the Latin *Mikrokosmos*, or *Parvus Mundus* that was first published by the Antwerp publisher G. de Jode in 1579. It was reprinted several times since then and was published in 1613 under the title *Den Gulden winkel der konstlievende Nederlanders* (*The Golden Shop of Art-loving Dutchmen*). In it, as was standard, emblematic pictures were combined with mottos and a so-called *subscription*: an added text that provided a literal translation of the figural image.⁵

A considerable amount of historical research into the word-image relation goes back to such kinds of emblematic figures and the emblematic relations between word and image.⁶ The idea is that words, or

⁴ Bal, *Loving Yusuf*, pp. 218–220. One exemplary collection of articles in which visual analysis is used as a form of cultural analysis is Brennan and Jay, *Vision in Context*. As the collection illustrates, cultural analysis is determined by the twentieth-century re-conceptualization of human subjectivity which was informed by Freudian psychoanalysis, Nietzschean philosophy, the philosophy of language (such as speech act theory), Marxism, semiotics, feminism, ideology critique, and, most recently, the material turn.

⁵ The text with images can be found online on the website of dbnl: http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/vond001dewe01_01/vond001dewe01_01_0021.php. In the WB edition, see pp. 263–426.

⁶ In the context of Dutch literary studies and Dutch art history, one decisive step in the study of word and image was made with the conference ‘Wort und Bild in der niederländischen Kunst und Literatur des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts’ (‘Word and Image in Dutch Art and Literature of the 16th and 17th Centuries’) in Cologne, 1981. The contributions were published in 1984; see Vekeman and Müller Hofstede, *Wort und Bild in der Niederländischen Kunst und literatur des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*.

better texts, are almost like images, and vice versa. As a result of this similarity they can be translated into one another, and in the process be used to explain one another. In general, however, this has turned out not to be a simple matter of mutual translation, as the term *subscription* might suggest. Instead, iconographical studies have taught us how to read paintings or images on the basis of some kind of grammar; in fact, the ability to somehow write and consequently to read images is at the basis of the word iconography. The reading of the image should then result in a final meaning captured in text, which is where similarity turns into asymmetry. Despite the humble *sub-* in subscription, the word offers the true meaning for the image. This fits in, partly, with a millennia-old hierarchy and opposition between word and image, one that is captured most succinctly in the negative conceptualization of idolatry.⁷

To put it briefly, and within the context of European history, the abstract and symbolic relation between words and what they represent allowed for the possibility that language was better suited to embody the ideal-as-truth. In a sense, this hierarchy posited the ideal of the word pitted against the alleged confusion of the complex and muddled image or deflated image. In this context, and historically speaking, it was important to learn how to read images for their true or symbolical meaning. This was done on the basis of books such as (for instance) Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia of Uytbeeldinghen des Verstants* (Iconology or Depictions of Reason), which originally appeared in Italian and was translated into Dutch by Dirck Pietersz Pers in 1644.⁸ The book contained the verbal description of many images that could be read as depicting concepts such as melancholy, anger, or freedom. Recognizing the images one would know what they meant, and choosing the words one could know how to depict them.

⁷ For a telling example, see the website of the Utrecht project on emblems, where it says: 'The meaning of the whole is determined by the combination of the three parts. The curiosity is roused by either the *motto* or the *pictura*, and then the *scriptio* complements these two parts and provides a logical explanation on [sic] the whole', <http://emblems.let.uu.nl/>. As may be clear, the picture itself is described here as only arousing curiosity in order to then be defined in language, by the subscript. A deconstruction of both hierarchy and opposition between word and image can be found in Bal, *Reading Rembrandt*.

⁸ The original appeared in 1593, entitled *Iconologia overo Descrittione Dell'imagini Universali cavate dall'Antichità et da altri luoghi*, and it was translated throughout Europe and reprinted many times. The printed version of 1603 was the first one with images.

Yet the issue was not just one of translation, as is demonstrated by the intense public debate in the seventeenth century on the relation between word and image, especially between Protestants and Catholics. With regard to this debate, it is relevant to recall that the age-old interest in the superiority of the word was rivalled by an equally old idea that seeing is superior to speech. In the Tanakh and Bible *seeing* has crucial epistemological and sometimes also spiritual value, and the figure of Joseph would be a good case to demonstrate both possibilities because of his ability to read images. In his case these were dreams, which could be ‘seen through’ for their true meaning. Hence another hierarchy in play was that of clear vision as opposed to the opaqueness of, and disturbance produced by language. It should be possible, therefore, to consider the two opposed hierarchies as distinct but equally important and as dynamically related.

In this context it may be worthwhile to reconsider the passage in Horace’s *Ars poetica* in full: ‘A poem is a kind of painting / one captures you more in proximity, the other from afar.’⁹ Here, the two are being compared not so much for their similarity in terms of meaning but for the comparable ways in which they are able to affect the reader, listener or viewer. Consequently, it is not so much the ability to translate each into the other that is at stake, but rather the contiguity of both in terms of affect. They stand next to one another because they enforce a similar movement on the part of the reader or viewer, both in terms of distance or proximity and in terms of ‘affect’. The latter is indicated by the fact that text and image *capiat*: capture or catch. This is why Vondel can state that his words tried to do what the painter had done with colours, drawing and passions. Meaning is less important here than aesthetics. Moreover, it is not so much the spirit that counts, but the material, palpable quality of the work. This is not to say that we have left the epistemological domain of knowledge and meaning. That domain is conceptualized differently because form is no longer that which opposes or hides meaning, but rather that which speaks itself.

There is, moreover, a second important shift traceable in Horace’s contention. It seems to imply that we will be affected differently because

⁹ Horace, *Ars poetica*, vs. 361–62: ‘ut pictura poesis: erit quae, si propius stes, / te capiat magis, et quaedam, si longius abstes.’ Horace’s famous phrase has a slightly lesser-known counterpart in the classic Greek poet Simonides’s contention that ‘poetry is silent painting and painting is mute poetry’. This phrase appears to contradict any opposition or hierarchy between word and image.

we look at some poems and paintings from a distance and at others from close by. Proximity and distance are embodied in the poem. It can offer infinitely small details that make us feel very close, or vast overviews that put us at a distance. This is to say that Horace considers poems to be working visually. Images are caught in text; as such they are able to materialize in us as readers, and in that materiality are able to touch us. As a consequence, the word-image opposition no longer works. Image and text both operate in terms of materiality, and they both do so visually. With regard to both it is then better to speak of visual analysis. This is an approach markedly different from iconography or the study of emblems. Visual analysis is not so much concerned with how text and image can be translated into one another, but rather how they both affect us materially and visually, and consequently move us, that is to say, shape us.¹⁰

A third important point in this discussion is the mutuality of the relationship between words and images. Whereas Vondel notes the influence a certain painting had on his writing of the plays, the converse relationship also pertains. Painters depicted plays they saw performed, making visual images on the basis of words. It has been suggested, for example, that Rembrandt's two paintings on the subject of *Joseph in Egypt* from 1655 were depictions of the play. The first one, now in Washington, would be based on the performance of (perhaps) Ariana Nozeman, who also was the first woman actress in a society where female roles were routinely played by men. She disappeared in the middle of the season, and her role of Jempsar was taken over. Whether or not this unsubstantiated legend is true, the two paintings are very different, although the scene they depict is the same, and so is the cast of characters. Instead of speculating on unverifiable anecdotal explanations, we propose that the major difference between the two paintings is their theatricality, and Rembrandt's contribution to the debate which Vondel's play initiated.

This is the point, then, where we wish to bring in theatricality. If there is one art in which word and image are realized and used simultaneously and materially, and also in terms of proximity and distance, it is the theatre. Moreover, since words and images (and sounds, one might add) operate simultaneously, the one cannot easily be based on, or brought back to the other. In the theatre 'visuality happens'.¹¹ At this

¹⁰ For an analysis of visuality in texts beyond the thematic of depiction, see Bal, *The Mottled Screen*.

¹¹ Bleeker, 'Visuality Happens!'

point, it is helpful to distinguish between theatrical as a quality, aspect or characteristic of what is seen (as something of the theatre or like theatre), and theatricality as a communicative affect emerging from a process of spectatorship. Theatricality, as Davis observes, emerges as a separate term, distinct from theatrical, in the 18th century.¹² The distinction between ‘theatrical’ as a quality, aspect or characteristic of what is seen (of something being staged) and ‘theatricality’ as emerging from a process of spectatorship is helpful in distinguishing between, for example, how the story of Joseph is staged in Vondel’s play and the effect or intensity produced within the relationship between (aspects of) the text, this staging and both readers and viewers. This meaning turns theatre into a ‘critical vision machine’ (Bleeker).

On the basis of the combinations of these considerations we propose to distinguish between emblematic or iconographic studies, iconology, and visual analysis. Iconography focuses on the way in which images are used rhetorically as a form of language, organizing them on the basis of a sociocultural lexicon and a distinctive set of rhetorical possibilities, in order to convey something by means of them. Iconology is concerned with the specific ways in which users and scholars understand, read and interpret images in historically and culturally determined ways. Michael Ann Holly recalls that Erwin Panofsky termed it ‘art history turned interpretative’.¹³ As Mitchell’s *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* argues, iconology’s major concern is predominantly epistemological. Accordingly, both iconography and iconology can help us to understand and read (for instance) seventeenth-century theatre as a historical object, or to define how people thought of and understood the idea of an image.¹⁴ This is distinctly different from dealing with the dynamic of theatricality. For the latter, we need visual analysis, as part of what we have termed cultural analysis.

Human subjectivity is staged when inner theatres mingle with outer theatres. Cultural analysis studies how the fantasies, reflections, desires and roles of individual and collective might meet in such inner and material theatres. This both confirms and exceeds the realm of theatre as an art form. Cultural analysis helps us to deal with theatricality.

¹² See Davis, ‘Theatricality and Civil Society’.

¹³ See Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts*. On the origins of the work and context of Panofsky, see Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*, p. 11, who considers Panofsky’s iconology as determined by the ‘tension between metaphysical idealism and positivism’.

¹⁴ For a paradigmatic study in this domain see Sierhuis, ‘Therapeutic Tragedy’.

In this vein, we will explain below that the difference between the two Rembrandt paintings can be seen as that between inner and outer theatricality, a distinction that, in turn, casts a new light on Vondel's Joseph plays. In relation to these plays one example of such cultural analysis (combining visual and textual analysis) is Mieke Bal's *Loving Yusuf*. In this study Bal considers the many ways in which the story of the love between Mut-em-enet (the name given by Thomas Mann and adopted by Bal in its short version, Mut) and Joseph has been shaped. The love between these two and the impossibility or possibility thereof is determined by the sociocultural production of individual and collective subjectivity, in terms of gender, ethnicity and culture. In Bal's study theatricality plays an important role; a structuring principle in the story of Mut-em-enet and Joseph is the struggle about who determines the *mise en scène*.¹⁵ In this context the question we wish to pose in what follows is how the idea of theatre as a 'critical vision machine' can be thought, in the context of the baroque, for its relation to what we will later propose to call a 'critical moment'.¹⁶

Inner and Outer Theatre: A Kiss that Disturbs Emblems

Both Joseph plays, *Joseph in Dothan* and *Joseph in Egypt*, conform to the classicist requirement that the entire action take place within one day. This leads to a form of narrative condensation in the plays that resembles the forms of condensation in pictures and, as we will see, in dreams. Accordingly, actions and events that are taking place through time, in different episodes, are now brought together. One way to do this, in the face of the threat of implausibility, is to condense scenes in an 'inner' theatre.¹⁷

Joseph in Dothan takes as its major event the capture and selling of Joseph by his (half-) brothers. They are the sons of, on the one hand, Jacob and Leah or her maid Bilha, and on the other Jacob and Rachel (who begot Joseph and Benjamin), as a result of which there is considerable rivalry between them. This rivalry is only aggravated because of the special attention that father Jacob is paying to Joseph. Another plot

¹⁵ On the way in which we use *mise en scène* in what follows, see Bal, *Travelling Concepts*.

¹⁶ On theatre as a 'critical vision machine', see Bleeker 'Being Angela Merkel' and *Visuality in the Theatre*.

¹⁷ On this see Korsten, *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, chapter 2.

element is Joseph's interpretation of a dream, which, according to him, means that his brothers will have to serve him. Exasperated, his brothers plan to kill Joseph. The eldest son Ruben, however, pleads for Joseph's life, so that instead the brothers leave him in a deep pit. When a little later Ruben, moved by feelings of remorse, is on his way to relieve Joseph, he meets his other brothers who had an even better idea when, coincidentally, a group of traders came by. They saw and took the opportunity to sell Joseph. Now they will make it look as if a wild animal has attacked and eaten Joseph. They will soak his cloak in goat's blood to sell that story to their father. Then, in *Joseph in Egypt*, Joseph has been sold again, this time to an important member of the court of the Egyptian pharaoh, a man named Potiphar. In his house he functions as the *maior domus*. Being a beautiful young man, however, he also becomes an object of desire: Jempsar, the wife of Potiphar, falls passionately in love with Joseph. In the day that the play represents Potiphar will be away for business and Jempsar has decided to declare her love again, a final and decisive time. The climax is that Joseph flees, leaving his cloak. When Potiphar returns this cloak is used as evidence of Joseph's alleged attempt to sexually assault Jempsar. The play ends with Joseph's being thrown into jail.

In relation to both plays, Vondel liked to work with emblematic or iconographic possibilities, as well as with the distinction between inner and outer theatre. One could argue that for many of his contemporaries the story of Jempsar and Joseph was framed emblematically. Joseph would be the emblem, then, of the beautiful but chaste and righteous religious man who is troubled by the emblematic figure of the lustful, uncontrolled and heathen woman Jempsar.¹⁸ As we will see, however, such a closed reading (as opposed to a close reading) falls short when dealing with decisive scenes in the play. According to Bal, it equally falls short in relation to the canonical versions themselves, both biblical and qur'anic ones. Rembrandt's two paintings can serve as two sides of a dilemma posed by the scene, in a more sophisticated, and open, because ambiguous, reading.

One issue at stake is affect, and theatricality as its medium. In the dedication to *Joseph in Dothan*, Vondel is concerned with the affective powers of theatrical materiality and visibility. When stating that he

¹⁸ A good example for a study with regard to the emblematic character of Joseph and the woman, who in this case is called Sefirach, is Spies, 'A Chaste Joseph for Schoolboys'.

tried to 'capture' Pynas's work at the end of the play, he does not mean that the bloody cloak will be shown on stage, as it is in the painting. Jacob does not even appear in the play. Instead, the affect the cloak produces is predicted on the basis of the visual imagination. In the final act, the eldest son Ruben, who is on his way to rescue Joseph, meets his brothers, who tell him that Joseph has already been sold to some travelling merchants. In order to mask this exchange, they will use trickery and tear the cloak apart a little, sprinkling it with blood, so that people will think that Joseph has been killed by some wild animal. Then, when the brothers leave with the cloak in order to report Joseph's disastrous fate to father Jacob, Ruben imagines how the latter will be affected:

My God, I am frightened. What a house it will be
 When that treacherous messenger will report to father
 How the cloak was found in the field, and shows it to him,
 Torn, dragged, hauled, smirched with dust and blood.
 With what kind of ears will he hear? How will he stand it?
 With what kind of eyes will he see his child's blooded cloak?
 It appears to me that I see the horrific figure of how
 He will fling his arms apart, and fall back
 With his bold head, his entire posture shaped
 as that of a corpse. The girls, children, boys,
 Our wives, mothers, and the entire household,
 Come rushing to his cries. Little Benjamin
 Standing at his feet...¹⁹

The scene does indeed seem to describe Pynas's painting here, without however referring explicitly back to that painting.²⁰ Instead the image is used differently since, as a character, Ruben testifies to an internal theatre, which is indicated by the phrase 'It appears to me that I see...'. This internal theatre is externalized when he presents the audience with a *mise en scène* that is touching, both because of what the words

¹⁹ *Joseph in Dothan*, ll. 1539–51: 'Myn Godt, ick schrick. och wat een huis wil ginder leggen, / Wanneer die logenbo den vader aen koom zeggen, / Hoe 't kleet gevonden zy op 't veldt, en toon hem dat, / Gescheurt, gesleurt, gesleept, van stof en bloet beklad. / Met wat voor ooren zal hy 't hooren? hoe zich houwen? / Met wat voor oogen 's kints bebloeden rock aenschouwen? / My dunckt ick zie met wat een jammerlijck gestalt / Hy d'armen smijt van een, en achterover valt, / Met zynen blooten kop; al 't aengezicht geschapen / Natuurlijck als een lijck: de maeghden, kinders, knaepen, / Ons vrouwen, moeders, en 't geheele huisgezin / Toeschieten op 't misbaer: den kleenen Benjamin, / Aen zyne voeten staende, ...'

²⁰ For the difference between the way in which Vondel deals with the scene here and a French adaptation (where the scene is turned into a form of meditation), see Brachin, 'Vondel in het Franse pak'.

mean and because of the scene they depict. The text works visually, then, affecting character and audience by calling up a scene, with all kinds of details that produce and leave their own traces. As a consequence it is hard to frame the scene, or image, in terms of an ultimate meaning, as Walter Benjamin suggested in relation to baroque allegory. That is to say that, whereas medieval and renaissance allegory would be aimed at reaching a final or conclusive meaning, baroque allegory, according to Benjamin, worked in the opposite way.

To be sure, iconography is in play, in several senses. The besmirched cloak becomes an iconographic sign because it is a prop, acted upon in a theatrical way. The sons showing the cloak will have to do their jobs as actors in order to make the cloak a convincing piece of evidence instead of just a prop, which brings the cloak beyond iconography into the realm of theatricality. (Such a legal use of props, as evidence, recurs in the story when Potiphar is confronted with Joseph's torn cloak, something that is elaborated in the Qur'an, sura 12, to prove that the woman is lying.) Moreover, although it is an image, the cloak acts dramatically, both showing and speaking of the events of how Joseph was attacked by a ferocious animal, had been dragged away, with the coat as the only sign of his presence at the place.

Culturally speaking, the cloak would be known to the audience as well. Joseph was Jacob's favourite son and, as a sign of his special love, Jacob had given him this particular cloak with many colours. As such, the cloak has become much more than an individual gift. It is symbolically charged in relation to a sociocultural history that is collectively re-worked. In the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions there is a pattern – much more than a pattern, even – of fathers selecting one son in particular, and most of the time this is not the regular, eldest one. Consequently, brotherly competition and deceit come in, whilst the human sphere becomes intertwined with the divine because of the miraculous, perhaps also arbitrary or incomprehensible ways in which God will save not just anybody, but this one in particular.

Yet another type of complex iconography verging toward theatricality is involved in terms of how Jacob's body speaks. There are distinct ways of expressing emotions, such as showing joy and grief. In this case the scene with Jacob flinging his arms apart and falling back like a corpse expresses grief because in this culture or moment in time grief is staged in this manner. The iconography becomes theatricality when the viewers not only read the signs correctly but are affected by them, feeling the grief themselves. Finally, as an iconographical motif, the

cloak connects this scene and this stage in Joseph's history to a later one, in which he will be in Egypt as the irreproachable servant to his Egyptian master Potiphar. Joseph will lose his cloak again, then, when he flees from Jempsar. Now the cloak is narrativized, acting in the plot like a character. It is also legalized, used as evidence. As such, it is open to misinterpretation – lying – and thus solicits a more refined second interpretation as evidenced in the Qur'an, when a witness comes forward. It becomes a semiotic object – a sign, which Umberto Eco in his *Theory of Semiotics* defined as everything that can be used in order to lie.²¹ In this respect the cloak comes into the realm of theatricality; viewers cannot help but ponder the issue of the lie in terms of justice, presented in an emotionally compelling way. Propelling the plot forward and captivating spectatorial interest through affect, the prop becomes a narrative character, a theatrical prompt, and a source of heightened reception.

Rembrandt's two paintings offer two different ways in which to engage the moment – which, for all these reasons combined, becomes what we call a 'critical moment'. What the difference between the two paintings explicates is this: the lie appears to be at odds with the dream, for how can a dream lie? The Washington painting addresses this question. For a dream does give testimony of both individual and collective tensions and desires, of cultural possibilities and impossibilities, as is evident at the beginning of Act II, when Jempsar's nurse ('Voester') sees her mistress lying asleep, partly undressed, having a dream. Jempsar is talking in her sleep and from what she expresses the nurse induces that she is dreaming about Joseph. In Act I we have already learned how passionately Jempsar is in love with him, and the latter has already expressed his unwillingness to return her love. This has made Jempsar desperate. In her dream, however, which is an inner theatre because of her talking and representing it, something else happens:

Jempsar: Last long, oh sweet pain
 Caused by love's pangs, shut deep.
 Does Venus's fire melt your heart in mine?
 Has she poured in mine your heart
 And both hearts, of one mind,
 paired together indistinguishably?

Nurse: Sweet dream, can you extinguish these flames?
 I shall, in Joseph's place, kiss her cheeks and mouth.

²¹ Eco, *Theory of Semiotics*, p. 10.

Jempsar: That's medicine of someone's mouth.
 Who kisses my sick heart to health?
 Are you thus sweetening this bitter suffering?
 But oh Joseph, hide my morning star!
 Run! Potiphar is threatening you there.
 He has come to begrudge our joy.
 There, he murders you in my lap.
 Where to flee death?
 Oh nurse, help, he murders, he rages, to get me.²²

Jempsar is dreaming of a union, and the verb 'paeren' is not innocent in this context. It can mean to pair, or to match, but also to mate, to have intercourse. In thinking that the dream might help to cure her mistress from her consuming passion, the nurse then decides to give the dream a touch of reality. She wants to act as Joseph and kiss the sleeping Jempsar. The text is ambiguous in terms of the nurse's role. She either takes the role of Joseph, acting as him, or she wants to kiss her mistress instead of Joseph. This seems to work at first. Jempsar expresses her joy that the kiss cures her, but then the dream radically changes, for suddenly Potiphar enters it, turning it into a nightmare. Jempsar shouts that Joseph has to run in order not to be killed in her lap (which brings back the 'paeren' as having intercourse). Then Potiphar seems to be turning on Jempsar herself. Consequently Jempsar wakes up in a fright, only to see that she is with her nurse, who has some trouble in bringing her back to her senses.

The dream clearly embodies an inner theatre, which, by means of the kiss of the nurse, is glued to an outer theatre. In another sense this outer theatre is an inner one still, as can be learned from several seventeenth-century critics of the theatre who described it as a dark and closed-off space in which perversities were acted out. In addition, more importantly, the theatrical character of society is what is at stake when we consider the scene in terms of what roles men and women or masters and slaves are allowed to play, to act out, or try out, and to what extent. Potiphar acts as the icon for a symbolical order that is deeply

²² *Joseph in Egypten*, ll. 215–30: '*Jempsar*: Duur lang, ô liefelijcke pijn / Van minneschichten, diep geschoten. / Smelt Venus vier uw hart in 't mij? / Heeft zy uw hart in 't mijn gegoten, / En bey de harten, eens geaert, / Ononderscheidelijck gepaert? / *Voester*: Genoegelijcke droom, kunt ghy dees vlammen blussen; / Ick wil, in Josephs plaets, haer mont en wangen kussen. *Jempsar*: Dat 's artseny van yemants mont. / Wie kust mijn quynent hart gezont? / Verzoet ghy zoo dit bitter lyen? Och Joseph, duick mijn morgenstar: / Och vlucht: daer dreight u Potiphar. / Hy komt ons deze vreught benyen. / Daer moort hy u in mynen schoot. / Waer heen gevloten voor de doot? / Och voester, help, hy moort, hy woet, om my te krygen.'

patriarchal, as a result of which women do not have the right to love who they want, or to be with whom they want. As such he not only appears in the dream to chase Jempsar and Joseph apart, but he also appears in between the two women kissing. In that context it is telling that Jempsar is not immediately framed here emblematically. Instead of being the uncontrolled and lustful woman bothering Joseph, she is the victim of forces that trouble her and that begrudge her feelings of love. She appears as such in other contemporary texts as well. The play functions in what may be called a sociocultural argument developed between works of art, which in turn can be defined as a collective form of staging subjectivity.

One piece of evidence of this artistic dialogue is Rembrandt's Washington painting. While Potiphar is extending a possessive arm toward the woman, and she is ambiguously pointing to some inner vision between Joseph, standing at the other side of the bed, and the red cloth, presumably his garment, hanging over the bed post, Joseph seems to be in a different realm. Not only is he standing at the other side (of the bed, of the couple), but his garment seems cut off and no legs below the seam are visible. He appears to float – an image, rather than a reality. This is reinforced by his left hand, which is just a bit above his arm, as if he were about to protest the allegation but refrains from doing so, from doing anything. His gaze is inward. These elements conspire to represent him as a dream image, conjured up by the woman who, while accusing him to Potiphar, also continues to be under the spell of his beauty – which is also her justification. This painting, then, 'argues' that the scene of the kiss remains an inner theatre, and that this is why the three protagonists can be together in the scene. According to story-logic, this would be a stretch; according to dream logic, it would be at the heart of the mechanism of dreaming, a condensation.

Representing the woman in the scene and the scene of the woman's dream in one image, Rembrandt is arguing for her right to desire as well as for her semiotic ability; for her status as more than property. His works participate here in a discussion surrounding the role of the woman, or how she is being brought to life by means of a culturally reworked memory (more on this below) to which a name must be attached. In the Tanakh and Bible the woman does not have a name. She is 'the wife of'. In the many reflections on the story and the many re-workings of it this becomes a primary matter of concern. She is *seen*, and this 'moment of recognition of the woman's subjectivity [...] must be the moment of naming' (Bal 2008:31). From medieval Zuleikha to

Mut-em-enet (again, the name given by Thomas Mann and adopted by Bal) the name determines the role that this woman can have, the ways in which she can stage herself or can be staged in the public realm. This is to say that her becoming a subject is staged by theatrical means.²³

Where or when the name Jempsar or Iempsar was conjured up we do not know. We can trace the texts that may have provided Vondel with an example, however. The English author Joshua Sylvester (1563–1618) lived in the Dutch Republic, in Middelburg, and was part of its intellectual circles, in which English and Dutch mingled intensively. In 1620, his *The Maidens Blush: or, Ioseph Mirror of Modesty, Map of Pietie, Maze of Destinie, or Rather Diuine Prouidence* was published. The text was a translation from the Latin version of the story by Girolamo Fracastoro (1478–1553), who has become famous for his text on syphilis and modes of infection, and, in general, was one of the more radical renaissance authors. When exactly his *Josephus* was written is uncertain, but it was published in his *Opera* in 1555. This was perhaps also the source for a play by the so-called Polish Pindarus, Szymon Szymonowicz (1558–1629) or Simon Simonides, who had travelled throughout Europe.²⁴ In 1587 he had published *Castus Joseph*. In all three texts the woman is named Iempsar. This does not mean that she appears as the same figure. Even carrying the same name, the Jempsar of Sylvester is distinctly different from Vondel's, for instance. A sign of this is the title alone, in which the woman is placed first, and one could argue that the same holds for Sylvester's story itself. In *The Maiden's Blush* Jempsar is made to fall in love by means of a potion, or poison, and is greatly confused as a consequence.

The difference between the Jempsar of Fracastoro/Sylvester and of Vondel pertains to cultural memory. It may be seen as a strong argument for the qualification of a so-called stable collective memory in favor, rather, of an active *communicative memory*.²⁵ This is to say that collective memory does not exist as a stable entity through time, but is constantly under construction. Such a memory must be meaningful and palpable, emotionally invested and collectively relevant. In this context emblematic figures can live throughout the ages as Joseph and

²³ On the names given to the woman, see Bal, *Loving Yusuf*, pp. 30–33.

²⁴ This name is a clear reference to the famous Greek poet Simonides from the fifth and sixth centuries before Christ. In Holland, he may have seen and been inspired by Cornelius Crocus's *Ioseph* (1535); see Crocus, *Ioseph*, ed. Bloemendal.

²⁵ On this concept see Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*.

Jempsar demonstrate. But whether it is a one-sided love or a mutual one, the relation and love between them will have to be reworked again and again in order to affect us and stay with us. Crucial in that reworking is the decisive scene between the two. The two come together in the theatrical *mise en scène* of a critical moment.

Mise en scène: The Critical Moment

In a passage from his prospectus for the Arcades Project, Benjamin cites the interior of the bourgeois apartment as a space for the staging of subjectivity, in which the individual ‘brings together the far away and the long ago.’²⁶ In the crucial scene of Jempsar’s confrontation with Joseph, it is rather the near-at-hand and soon-to-come that are being staged. Nevertheless, some form of ‘inner theatre’ appears to be in play. The scene is quite direct, at first, when Jempsar begs Joseph:

Jempsar: I fall before your knees and pay homage to your feet.
This body and this soul are prepared to pay for their debt
with such a death, as is befitting for one so desperate.
Why turn your countenance, so shy, and so ashamed
away from my face? Ay, leave that being ashamed for awhile.
What shame cannot do, can perhaps pity do,
for one who must and can die, because of you.
Please, brush away my tears.

Joseph: You crooked crocodile,
Let me go, let me go: you murder with this deceitful moaning.²⁷

The discrepancy between a woman who asks that Joseph brush away her tears and his qualification of her as a crocodile is considerable, although on a metaphorical level the tears of a crocodile are, of course, not real tears. Moreover, the metaphor of the crocodile for a woman who desires a man’s love was well known at the time. Thus the metaphor enhances the discrepancy between Jempsar’s and Joseph’s focalization,

²⁶ Benjamin, *Selected Writings: 1935–1938*, p. 38.

²⁷ *Joseph in Egypten*, ll. 1161–64: ‘*Jempsar:* Ick val voor uwe knien, en offer aen dees voeten / Dit lichaem, en dees ziel bereit haer schult te boeten, / Door zulck een doot, als een wanhopende betaemt. / Wat draeit ghy ’t aengezicht, zoo schuw, en zoo beschaemt, / Van mijn gezicht? ay zet de schaemte een poos ter zyden. / Wat schaemte niet vermogh, vermoge ’t medelyden / Met een die sterven moet en kan, om uwent wil. / Ay wisch mijn tranen af. / *Ioseph:* Doortrapte krokodil, / Laet los, laet los: ghy moort met dit bedrieghlijck steenen.’

because Jempsar is surely not feigning, or faking her tears. She is passionately in love and desperate. The scene offers a clash between two visions. Then, suddenly, there is the critical moment, after which it is uncertain, at first, whether Joseph flees or is sent away:

Jempsar: You stubborn, what a mockery! Stubborn man, go!
 Get you beyond, with the good name of this Morningstar,
 for whom you shut your eyes. Go report to Potiphar
 how manly, how chaste Joseph has behaved,
 so that for eternity insults can be thrown in my face
 by you: how Jempsar was not good enough for her slave
 who posed himself for the entire house so decently.
 But no, you will not cool your courage on me like this!
 You found my love too low, and you will feel my revenge.
 I know how to cover up that shameful spot with a cloak
 of honourability. I will be ahead of you.
 Oh nurse, slaves, help! Oh, who will listen to my complaints.
 Help slaves, nurse, help! A slave wants to rape me.
 Oy Potiphar, assist; oy nurse, help your woman.
 Where is the entire family now? Is no one faithful?
 There he goes, running, ay he flees. What good is my complaining?
 This is that cold servant. He left me his cloak
 as a witness. You slaves, go after him.
 Oy, take me aside, until this is past.²⁸

Jempsar delivers a speech that concludes the story, and yet anticipates further action. In a manner analogous to Ruben's speech at the end of *Joseph in Dothan*, Jempsar imagines a scene that is still to come. Rather than the crucial scene of Joseph's report to Potiphar being *staged*, this scene is imaginatively projected by Jempsar, whose declaration 'I will be ahead of you' (l. 1180) rings true in multiple ways. The play is literally 'getting ahead of itself', just as in *Joseph in Dothan* the scene with

²⁸ *Joseph in Egypten*, ll. 1170–88: '*Jempsar*: Hardtneckige, o wat hoon! hardtneckige, ga henen, / Ga henen met dien roem van zulck een morgenstar, / Voor wie ghy d'ooogen sluit. ga melt nu Potiphar, / Hoe mannelijck, hoe kuisch zich Joseph heb gequeten; / Op dat het eeuwich my in 't aenzicht werd verweten, / Van hem; hoe Jempsar veronwaerdicht van haer' slaef, / Zich hebbe, voor al 't hof, ten toon gestelt zoo braef: / Maer neen, ghy zult noch zoo uw' moedt aen my niet koelen. / Ghy hebt mijn min versmaet, ghy zult mijn wraeck gevoelen. / Ick weet die schantvleck wel te decken met een' schijn / Van eerbaerheit: ick zelf zal in de voorhael zijn. / Och voester, slaven helpt. o wie verhoort mijn klaghten. / Helpt slaven, voester helpt: een slaef wil my verkrachten. / Och Potiphar, sta by. och voester, help uw vrouw. / Waer blijft nu al 't gezin? is niemant my getrouw? / Daer vliedt hy: och hy vliedt. wat moght mijn kermen baten? / Dat is die koele knecht. hy heeft my 't kleet gelaten, / Tot een getuigenis. ghy slaven jaeght hem na. / Och leit my aen een zy, tot dat dit over ga.'

Jacob seems to arrive in advance without ever quite making it onto the stage. Here the *mise en scène* occurs elsewhere: offstage or, as in Benjamin, invisibly, but here visually caught in words. Potiphar's precipitous arrival, as with that of Jacob, occurs within an interior theatre, and the 'scene' which the audience is asked to (en)vision cannot be 'seen' but is literally present.

Consequently, rather than looking *at* characters, as in traditional representative theatre, here the spectator is asked to look *with* Jempsar, to see what she is seeing. The importance of this shift in perspective should not be underestimated, as it entails a dramatic change in the locus of the viewer. The latter is asked to adopt the position of the character or at least to enter into the theatre of her consciousness. 'Looking with' entails a reversal of the classical Cartesian (theatre) subject, whose autonomous place outside the stage of action is suddenly called into doubt. Exterior vision would then be replaced with a shocking intimacy or, as Bal would have it, with 'sym-pathy', a seeing- and suffering-with.²⁹ Sympathy also plays an important part in Davis's elaborations on theatricality. In her argument, however, theatricality is opposed to sympathy. It is 'the act of withholding sympathy that makes us spectators to ourselves and others.'³⁰ Being critical, in her argument, involves a shift from the emotional involvement she associates with sympathy towards a situation in which we choose to withhold sympathy. It also requires a theatricality that is *outer*.

Yet the point concerning the subjectivity of vision is that we cannot simply choose how to see what we see. Instead, how we see what we see is a culturally and historically specific response to the address presented to us by the *mise en scène*, which is, here, the *mise en scène* of this scene in Vondel's play. Moreover, neither the conditioned choice to withhold sympathy nor the failure to sympathize necessarily leads to critical thinking.³¹ In order to understand the critical potential of withholding sympathy we must ask what turns such an act of withholding sympathy into a critical act rather than being a simple dissimulation or a plain refusal. The example of this scene in *Joseph in Dothan* suggests the critical potential of the opposite movement, as a result of which change in perspective becomes useful to understand theatre as a 'critical

²⁹ Bal, *Loving Yusuf*, pp. 95–116.

³⁰ Davis, 'Theatricality and Civil Society', p. 154.

³¹ For a more extensive elaboration of this critique of Davis, see Bleeker 'Theatre of/ or Truth'.

vision machine'. This is to say that theatre is not so much the locus of illusion, masking, and play-acting, but of questioning and altering the perspective from which one is acting and experiencing. Or, to put this differently still, the audience is not so much looking *at* something that is placed in perspective, but is taken up in a perspective instead.

The difference, which is critical, also emerges from a confrontation between the two Rembrandt paintings. In the one in Berlin, the theatricality appeals to a sense of outer theatre. Rather than presenting us with an inner vision of the love-sick Jemphsar, we see before us, clearly, a *mise en scène* that embodies the question of what would happen if...: if Joseph would participate in his own trial; if he were to answer the false accusation; if he and Potiphar would actually engage in a confrontation. Here the woman accuses, by means of her gesture of pointing to the garment on the bed post. Potiphar, coming closer to her and thus being more possessive in his gesture, is no longer a judge but a participant. Joseph's gesture of protesting his innocence is a clear indication of an outer theatre. Whoever sees this can 'hear' all three voices, see the gestures, interpret the scene. Such a scene absorbs the viewer as one who is taken up in its perspective.

The notion of a 'change of perspective' entails the use of a term from visual analysis, and as such it can be deployed in the listening to, or reading of, a dramatic text. Drama can be seen to possess a certain visual logic analogous to that of perspective in painting. Just as perspective structures our reading of a painting, so too 'dramatic structure functions as a framework that presents the audience with a perspective on what is there to be seen as a result of which the audience knows how to look and how to understand what it sees.'³² In both drama and painting, such structures must themselves remain invisible in order to fulfil their function, which, to put it succinctly, is that of naturalizing the representation as truthful. Perception of what one might call the construction of perspective risks the dissolution of its intended effects. That is to say, it risks destabilizing the apparent self-evidence of its alleged truthfulness and drawing attention to the construction of its *mise en scène*.

Far from desiring to produce a Brechtian estrangement *avant la lettre*, Jemphsar's imagined scene attempts to enact the perspectival shift unnoticeably. Rembrandt, we can speculate, brought this up, not in

³² Bleeker, *Visuality in the Theatre*, p. 10

either painting but in the combination of both. The critical moment occurs in the gap between the two paintings; that between inner and outer theatre and the question of how truthful visual representation can be.³³ With respect to this, all the verbal exchanges of the preceding acts in Vondel's play can be seen as upholding that shift. Acts II and III present us with a seemingly endless series of arguments and digressions whose purpose would be to lead us to a critical moment without triggering awareness of the change that will occur, and thus to 'naturalize' the shift from dramatic action to narration, and from representation to a kind of interior theatre. The fact that this shift entails an enormous risk would thus serve to justify the verbal machinations of the preceding acts. But why, one might ask, take this risk? Why stage the climactic scene by means of an interior theatre, both here and at the conclusion of *Joseph in Dothan*? Questions such as these lead us to define the theatrical moment at stake here as a *critical* moment, in a double sense of the word. Analogously, Rembrandt draws attention to this by presenting an inner and an outer theatre and submitting the question of truth and justice to a viewer caught up inside a perspective.

Whereas Benjamin's discussion of internal theatre(s) of consciousness occurs in the context of the late nineteenth century, during the heyday of *phantasmagoria*, the inner theatre we see here is closer to the rhetorical structure of allegory as Benjamin elaborated it in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. One aspect of his definition of allegory concerned the 'nonexistence of what it presents'.³⁴ Elaborating on this Benjaminian idea of allegory, Bainard Cowan stated that an 'unfaithful leap constitutes the essential discontinuity of allegory; in the allegorical drama it is concomitant with a breaking of the fictional "contract" of consistency in the level of realism by the author's suddenly introducing a higher fictionality into the scene'.³⁵ And indeed, Jempсар's speech, in her inner theatre, introduces a higher level of fictionality into the scene, redoubling the staging by pointing towards a scene that is not there. These two elements – a (suddenly) heightened fiction, and a 'pointing towards' that which is absent – already provide the simplest definition of allegory. Jempсар's act of 'pointing towards the absent scene' is quite literal. More importantly, the sudden shift recalls Carl Horst's

³³ We are not claiming an intentional 'debate' here. For the problematic nature of any appeal to artistic intention, see Bal, *Travelling Concepts* (ch. 'Intention').

³⁴ Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 233.

³⁵ Cowan, 'Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory', p. 120.

description of allegory, quoted by Benjamin, as entailing ‘a crossing of borders into a different mode’, a ‘violation of frontiers’, and a ‘disruption.’³⁶ That shift is literally embodied in the difference between the two paintings.

Relevantly for our discussion, Benjamin analyzes this change of mode within drama as revealing a longing on the part of the text to transform into the visual:

The desire to guarantee the sacred character of any script – there will always be a conflict between sacred standing and profane comprehensibility – leads to complexes, to hieroglyphics. This is what happens in the baroque. Both externally and stylistically [...] the written word tends towards the visual.³⁷

Benjamin’s usage of the term ‘hieroglyphic’ recalls the formulation of Diderot, for whom the ideal drama would present itself as a fixed tableau, or a series of tableaux, whose meaning could be read at a single glance. As in the final scene in *Joseph in Dothan*, the scene here does indeed seem to tend towards the pictorial, but the *tableau* to be realized remains invisible, or rather, only internally visible.

The tableau-like effects, here made evident in the a-temporal simultaneity of Joseph’s flight, Potiphar’s wrath and Jemphar’s duplicity, suggest a similarity of the medium of theatre itself with Rembrandt’s paintings of this scene, in which Potiphar appears not at the door but by the bed, so that the failed seduction and the ensuing confrontation overlap in a single image.³⁸ But in Vondel’s case such simultaneity is created only imaginatively. It is almost as if Vondel, while admittedly inspired by a painting, succumbs to a certain iconoclasm, an admission of the ultimate paucity of visual representation, recalling Benjamin’s description of the baroque’s ‘deep-rooted intuition of the problematic character of art.’³⁹ Dramatic action seems inadequate to depict the climactic scene but, ultimately, so too is visual representation, so that the text must resort to the conjuration of an internal (invisible) theatre as the only remaining ‘stage’ for representation.

³⁶ Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 177.

³⁷ Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, pp. 175–76.

³⁸ For more on the Rembrandt paintings, see Bal, *Reading Rembrandt*, pp. 139–62. On simultaneity as characteristic of baroque allegory, see Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 194.

³⁹ Benjamin *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 176.

This sort of pushing of the text against its own aesthetic limits (be these textual *or* visual) in turn suggests a final resonance with allegory. In its presentation of what is definitely ‘not there’ as still present (one could say, somewhat awkwardly, in its presentation of absence as presence) the text suggests that emotive force, like ‘truth’ in allegory, can only be produced but never fixed; in other words, *affect* is an *effect*. Benjamin makes the distinction here between truth and knowledge. Whereas ‘knowledge is possession’, truth is only ever ‘bodied forth’. It is in fact, always ‘already representing itself’ (*bereits als ein sich-Darstellendes*) and comes to exist only *through* and *in* this representation.⁴⁰ Here we could say that Vondel’s text only manages to move us properly through the movement or shift that occurs in this passage, a shift that can only ever be ‘traversed’ but never grasped; that exists only as, and in, representation.

The moment as such would thus appear ungraspable; and yet, precisely at this moment, something is definitely being grasped. As Jempsar recounts her ‘vision’ of Joseph’s report to Potiphar, and then determines to forestall this confrontation (theatrically) by adopting the role of honourability (a role that is imaged, significantly, in the emblem of the cloak), something changes hands. ‘There he goes, running, ay he flees. What good is my complaining? / This is that cold servant. He left me his cloak.’ Joseph’s cloak, already weighted with significance, will become the key evidence – or as she puts it, her ‘witness’ – in Jempsar’s accusation of rape, and yet there is, curiously, no sense of struggle over its possession. In the biblical account she chases after Joseph and rends his coat; in the Qur’an, it is specified that it is rent from behind. Here there is neither chase nor rending, but rather a changing of hands whose manner is entirely obscured by the narration. One moment, presumably, the cloak is in Joseph’s possession, and the next it is Jempsar’s, without our ever being certain as to the manner in which this change came about. The actual ‘moment’ of contestation, or of this change of hands, remains in doubt: we cannot grasp how Jempsar grasped it.

All this allows us to radicalize the definition of theatricality as a critical vision machine, in considering different modes of the moment *as critical*. One concerns the shift from external to internal theatre, and

⁴⁰ Benjamin *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, pp. 29–30. Portions of translation modified.

from looking-at to looking-with. But the latter pair can no longer be projected onto the former, as Rembrandt demonstrated in the Berlin painting. One can be enticed to 'look with' in outer as well as inner theatre; what changes is the cast of characters. This insight, more than the identity of the cast of actors, is what makes Rembrandt's response to Vondel's play an important source for the understanding of word and image relations. The other of these modes, coextensive but not entirely equivalent, is this obscured instant of a possession changing hands which remains outside of our (but not Jempsar's) grasp. In the moment of internal, imaginative visioning a material change occurs, but this material shift is itself unseen and seemingly unmotivated. We are dealing with a moment of heightened vision combined with the inexplicable transformation (or, at least, transference) of material substance that can be read as analogous to the final movement of allegory in Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*. According to Benjamin, the near-unbridgeable gap between finite phenomena and the infinite realm of the idea is enacted in the baroque through a process extrinsic to the properly dramatic action; allegory traverses this disjunction, at the end, by means of divine transubstantiation. Yet in the case of *Joseph in Egypt*, transubstantiation is not the work of divine powers. It is rather as if this force, which has the power to emotively move us, possesses also the power to literally move things. In other words, there is a parallel between these movements. Just as the shift between external and internal theatre occurs suddenly and without apparent cause, so too the movement of the cloak from Joseph's to Jempsar's possession seems to occur without causality.

Such a radical shift demands our attention, since the moment is critical both in terms of importance for the development of the story and in the sense that it cannot be seized, or grasped, but only traversed. This leads to a form of heightened critical *attention* that is provoked by a decisive, that is to say a critical moment in a here-and-now that we have to enact. The critical moment can be defined in a twofold way, then, in terms of theatricality. First, the moment itself is critical in the sense that it embodies an epistemologically ungraspable but ontologically pivotal shift. Secondly, as such the moment is not something that leads to intensification only, but to a heightened attention that is critical because it provokes us to ask what it is we are participating in. In terms of cultural analysis, the enactment of that moment as here and now is decisive. Consequently, the *mise en scène* of Joseph and Jempsar's confrontation, and the critical moment it entails, is not

determined or framed beforehand, either in terms of emblems or iconography. It is part of a 'scenic memory' that is always a 'communicative memory' in which we, in whatever times or circumstances, participate. Analysis, then, in taking things apart, also demands that we touch, and connect to what we handle, bringing our own inner theatre in play in relation to a collective theatricality that is outer. What matters is that theatricality is a communicative affect emerging from a process of spectatorship, and that turns the theatre, when practiced by such subtle subjects as Vondel, into the key medium in which to pose social dilemmas before spectators capable of engaging with them in integrated fashion on the levels of reason and affect, morality, justice and emotion.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE HUMANIST TRADITION – *MARIA STUART* (1646)

James A. Parente, Jr. and Jan Bloemendal

The Play, its Subject and its Sources

Maria Stuart of Gemartelde Majesteit (*Mary Stuart, or Martyred Majesty*) was published anonymously in 1646. According to the title page, it was printed ‘in Cologne, at the old printery’ (‘te Keulen, in d’oude druckerye’), which in fact was Vondel’s publisher Abraham de Wees. It was also this printer who paid the poet’s fine when he was condemned to pay one hundred and eighty guilders.¹ Through the Roman Catholic ‘crucified royal heroine’ and ‘crowned martyr’² Mary Stuart, who had died some sixty years earlier, Vondel indirectly but unmistakably honoured his contemporary King Charles I, and through the figure of the ambitious Elizabeth I, criticized Cromwell, the leader of Parliament and Charles’s rebellious opponent.³ For the Amsterdam Protestants and the administrators of the Amsterdam Schouwburg, this alignment with the Roman Catholic Queen of Scots was unacceptable. From their point of view, the play was polemical, blasphemous, and inflammatory, and they ensured that the court fined Vondel for his stance. The play was ostentatiously dedicated to Edward, Mary’s only great-grandson and Count Palatine of the Rhine and Duke of Bavaria, who, like Vondel, had recently converted to Catholicism.⁴ Vondel also

¹ The text is published in WB, 5, pp. 162–238. Kristiaan P. Aercke translated the play into English as *Mary Stuart, or Tortured Majesty*; the translations of *Maria Stuart* in this chapter are either taken from this translation or based on it.

² *Maria Stuart*, dedication to Eduard, WB, 5, p. 164, ll. 3–4: ‘Koningklijke Kruisheldin en gekroonde Martelares’.

³ See Parente, *Religious Drama and the Humanist Tradition*, p. 200; Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 1, pp. 416–17; Vondel, *Maria Stuart*, transl. Aercke, pp. 11–12. Aercke also points to Vondel’s simplification of the parallel opposition between Catholics and Protestants, and monarchists and republicans, *ibidem*, pp. 10–11.

⁴ See Vondel’s letter of dedication, WB 5, p. 166, ll. 51–54: ‘Ick nam de vrymoedigheid dit treurspel uwe Vorstelijcke Doorluchtigheit op te dragen, die d’eerste van uwe Grootmoeders nakomelingen haer heilige asschen en geest verquickt met den Katholijcken Roomschen Godtsdienst tomhelzen, en haer godtvruchtige voetstappen na te

had a personal reason for this choice of subject: Mary was executed in the year of his birth, 1587. This symbolic connection between both events allowed him to celebrate his own conversion. More importantly, Mary Stuart's execution sixty years earlier offered Vondel a possibility of responding to the English political situation in his own times. Ironically, the poet himself never saw the play staged.⁵

In *Maria Stuart* Vondel chose a much-debated subject.⁶ The story was familiar enough: Mary I, Queen of Scots, or Mary Stuart (1542–1587) was six days old when her father King James V of Scotland died, and she inherited the throne. In 1558, she married Francis, Dauphin of France, who, however, after becoming King Francis II, died in 1560. She returned to Scotland, and five years later she married Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, who died in an explosion in 1567. She then married James Hepburn, 4th Earl of Bothwell, who was considered Darnley's murderer. After an uprising against the couple, she was forced to abdicate the throne in favour of her one-year-old son James VI. She fled to England, seeking protection from her cousin Queen Elizabeth I. Elizabeth, however, immediately ordered her arrest: Mary presented a threat to Elizabeth's reign, since many English Roman Catholics considered her the legitimate sovereign of England. After twenty years in custody, Mary was sentenced to death for treason. On 8 February 1587, she was beheaded. Vondel's play begins on 7 February 1587, the day before the execution, and ends on Mary's final day.

Although the general subject was familiar, Vondel consulted several historical works on Mary's life in fashioning his play.⁷ Vondel acknowledged a major source on the colophon of his play: 'Testimony

volgen' ('I took the liberty to dedicate this tragedy to your Royal Highness, since you are the first of the grandchildren of your grandmother to invigorate her holy ashes and spirit by embracing Roman Catholic faith and by following in her pious footsteps.') On Vondel's conversion, see the chapter by Pollmann in this volume. As Kristiaan Aercke put it (Vondel, *Maria Stuart*, transl. Aercke, p. 8): '*Mary Stuart* was an act of faith on the part of its author: faith, in spite of evidence to the contrary, that the Queen of Scots was innocent; faith in the justice of the political and religious causes which the poet himself had come to embrace; and, last but not least, faith in his interpretation of the theory and practice of poetic drama.'

⁵ But it was printed. On Vondel's proofs of *Maria Stuart*, see Bloemendal, 'New Philology', elsewhere in this volume.

⁶ He may have had the wish to interfere in topical debate; on the relationship between literary culture and public opinion see Bloemendal and Van Dixhoorn, 'Literary Cultures and Public Opinion'.

⁷ Since his sources are treated at length in the *Volledige Werken* (WB, 5, pp. 940–44, annotations made by C.G.N. de Vooy and C.C. van der Graft), we can be brief about them here. See also Van de Graft, 'De bronnen van Vondels treurspel Maria Stuart'.

from Camden, Elizabeth's historian, a Protestant' ('Getuigenis uit Kamdeen, Elisabeths historischrijver, een Protestant').⁸ This testimony is the translation of a passage from William Camden's *Annales rerum Anglicarum et Hibernicarum regnante Elizabeth* (*Annals of English and Spanish History during the Reign of Elizabeth*).⁹ As always, one has to be cautious with the author's own statements, for more sources are traceable. These would later be printed in a compilation work by Samuel Jebb, *De vita et rebus gestis Mariae Scotorum reginae* (*The Life and Deeds of Mary, Queen of Scots*, 1725): a part of *L'Histoire de l'incomparable Reyne Marie Stuart* (*History of the Incomparable Queen Mary Stuart*) by the French Jesuit Nicolas Caussin,¹⁰ and Florimond Remond's *Opgang, Voortgang, en Nedergang der ketteryen dezer eeuwe* (*Rise, Advancement and Fall of the Heresies of this Age*).¹¹ Other sources for Vondel's play included in Jebb's compilation were Jacques-Auguste du Thou, *Historiae sui temporis* (*History of His Own Times*, 1604–1608) and Romoaldus Scotus, *Summarium de morte Mariae Stuartae* (*Short Report of the Death of Mary Stuart*, 1588). Except for Camden, all these authors were Roman Catholics. In these 'historical sources', Vondel – as an heir to the humanist tradition – went *ad fontes*.

Vondel's commingling of Catholic and Protestant sources did not mitigate his unabashed partisanship for the Catholic 'martyr' in the eyes of his contemporaries. But his historical ecumenicalism was intended not to inflame sectarian tensions but to bring together Catholics and Protestants under the aegis of an idealized vision of an irenic, universal Roman Catholic Church.

Vondel and the Humanist Tradition

By the time Vondel published *Maria Stuart* in 1646, tragedies in Dutch generally appeared in neo-classical form.¹² The neo-classical style originated in the humanist school plays of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that were written by the teachers of grammar and rhetoric in humanist (i.e. Latin) schools for the edification of their

⁸ WB, 5, p. 940.

⁹ The first part appeared in London, 1615. Editions of the entire work were printed Leiden 1625, London 1627, and Leiden 1639.

¹⁰ Jebb, *De vita et rebus gestis Mariae Scotorum reginae* (1725), vol. 2, pp. 53–104.

¹¹ Its subtitle runs: *Uit het Frans in 't Nederduyts vertaelt door v[ander] K[r]uyssen] P Antwerpen, 1646.*

¹² See also Parente, *Religious Drama and the Humanist Tradition*, *passim*.

students in Latin style and elocution, and, most importantly, Christian ethics and the Christian (Catholic or Protestant) interpretation of historical or contemporary events. Latin school drama enjoyed an efflorescence in the Low Countries of the sixteenth century, and some of the acknowledged masters of the form, Gulielmus Gnapheus (1493–1567), Georgius Macropedius (1487–1558) and Cornelius Schonaeus (1540–1611), who honed their craft in schools in The Hague, 's-Hertogenbosch, Utrecht, and Gouda, published works that were disseminated across Northern Europe, chiefly in the lands of the Holy Roman Empire.¹³ In the sixteenth century, the comic language and form of the Roman dramatist Terence was especially popular, but as the century ended, the tragedies of Seneca were more widely imitated. In keeping with the late antique prescription that tragedy should illustrate the fall of kings or the tumultuous affairs of state, academic playwrights turned to historical events from antiquity through the early seventeenth century for their dramatic material. The rediscovery of Seneca as a stylistic model coincided with the outbreak of the Eighty Years' War, and humanist tragedians from the Catholic and Protestant camps turned the school stage into a forum for debating the politics of the day. Caspar Casparius (1569–c. 1642) and Daniel Heinsius (1580–1657) adapted Seneca for their historical tragedies on the heinous assassination of William of Orange.¹⁴ In the Catholic provinces, however, Panagius Salius (d. 1595) presented arguments against revolution, and the prolific Leuven playwright, Nicolaus Vernulaeus (1583–1649) encoded political messages of contemporary relevance about kingship, *prudentia*, and the primacy of the Roman Church over secular kings in his medieval and early modern historical dramas. Alongside these Latin-language works, Dutch-language playwrights such as Guiliam van Nieuwelandt (1584–1635) and Jacob Duym (1547–before 1624) adapted and even 'classicized' the traditional form of rhetoricians' plays to convey lessons in political deportment, and, as is well known, P. C. Hooft (1581–1647) was an early proponent of the tragic form as a vehicle for moral-philosophical and political instruction.¹⁵ At the turn

¹³ See, for instance, Bloemendal, *Spiegel van het dagelijks leven?* and Bloemendal and Norland, *Companion to Neo-Latin Drama*.

¹⁴ See Heinsius, *Auriacus*, ed. Bloemendal and Bloemendal, 'De dramatische moord op de Vader des Vaderlands'.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Porteman and Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen*, pp. 278–83 on Van Nieuwelandt and pp. 215–28 on Hooft; Grootes and Schenkeveld, 'The Dutch Revolt and the Golden Age', pp. 197–98; 203–07.

of the seventeenth century, historical plays, be they in Dutch or Latin, reflected the passionate fervour of the Eighty Years' War, and the form was readily used to celebrate the heroic grandeur of the past – such as the revolt of the *Batavi*, or the defeat of the assassins of Count Floris V – in order to stoke the patriotic enthusiasm of the Dutch, and to contrast ancient and medieval moments of dire adversity with later seventeenth-century political and economic achievements.

By the late 1640s Latin historical tragedies were rapidly disappearing from the academic stage, displaced by Dutch-language translations, or even completely new historical works. Vondel's *Maria Stuart* is, to a certain extent, a conservative retreat into a once popular dramatic form. When viewed against the formal sophistication of *Gysbreght van Aemstel* and the complex characterizations of the Old Testament Joseph and his brothers in *Joseph in Dothan*, *Maria Stuart* seems unidimensional and uninteresting. Is *Maria Stuart* a step backward for Vondel? To what extent has he been able to incorporate his zeal for Catholicism into his dramatic work without sacrificing the complexities of his earlier plays? How does Vondel transform earlier humanist treatments of the subject into a worthy subject for neo-classical, Aristotelian drama? For most of the twentieth century, Vondel scholarship has betrayed a tendency to diminish the importance of works such as *Maeghden* (*Maidens*) and *Maria Stuart* in order to reclaim Vondel as a great *Dutch* (*lege*: Protestant) playwright. In the analysis that follows, we re-examine Vondel's work in light of earlier humanist dramatic treatments of Mary Stuart. Although it is unlikely that Vondel knew these works because of their limited circulation in print, the comparison will reveal the way in which Vondel transformed previous neo-Senecan explorations of the topic into a more Aristotelian tragedy of action.

Adrianus Roulerius's *Stuarta Tragoedia* (Stuart, a tragedy)

Stuarta tragoedia,¹⁶ written by the Catholic neo-Latin poet and priest Adrianus Roulerius or Adrien de Roulers (d. 1597) is one of the first tragedies on Mary Stuart's death ever written.¹⁷ This Roulerius was

¹⁶ Roulerius, *Stuarta tragoedia*, ed. Woerner; see also Woerner, 'Die älteste Maria Stuart-Tragödie'; Kipka, *Maria Stuart*, pp. 94–103; Phillips, *Images of a Queen*, pp. 193–95.

¹⁷ See Kipka, *Maria Stuart*, pp. 94–103 and Woerner's introduction. The very first play was the *Maria Stuarta tragoedia* by Jean de Bordes, printed in Milan, 1589, and

born in Lille, where he also died. He became a priest, who taught at the Benedictine Abbey of Marchienne at Douai and later became a vicar and the rector of the seminary in his native city.¹⁸ As a teacher of *poesis* at the Douai Abbey he wrote his Latin tragedy, which was performed by his pupils on 13 September 1593. The play, the full title of which runs *Stuarta tragoedia sive Caedes Mariae serenissimae Scot[orum] Reginae in Anglia perpetrata* (*Stuart, a Tragedy, or the Murder of Mary, the Most Illustrious Queen of Scots, Committed in England*), was thus performed and published only six years after the execution.

The play is well-documented and based on historical sources, even down to the smallest detail.¹⁹ Roulerius mentions them himself, but as Woerner, the editor of *Stuarta*, has shown, some sources were mere 'name-dropping', since they did not even treat the final events.²⁰ The humanist will have used the 'Brevis chronologia vitae et gloriosi per martyrium exitus Mariae Stuartae' ('Short Chronology of the Life and Glorious Martyr's Death of Mary Stuart'), which was a supplement to the first edition of Romoaldus Scotus's *Mariae Stuartae [...] supplicium et mors pro fide catholica constantissimae* (*The Punishment and Death for the Catholic Faith of the Most Constant Mary Stuart*) of 1587.²¹

twice produced before May 1590; see Phillips, 'Jean de Bordes' "Maria Stuarta tragoedia" and Phillips, *Images of a Queen*, pp. 189–93.

¹⁸ On him M.A. Nauwelaerts, *Moderne Encyclopedie van de Wereldliteratuur*, 8, p. 177; Roulerius, *Maria Stuarta*, ed. Woerner, pp. iii–xx; A. Roersch, *Biographie Nationale de Belgique*, 20, coll. 219–21.

¹⁹ Woerner, in his edition of *Stuarta tragoedia*, pp. iii–iv: 'Er verwertet bis ins kleinste eine Flugschrift von Augenzeugen über die Enthauptung, ja er gewinnt die besten, fast realistisch anmutenden Dialogstellen seines Werkes, wie die Gespräche Marias mit Buckhurst, Beale und Paulet, durch sorgfältige Nachbildung des eigenen brieflichen Berichtes der Königin über die Vorgänge in Fotheringay an den Erzbischof von Glasgow.' ('Right down to the last detail, he uses a pamphlet about the beheading written by witnesses, and indeed he attains to the best, nigh on realistic-seeming dialogues of his oeuvre, such as Mary's discussions with Buckhurst, Beale and Paulet, through careful emulation of the queen's actual letter to the Archbishop of Glasgow on the events in Fotheringay.')

²⁰ Woerner in *Stuarta tragoedia*, p. viii: 'Die drei [John Lesly von Ross, *De origine, moribus et rebus gestis Scotorum* (Rome, 1578) Natalis Comes, *Universae historiae sui temporis libri XXX* (Venice, 1581) or Gilbertus Genebradsu, *Chronographiae libri IV* (Cologne, 1584)] also werden von dem Professor der Rhetorik lediglich aus Gelehrteneitelkeit vorgehoben. Und es fragt sich, ob er sie je geöffnet hat.' ('Thus the three are put forward by the Professor of Rhetoric merely for reasons of academic vanity. And it has to be asked whether he ever opened them.')

²¹ Romoaldus Scotus, *Mariae Stuartae Scotorum reginae, principis catholicae, nuper ab Elisabetha regina et ordinibus Angliae post novendecim annorum captivitatem in arce Fodringhaye interfectae supplicium et mors pro fide catholica constantissimae. In Anglia*

Another of Roulerius's direct sources was some letters of Mary Stuart's, compiled by Adam Blackwood in 1587, *Martyre de la royne d'Escosse* (*Martyrdom of the Queen of Scotland*).²² As a humanist, Roulerius went *ad fontes*; as an apologist, however, he selected his sources carefully.²³

As a literary work the tragedy is modelled on the five-act scheme of Seneca's tragedies, and moulded into his lofty style as well. In the first act Roulers makes the ghost of Henry VIII appear from hell. In the second scene he depicts Elizabeth as a monstrous *malefactorix* in a dialogue with 'Dudelaeus' (Dudley, i.e. Leicester). This criminal creature is contrasted with the innocence of Mary in Act II, shown in a conversation with her doctor. Her only 'sin' is the Scots' Catholic faith.²⁴ She is told that the court is formed and will meet soon. The main scene of the third act is a discussion between Mary, Buckhurst, Beale, and Paulet. She ponders on the injustice that will be done to her, now 'impiety has triumphed over the good'.²⁵ Mary's innocent martyrdom is highlighted

vernacula lingua primum conscripta, [...] Additis succinctis quibusdam animadversionibus et notis, brevisque totius reginae eiusdem vitae Chronologia, ex optimis quibusque auctoribus collecta (Cologne: Godefridus Kempensis, 1587). A second edition, without the 'Brevis chronologia', was published in Ingolstadt (at Wolfgang Eder's printery), 1588.

²² The second edition has the title: *Martyre de la royne d'Escosse, douairiere de France, Contentant le vray discours des trahisons à elle faictes à la suscitation d'Elisabeth Angloise, par lequel les mensonges, calomnies et faulses accusations dressees contre ceste tres-vertueuse, tres-Catholique et tres-illustre Princesse sont esclarcies et son innocence averée. Avec son oraison funebre prononcée en l'Elgise nostre dame de Paris. Pretiosa in conspectu Domini mors sanctorum eius* (*Martyrdom of the Queen of Scotland, Dowager of France, containing the true story of the treason committed to her on the initiative of Elizabeth of England, in which the lies, calumnies and false accusations brought forward against this highly virtuous, highly Catholic and highly illustrious Princess are elucidated and her innocence is proved. With her funeral oration delivered in the Church Notre Dame of Paris. The death of his saints is dear to God*) (Edinburgh [= Paris], Jean Nafield, 1588). Mary Stuart was a patron for this Adam Blackwood (1539–1613); she enabled him to study at Paris and Toulouse. Blackwood taught philosophy at Paris. At the time of Mary's death, he was Judge at the Court of Poitiers on her behalf. Woerner, in his edition (pp. xii–xvii), shows exactly which source inspired each scene.

²³ As Phillips, *Images of a Queen*, pp. 194–95, states: '[he] relied heavily, if not exclusively, on the principal propaganda documents produced by Mary's supporters on the continent, and particularly on those written by Adam Blackwood'. These texts were particularly available in Douai, the centre of Counter-Reformation, because of the mercantile connections between Douai and England, and because in this city the first English seminary was established; see Kipka, *Maria Stuart im Drama der Weltliteratur*, p. 95.

²⁴ Roulerius, *Stuarta*, l. 449: 'fidei professus dogma Romanae Scotus' (the Scots believing in the dogma of Catholic faith). The quotations are from Woerner's edition; unless stated otherwise, the translations are my own.

²⁵ Roulerius, *Stuarta*, l. 770: 'Vicit impietas bonos'.

by a comparison to David: 'Thus Saul in madness wreaked havoc on Abraham's descendant David; but he was able to flee the threat of the ruler who chased him. For us in our captivity there is no window open, no Michol who can let us go.'²⁶ But she is prepared to die for 'ancient faith.'²⁷ In the fourth act she is told that Elizabeth actually wants her death. Her desperate position is underlined by Paulet's warnings not to try and flee. In the fifth act the scaffold is ready, even though it is not visible throughout the act. Two maidens relate the beheading itself, whereupon the executioner brings Mary's head in.

Just as in Seneca's *Thyestes*, Roulerius opens the play with the monologue of a ghost, and just as in Seneca's dramas, the first four acts are concluded with a chorus song. The style and metres of these songs, however, are derived from Virgil and Horace, while the other parts of the acts are written in the iambic trimeters of Seneca's plays. In line with his classical model, Roulerius viewed the protagonist more as a victim of fate and political machinations.²⁸ But he was also convinced that piety with regard to Mary Stuart involved assailing the Protestant heresy that had martyred her.²⁹ The action of *Stuarta* concentrates on the last few hours of Mary's life and on her friends' and foes' efforts to save her or to persuade Elizabeth to have Mary executed, and, finally, on Mary's fate – and the freedom of her soul to be a voluntary martyr:

Do you have the same power over my soul as you
Mistreat my body? And will you prohibit me to get
A foretaste of my heavenly Father's love, in sweet hope?
I only place my hope on that. The God who shed
His blood for me, will see from heaven my blood
Shed for Him, and for the sake of the ancient rites
Of the great Church.³⁰

²⁶ Roulerius, *Stuarta*, ll. 901–05: 'Sic in Abramiden Saul / Davida demens saeviit motu truci; / Sed ille tecto fugit instantis minas / Potentioris; nulla captivis patet / nobis fenestra, nulla qua emittat Michol.'

²⁷ Roulerius, *Stuarta*, ll. 906–13: 'Te, rex paterque caelitem, testem invoco, / quem praeterire consili nostri potest / Nihil: subire praesto, quodcumque imperi / Deiecta mulier culmine alienum ad iugum / Exsulque potis est, millies decies neci / Adsum parata, si tot animabus feras / Abolere pestes impiae haereseos genus / Atque revocare liceat antiquam fidem.' (You, King and Father in Heaven, whom none of our thoughts escapes, are my witness: I am ready to suffer whatever a woman who is cast down from the top of power under another's yoke and who is an exile, can suffer, and I am prepared to die hundreds of thousands of times, if it is possible to destroy impious heresy, that curse that assails so many souls, and to restore ancient faith.)

²⁸ Parente, *Religious Drama and the Humanist Tradition*, p. 200, n. 105.

²⁹ Phillips, *Images of a Queen*, p. 193.

³⁰ Roulerius, *Stuarta*, ll. 808–14: 'An quam male exercetis in corpus, foris / Animae est potestas? Siccine erga me patris / Praecipere studium spe bona aetherie vetes? / Illa,

As such, the history of Mary Stuart illustrated for the students and their audience, and indirectly for the audience ‘out there’, the necessity to choose sides.

Jacobus Zevecotius, Maria Stuarta / Maria Graeca

Zevecotius’s *Maria Stuarta* was never published as such. Before the publication its author, Jacobus Zevecotius or Jacob van Zevecote (1596–1642), removed any allusion to the history of the Queen of Scots.³¹ He made the protagonist a Byzantine princess, the wife of the Emperor Constantinus VII, and published the tragedy as *Maria Graeca* (*The Greek Mary*, 1623). This remake had to do with his conversion to Protestantism.³² He changed the play once more after his migration from Ghent in the southern Netherlands to the Dutch city of Leiden in 1624, where he lived under the protection of men such as his relative Daniel Heinsius. The revisions to the *Maria Graeca* stemming from this period were particularly extensive.

It is telling that the play could rather easily be changed from a Roman Catholic tragedy into a Protestant or even Reformed one. This has to do with his literary model, the tragedy in pure Senecan style *Auriacus, sive Libertas Saucia* (*Orange, or Liberty Wounded*, 1602) of his kinsman Daniel Heinsius. The question is whether Senecan literary imitation prevailed over topicality, even though the ‘*Argumentum*’ of the *Maria Stuarta* version is explicit:

Mary Stuart, once the wife of the King of France Francis II, ruler of Scotland, and true Queen of all Great Britain (declared to be illegitimate by her father Henry VIII because of Elizabeth, the daughter of Anne Boleyn), having taken refuge in England after having suffered several

illa spero. Qui Deus pro me suum / Fudit cruorem, fundier pro se meum / Ecclesiaeque veteribus magnae sacris / Caelo videbit.’ The translations from Latin are made by Bloemendal.

³¹ On him W.J.C. Buitendijk in *Moderne Encyclopedie van de Wereldliteratuur*, 10, pp. 341–42; IJsewijn in his synoptic edition of the play in *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, pp. 258–64.

³² For instance, he changed the names: ‘*Maria Stuarta*’ into ‘*Maria*’, ‘*Haeresis*’ (‘Heresy’) into ‘*Haeresis Iconoclastarum*’ (‘Heresy of Iconoclasts’), and ‘*Joanna*’ into ‘*Melicerta*’, but also some allusions such as ‘*Haeresis / Foecunda*’ (‘widespread heresy’, ll. 11–12), which he turned into ‘*omnium / Libido*’ (‘lust of all’) and ‘*nulla foedifragae fidem / Damnaret Anglae*’ (‘no woman would condemn the faith of the treacherous Anglian Queen’, ll. 115–16) into ‘*nulla damnaret sui / Fidem mariti*’ (‘no woman would condemn the faith of her husband’).

tokens of injustice, having been held in custody for twenty years by order of the same Elizabeth in the castle of Fotheringay, is beheaded by the sword.³³

In contrast to Roulerius's play, in Zevecotius's *Maria Stuarta* the characters are abstracted from historical persons, bearing rather 'timeless' names, except for the protagonist 'Mary Stuart'. The others were called Heresy, Joanna, Old Man, Headman, Messenger, Faith and Chorus.³⁴ In the adaptation, the 'Chorus of fugitive English men and women' became a 'Chorus of Greek men and women who fled the tyranny of Constantinus and the heresy of Theodora'.³⁵

In the Mary Stuart version, Mary expresses an acquiescent, Stoic-Christian worldview. It is as if Vondel's irenic desire to have done with schism is given an equivalent here in the transhistorical desire not to take sides but to contemplate:

Father, will at last that day come that I
 Begged for so long in prayers, that last day
 Of my sorrow, on which You will give me
 For the lost Scottish crown an eternal one?
 Recede, false world, now I am bound to die,
 I have no debts to you anymore; everything the fatal day
 Will take from my remains, is stolen from me by life.
 And before death, my raging, perfidious cousin ordered that
 I should be bereft of the purple, the sceptre, and my belongings.³⁶

Being a creative imitation of its model, Heinsius's *Auriacus, sive Libertas saucia* (1602), the tragedy ends with a funeral lamentation. Whereas

³³ IJsewijn, 'Jacobus Zevecotius: Maria Stuarta / Maria Graeca', p. 275: 'Maria Stuarta, Francisci 2. Galliae regis olim coniunx, Scotici sceptri domina, ac totius maioris Britanniae (ob Elisabetham, Annae Bolaenae filiam, iussu patris Henrici viii. illegitimam declaratam) vera princeps, in Anglia profuga post varias perpressas iniurias et viginti annorum carceres iussu eiusdem Elisabethae in arce Fodringana securi percutitur.'

³⁴ IJsewijn, 'Jacobus Zevecotius: Maria Stuarta / Maria Graeca', p. 275: 'Maria Stuarta, Haeresis, Joanna, Senex, Comes Executor, Nuncius, Fides, Chorus.'

³⁵ IJsewijn, 'Jacobus Zevecotius: Maria Stuarta / Maria Graeca', p. 282: 'Chorus Anglorum et Anglarum fugientium', 'chorus Graecorum et Graecarum tyrannidem Constantini et Theodora haeresim fugientium.'

³⁶ Zevecotius, *Maria Stuarta*, ed. IJsewijn, ll. 1009–17: 'Ergone, Genitor, illa tam lentis diu / Petita votis imminet tandem dies / Mei laboris summa, qua pro perdita / Scotiae corona, non relinquendam dabis? / Abscede fallax Munde, nil ultra tibi / Moritura debeo, quidquid a liquis dies / Fatalis aufert, vita praeripuit mihi; / Et ante funus purpura, sceptro, bonis / Carere iussit neptis infidae furor.' In the *Maria Graeca* version the words 'Scotiae' and 'neptis infidae' are replaced by 'mundi' (world) and 'coniugis diri' (my awful husband) respectively.

Heinsius made the character of Liberty mourn William of Orange, Zevecotius has the lamentation performed by the Chorus and by Faith (Fides). The entire world and even the cosmos itself should mourn this deceased monarch. This too is a martyr drama, but its form is Senecan, and its scope is not so much pagan-fatalistic as Christian.

Humanist Poetics: Gerardus Joannes Vossius, Poeticae Institutiones

In 1647 the professor of history at the *Athenaeum illustre* in Amsterdam and a good friend of Vondel's, Gerardus Joannes Vossius (1577–1649), published his *Poeticarum institutionum libri III (Institutes of Poetics, in Three Books)*.³⁷ It offered no 'new' literary theory; rather it was a compilation of everything known about poetics from Antiquity and his own time. For instance, both the Horatian principles of *utile dulci* and probability, and the Aristotelian unities and the theory of *katharsis* are treated. Its major contribution to poetical theory is, then, the structuring and arrangement of known poetical ideas.

It is tempting to read Vondel's play alongside this manual, since he and Vossius were close friends and valued each other.³⁸ Vondel wrote poems of consolation for his friend at the death of his son Dionysius and his daughter Cornelia. They discussed matters of poetics, and the professor's rich library was always open to the studious Vondel. The poet dedicated his *Gebroeders (Brothers, 1640)* to the humanist professor, who in his turn highly praised this play and assured its author that he had written for eternity.³⁹

The *Poeticae institutiones* is divided into three parts. Part 1 treats poetic fiction and invention, character, meaning, order, style and metre. In this part, the classification of poetry according to the medium (language, harmony and rhythm), the object (good or bad people) and the mode of representation (narrative, dialogue or mixed) are treated, as well as the division of the genres. Genres are discussed in the second part, beginning with drama: tragedy, comedy and other

³⁷ On Vossius, see Rademaker, *Life and Work of Gerardus Joannes Vossius* and *idem, Leven en werk van Gerardus Joannes Vossius*. See also Vossius, *Poeticarum institutionum libri tres / Institutes of Poetics in Three Books*, ed. Bloemendal.

³⁸ See Rademaker, *Life and Work of Gerardus Joannes Vossius*, pp. 260–63; 305–06. It is somewhat remarkable that the Roman Catholic Vondel and the Protestant Vossius were close friends, but Vossius was quite moderate; they were also both born in the German Empire (Cologne and Heidelberg respectively).

³⁹ Brandt, *Leven van Vondel*, ed. Verwijs and Hoeksma, p. 187: 'scribis aeternitati'.

dramatic genres. The third part is devoted to epic and other genres. Since Vondel in his *Maria Stuart* renders the protagonist both a tragic and an epic heroine, we will concentrate on two issues: Vossius's discussion of tragedy and his treatment of the epic hero.⁴⁰

Vondel's Maria Stuart, The Humanist Tradition and Beyond

Vondel was part of the humanist tradition. As a beginning dramatist, he wrote plays imitating the style and structure of Senecan drama. In the mid 1640s, he became acquainted with Aristotelian poetics with their mixed characterization of the hero. For this reason, in the dedicatory preface to *Maria Stuart*, Vondel felt the need to defend the tragic heroine's status as neither virtuous nor evil. However, his attempt to disguise his enthusiasm for the martyred queen only cast her moral qualities in even greater relief.

Aristotle's laws of the theatre hardly allow a character who is so completely innocent, as perfect as she is, to serve as the protagonist of a tragedy [...]. My solution for this problem was to shroud Stuart's innocence and the justice of her cause with the fog of contemporary gossip, slander, and evil, so that her Christian and royal virtues that are obscured now and then would shine forth even brighter.⁴¹

This may have been intended to serve as an apologia for his non-Aristotelian approach to his protagonist, but given the unpopularity of Mary Stuart in the Protestant Netherlands Vondel's expectations may have been overly optimistic.

The hagiographical tone of the last hours of Mary Stuart recalled the panegyric representation of Mary's life and death by earlier humanist playwrights. In the plays by Roulerius and Zevecotius, Mary had been a heroine without fear or reproach. She is portrayed as a woman who

⁴⁰ In accordance with Aristotle, Vossius associates tragedy and epic in *Poeticae institutiones*, 3, 2, 4: 'Epic, too, only has to do with plot, characters, diction and thought, but tragedy observes both these four and moreover spectacle and melody. Hence Aristotle writes: "Anyone who knows about tragedy, good and bad, knows all about epic, too, since tragedy has all the elements of epic poetry, though the elements of tragedy are not all present in the epic."'

⁴¹ WB 5, p. 165, ll. 30–38: 'De tooneelwetten lijden by Aristoteles naulicks, datmen een personaedje, in alle deelen zoo onnozel, zoo volmaect, de treurrol laet spelen; [...] waarom wy, om dit mangel te boeten, Stuarts onnozelheit en de rechtvaerdigheit van haere zaeck met den mist der opspraecke en lasteringe en boosheit van dien tijdt benevelden, op dat haer Kristelijcke en Koninklijcke deugden, hier en daer wat verdonckert, te schooner moghten uitschijnen.'

shows a flawless perseverance in her final hours, aware that she will exchange a temporary crown for an eternal one. Both authors portrayed her as a moral example for their pupils, so that they might learn Latin and be imbued with pious zeal. Moreover, the history of Mary, Queen of Scots was dramatized to serve as Catholic propaganda in the battle against heresy. It was not accidental that Roulerius made the Chorus of captive boys and girls compare the evils in Scotland resulting from neglect of religion with the apostasy of the Jews.⁴²

As a result of the authors' overtly didactic and political purposes, their protagonist became a rather 'flat' character, who is unquestionably a blameless martyr. The humanist Mary Stuart plays could reflect the pamphlet literature disseminated by Mary's ardent supporters and especially by Blackwood.⁴³ Vondel, as a more Baroque author, can use Mary to symbolize his own conversion to Catholicism. Her mistreatment could at the same time evoke the turmoil of Cromwell's revolution, so that 'the fires of Vondel's heated defence of Mary Stuart were not so much stoked by her tragic death almost sixty years before [...] as by contemporary events in England'.⁴⁴ But what is more, in his preface Vondel constructed an elaborate parallel between Christ's Passion and Mary's final hours. Mary dies as a sacrificial lamb for her people, just as Jesus did. She celebrates a 'Last Supper' with her maidens, she forgives her enemies and she commends her soul to God.⁴⁵ As such, Maria's fate served as a post-figuration of the Passion. Moreover, she is an exemplary Queen, rendering *Maria Stuart* a '*Fürstenspiegel*' ('mirror of rulers') too: 'Sovereignly and patiently, she bent her shoulders under the cross, and served thus as an example to all Christian rulers'.⁴⁶ Vondel combines this exemplary function with her royal ancestors,

⁴² Cf. Phillips, *Images of a Queen*, p. 194. This is explicitly summarized in the 'Synopsis' that preceded the play; see Roulerius, *Stuarta*, ed. Woerner, p. 8: '[...] captivorum chors iuvenum et puellarum mala Scotiae religionibus neglectis comparet veteris Iudaeae malis.'

⁴³ Cf. Phillips, *Images of a Queen*, p. 191.

⁴⁴ Parente, *Religious Drama and the Humanist Tradition*, p. 200; Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 1, pp. 416–17.

⁴⁵ WB, 5, p. 164, ll. 10–12: 'Weinigen streecken hier die kroon van (Gode en zijn eere ten dienst) een zichtbare kroon en dit leven te versmaden. In de heilige boecken wort Moses en Kristus alleen die lof toegeschreven.' (Not many people can boast that they have spurned on earth, for the sake of God and religion, a crown, or even life itself. As an example in the holy books, you will find only Moses and Christ who have thus distinguished themselves.)

⁴⁶ WB, 5, p. 165, ll. 24–26: 'Zy buight haer vrye schouders gewilligh, geduldigh onder het kruis, ten spiegel van alle Kriste Vorsten.'

thus stressing the righteousness of her claim to the throne and consequently her innocence of the charges of revolution brought against her by Elizabeth.

Vondel also equates Mary Stuart and Mary, the mother of Jesus. According to Vondel, it is 'perfectly just' that the martyred queen 'is seated at the feet of Mary. For Mary's name she bore very worthily, and she resembled her far more than any other queen; indeed, like Mary, she carried her cross no less than twenty years, and she, too, was pierced with the daggers of solemn vicissitude.'⁴⁷ In the play itself, the chorus of Mary's ladies-in-waiting add to this parallel by highlighting the resemblance of the New Testament Mary going to see her cousin Elizabeth, and Mary Stuart seeking refuge from her homonymous cousin.⁴⁸

As indicated above, Vondel was aware that the protagonist of his play was too innocent in the eyes of God and the Church to really be an Aristotelian tragic hero who was both virtuous and flawed. Therefore, in the letter of dedication to Edward of Bavaria he made a feeble attempt to weaken Mary's excellence. But he also added to her 'humanity' by having Mary ascribe her untimely end to her own sinfulness:

My own sins were to blame, they deserved such a penalty.
Most warnings go unheeded; he from whom God withdraws His
Protection does not see the trap that lies before his feet.
You become wise through disasters, and notice too late
That you are floating at your neighbour's mercy.⁴⁹

Later, however, she declares once more her own innocence ('I, devout and blameless'; 'ick, vroom en zonder smette'), which is perhaps a political, but certainly a moral and spiritual innocence. She avows her sins in Vondel's weak attempt to make her an Aristotelian character, but all in all, she is perfect. 'By likening his heroine to the Virgin Mary, Vondel had acquitted her of all evil, including the most grievous of all

⁴⁷ WB, 5, p. 165, ll. 27–28: 'aen de voeten van Maria, wiens naem zy zoo waerdigh gedragen heeft.'

⁴⁸ This choral ode is an imitation of poem 16 in Romoaldus Scotus's collection *Summarium de morte Mariae Stuartae* (Ingolstadt: Sartorius, 1588). The poem and the chorus hint at the same comparison of the two Marys by stating that both had sought comfort from their kinswoman Elizabeth (cf. Luke 1:39–45), although with contrasting success.

⁴⁹ Vondel, *Maria Stuart*, ll. 336–40, WB, 5, p. 181: 'Mijn schulden hadden schult, die zuclck een straf verdienden. / Men waerschuwt al vergeefs: wien Godt zijn hoede ontzeit, / Bemerckt den valstrick niet, die voor zijn voeten leit: / Men wort door rampen wijs, en ondervint te spade, / Hoe los men henedrijve op 's nagebuurs genade.'

human afflictions: original sin.⁵⁰ But this portrayal of her innocence eventually serves a secular purpose. By these religious parallels, the injustice of Mary's foes and of her martyrdom is underscored, and her political goals – and indirectly that of Charles I against Cromwell's attacks – are justified.

Mary's martyrdom in *Maria Stuart* does not attain the complete otherworldliness of the Jesuit martyrs, but attests to the proud attitude of a dishonoured queen. Ultimately she never forgives her enemies; in fact, she is not able to relinquish the throne. Indeed, she cannot keep her stoic calm, nor the resignation of the world she expresses in the lines: 'What is the world, with all its vanities, but smoke? / An instant, a naught!'⁵¹ Although she even consoles the Chorus bewailing her imminent death 'Entrust yourselves to God, for He'll make good the loss. The king of kings will protect and feed His children'⁵² later on in the play she will declare her sovereignty, without stoic calm, without Christian endurance, and without any sign of Christ's mercy, when she begs the earls to grant the presence of some confidants at her execution:

[...] I beg by the eternally living God,
Do not refuse the niece of Henry the Seventh,
Elizabeth's kinswoman for eternity,
Surviving heiress of all France and Valois,
Anointed Queen of Scotland, this simple request now,
A request made in distress, which no savage Turk, no Mongol
Has ever refused a Christian!⁵³

According to Vossius – in Aristotelian tradition – the tragic hero or heroine should occupy the middle ground between good and evil. Another requirement, one in line with tragedy, concerns the social

⁵⁰ Parente, *Religious Drama and the Humanist Tradition*, p. 202; he mentions as an example of a Christian author who considers Mary to be free from original sin Augustine's *De natura et gratia*, 36.42.

⁵¹ Vondel, *Maria Stuart*, ll. 1242–43, WB, 5, p. 219: 'De weerelt is maer rook met al haer ydelheden, / Een oogenblick, een niet.'

⁵² Vondel, *Maria Stuart*, ll. 1250–51, WB, 5, p. 219: 'Betrouwt op Godt, die kan uw schade licht vergoeden: / Die groote Koningk zal zijn kinders wel behoeden.'

⁵³ Vondel, *Maria Stuart*, ll.1402–08: 'Ick bezweer u by dien eeuwich levenden, / Ontzeght toch nu de nicht van Henderick den Zevenden, / Elizabeths verwante en maeghschap voor altoos, / Een boedelhoudster van gansch Vranckrijck en Valois, En dit gezalfde hoofd der Schotten niet een bede, / Een nootbe, van geen Turck, noch Tarter, woest van zede, / Oit Kristensch mensche ontzeit.' Cf. Parente, *Religious Drama and the Humanist Tradition*, p. 203.

status of epic characters: 'Persons should preferably be grand and illustrious, like heroes, kings and rulers.'⁵⁴ Both represent heroic, outstanding and weighty actions.⁵⁵ In an epic, the heroes are often virtuous, such as Aeneas in Virgil's *Aeneid*. However, first and foremost an epic hero must be consistent.⁵⁶ Another marked difference between the two genres is that, while epic represents people through narrative, tragedy does so through action, although epic 'commonly refers to mixed poetry because the epic poet introduces persons who use direct speech.'⁵⁷ Due to historical circumstances, then, one could argue that Vondel has infused tragedy with epic.

Vondel did follow Aristotle's rule that a protagonist should be neither virtuous nor evil – as expressed in Vossius's *Poeticae institutiones* and probably discussed by the scholar and the poet – more than he had wished to. The presentation of the protagonist, however, went much further than school drama had done. Presentation became representation – of Mary, Queen of Scots murdered by Elizabeth, of Roman Catholicism challenged by Protestantism, of the rebellion of Cromwell against Charles; in sum, representations of several forms of legitimate and illegitimate sovereignty. Presentation became representation, which is characterized by likeness or resemblance between two phenomena; by genesis, the presentation of one phenomenon arousing the other; by identity or correspondence; or by embodiment.⁵⁸ In humanist Latin drama, the representing and represented subjects remained distinct, since plays were mainly part of a pedagogical programme that aimed at pupils learning Latin and being shaped morally. Its public was always relatively limited and part of the pedagogical project. In this situation Latin drama played a role in public debate, indirectly, behind and beyond its primary educational function. That is to say that the

⁵⁴ Vossius, *Poeticae institutiones*, 3, 1, 3: 'Personae potissimum sunt grandes et illustres, ut heroes, reges, duces.'

⁵⁵ Cf. Vossius, *Poeticae institutiones*, 3, 2, 1.

⁵⁶ Vossius, *Poeticae institutiones*, 3, 5, 5: 'But such a character has to be sustained to the end as it has been fashioned at the beginning. This is Horace's advice. [...] The poet [...] relates everything in such a way that there seems to be no inconsistency in a character.' (Talis vero ad extremum servanda est persona qualis ab initio fuerit constituta. Monet hoc Horatius [*Ars Poetica*, 126–27]. [...] Poeta [...] ita omnia exsequitur ut nihil pugnans in persona videatur.)

⁵⁷ Vossius, *Poeticae institutiones*, 3, 1, 9: '[...]epopoeiam vulgo ad mixtam referri poesin eo quod poeta epicus personas etiam directa oratione loquentes inducat.' Cf. *ibidem*, 3, 2, 3.

⁵⁸ On this see Korsten, 'Macropedius' experimental plays'.

dramatic situation, stressing the pre- or post-figuration of the protagonist, created a distance and distinction between object and image so that drama could work indirectly as a consequence. In Vondel's *Maria Stuart*, post- or pre-figuration and post- or pre-figured coincide to a far larger extent due to the more publicly direct operation of theatre, the sacrosanct character of Baroque theatre and its desired affective pull. It was this iconic aspect that turned Vondel's dramas into dangerous public vehicles. To be sure, *Maria Stuart* was not performed on stage. It was not made part of public opinion through direct staging, whereas many earlier humanist dramas were. But *Maria Stuart* was made public through the printing of the play and as such the work presented a character that was not to be explored pedagogically, but that embodied, artificially, a divine presence. Whether in the minds of audiences reading the printed version or on stage, the actor or actress playing Mary became identical to the Mother of Christ – and through that identification to Charles I and to Roman Catholicism. In this way, as Vossius observed, drama is potentially more immediate than other genres, for following the Greek philosopher, a poet represents actions rather than characters.⁵⁹

Aristotle also requires that tragedy arouse pity and fear to bring about a *katharsis* in the audience. The audience must be able to identify – again! – with the characters, especially with the protagonist. For this (rhetorical) reason, the protagonist should be neither entirely spotless nor extremely bad; he or she must exhibit the flaws inherent in all human beings. This is the main result of the turn from Senecan to Aristotelian drama. Neo-Senecan playwrights revelled in the rhetorical exploration of the emotions and placed their characters in a reactive mode; in Aristotelian neo-classical drama, action rather reaction or passivity is central to the representation. In the humanist Mary Stuart plays of Roulerius and Zevecotius, drama provides the occasion for stasis and reflection; in Vondel's martyr play, Maria re-enacts the *passio Christi* in thoughtful preparation for her death.

Vondel is clearly not writing for schoolboys, nor is his Mary Stuart a fearless or irreproachable heroine. She is simultaneously the embodiment of Christ and a flawed human being beset by sin – even if she is morally and religiously superior to others. Vondel wished to legitimize

⁵⁹ Vossius, *Poeticae institutiones*, 1, 2. Vossius deals with character – and the Aristotelian middle course – in 1, 5. There Vossius combines Aristotle's law with the rhetorical – Horatian – demand of appropriateness.

political action, or discussed questions of sovereignty,⁶⁰ so that Mary Stuart could become immortal, not by Christ's grace, but by her act of imitation of Christ, an imperfect but thereby all the more convincing imitation. This delineation of her character, and the more direct role ascribed to theatre in the seventeenth century as the locus for political debate and action, made *Maria Stuart* a dangerous drama, and its poet a potentially subversive force in Calvinist Amsterdam.

⁶⁰ See Korsten, *Vondel belicht* and *idem*, *Sovereignty as Inviolability*.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

DECONSTRUCTION – UNSETTLING PEACE IN
LEEUWENDALERS (1647)

Stefan van der Lecq

From an international perspective, early modern Dutch studies inevitably appears to be a fairly traditional and, one might argue, even staunchly conservative discipline. Whereas the likes of Shakespeare and Milton have been extensively studied from a wide range of modern theoretical perspectives, the literary figureheads of the Dutch Golden Age are still firmly ensconced in the paradigmatic frameworks of classical philology and positivist historicism. As Jürgen Pieters has recently argued, Dutch literary historians have a propensity to meet ‘poststructuralist’ theory either with indifference or with marked hostility.¹ Their most fervent objection to incorporating the thinking of theorists such as Foucault, Althusser, Derrida, or Deleuze into the study of historical literature is that this would yield ahistorical analyses: instead of being concerned with reconstructing the function of a particular play, poem, or treatise in the context in which it was created, such analyses would wrest the text from history in order to transform it into a vehicle for the ventriloquisation of modern concerns. Marijke Spies, for example, describes the distinction between the two approaches as one between historical research and interpretation *per se*.² Her choice of words is significant, implying as it does a host of further binary oppositions:

¹ See Pieters, ‘New Historicism Revisited’, p. 48. There are, however, a few notable exceptions to the general tendency towards the so-called ‘Old Historicism’ in early modern Dutch studies. Apart from Frans-Willem Korsten, whose work will be discussed below, Pieters names two other scholars who have attempted to introduce insights from such diverse fields as semiotics, gender studies, and deconstruction into the debates on early modern Dutch literature: Lia van Gemert and Arie Gelderblom. See Van Gemert’s inaugural lecture (*Norse negers*) and Gelderblom’s book *Mannen en maagden in Hollands tuin*. The article was taken up in Pieters’s *Historische Letterkunde vandaag en morgen*.

² Spies, ‘Vondel in veelvoud’, p. 239. For a thorough evaluation of Spies’s position and approach, and the importance and influence of that approach in the Low Countries, in relation to international methodological and theoretical debates and developments, see Pieters, *Historische letterkunde*, pp. 19–92.

objectivism versus subjectivism, factuality versus conjecture, representativity versus particularism, a focus on authorial intention versus an interest in the modern critic's response to the text, and so on. Spies's rigid demarcation of what counts as valid historical research within literary departments leaves no doubt as to her opinion of theories that would question the very possibility of such impartial positivism.

The fact that the rigorous battle lines which Spies drew in 1987 are largely still adhered to within Dutch departments proves the tenacity of the discipline's 'resistance to theory'.³ The reactions to Frans-Willem Korsten's recent book *Vondel belicht (Sovereignty as Inviolability)*, in which the author makes use of the work of both early modern and post-modern thinkers in order to analyse the concept of sovereignty in the plays of Joost van den Vondel, serve as a good case in point. Riet Schenkeveld and Marijke Meijer Drees, for instance, both begin their reviews by indicating that Korsten is no specialist in seventeenth-century literature. This rhetorical disqualification of the author is followed by a litany of methodological objections that is as defensive as it is unsurprising. Korsten is accused of slapdash eclecticism, presentism, and a perverse neglect of the time-honoured criteria of the properly historical method: representativity, linear chronology, and systematic contextualisation.⁴ Without critically examining the traditional historicist practice that inspires their own counterarguments, both reviewers adamantly deny the merit of Korsten's modern theoretical approach to historical literature.

Rather than simply taking sides in this rather old debate,⁵ my contribution to the present volume is an attempt to blur the apparently

³ I am alluding to Paul de Man's essay of the same name.

⁴ See Riet Schenkeveld, 'Vondel geïnterpreteerd' and Marijke Meijer Drees, 'Nomadische voorstellingen'. Meijer Drees does discuss Deleuzian philosophy, but refuses to take Deleuze's far-reaching challenge to the historicist paradigm seriously and dismisses his thinking as an incentive to artistic creativity (p. 180–82). Schenkeveld, on the other hand, does offer one interesting point of critique next to her more conventional objections: despite Korsten's explicit intention to show the fundamental dialogism of Vondel's plays, his own book eventually amounts to a monologue (*Vondel belicht*, p. 140 *et passim*; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, p. 140 *et passim*). I will come back to this profoundly theoretical argument below.

⁵ Pieters traces the debate back to the two research paradigms distinguished by German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey: positivism and hermeneutics ('New Historicism Revisited', pp. 55–56). Within an Anglo-Saxon context, however, the debate is also reminiscent of the fierce disputes in the early 1980s, when Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels denied the possibility of 'doing' literary theory altogether. In their well-known essay 'Against Theory', they argued that (textual) meaning and (authorial)

impermeable boundary between ‘historicist philology’ on the one hand and ‘poststructuralist theory’ on the other. Can the traditional humanist critic, if he fully accepts the consequences of his practice, avoid searching epistemological questions? And can reading practices based in contemporary theory only result in historically untenable interpretations? To answer these questions I will take a closer look at deconstruction, a critical approach that many would consider to be the single most ruinous chimera of literary theory. In order to test its productivity when it comes to early modern Dutch literature, this approach will be confronted with a play that explicitly asserts its own lightheartedness: Vondel’s pastoral comedy *Leeuwendalers* (*Inhabitants of Leeuwendaal*).

One of the crucial insights of deconstruction, a term coined by French philosopher Jacques Derrida in the late 1960s and propagated in the English-speaking world by the so-called Yale school of criticism, is its challenge to the assumption that language can be used to convey lucidly a determinate meaning. Derrida uses the term *différance* – the infinite process of signification, which amounts to a movement that unstopably progresses along a chain of different signifiers and continually defers the production of ultimate sense – to demonstrate why linguistic utterances can in principle never acquire a ‘true’ meaning. The illusion of such an absolute meaning can only be sustained when the alternatives that inevitably present themselves are pushed away, suppressed, or radically excluded. In Western thought, a prevalent strategy to establish ‘meaning’ has been to set up structures of binary oppositions: male versus female, speech versus writing, nature versus culture, and so on. The terms of these oppositions are often ordered hierarchically and aspire to a status of transcendental or universal validity. In his writings, Derrida characteristically proceeds to read a (philosophical) text in order to expose where it unwittingly shows traces of alternative meanings that directly contradict what it purports to argue.⁶

In adapting Derrida’s thinking for literary criticism, the first generation of deconstructionist critics has made heavy use of the New

intention are falsely treated as separate terms by contemporary theorists. The empirical difficulties of such an enterprise notwithstanding, Knapp and Michaels claimed that the proper task of literary criticism is simply to ascertain the author’s intention through his writing. For their essay and the wide range of replies from the field they sought to abolish, see Mitchell, *Against Theory*.

⁶ My summary overview of Derrida’s work is based on Jonathan Culler’s insightful discussion in *On Deconstruction*.

Criticism's practice of *close reading*. By meticulously uncovering that which a text must not say in order to constitute a meaningful whole, early Derrida enthusiasts such as Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller have demonstrated how the struggle between conflicting forces within a text unfailingly ends in aporia: the reader is faced with a tangle of antithetical alternatives that logic cannot dissolve. To see how such a reading tactic might be productive, the work of Barbara Johnson, a onetime student of De Man's, is extremely helpful. In *The Critical Difference*, she succinctly defines deconstruction as 'an attempt to follow the subtle, powerful effects of differences already at work within the illusion of a binary opposition.'⁷ According to Johnson, binary oppositions are illusory because they rely on the repression of internal difference: difference *between* entities is often an outward projection of difference *within* entities. To read a text deconstructively is to trace the intricate ways in which it represses its self-difference in order to appear homogeneous, stable, and whole. Rather than seeing difference as a reliable method of discrimination, Johnson claims it is a textual unknown that works to produce meaning. As she puts it in *A World of Difference*, a deconstructive reading sets itself up for an encounter with the surprise of otherness, which is 'that moment when a new form of ignorance is suddenly activated as an imperative.'⁸

Deconstruction has been accused of being a largely apolitical practice, and this may be one of the reasons why the works of Jacques Rancière and Giorgio Agamben have become more and more important in the Americas at present – or the works of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, for that matter.⁹ Terry Eagleton, for instance, with his highly political, Marxist background, describes Anglo-American deconstructive criticism as 'blank ammunition' that affirms nothing and Jacques Derrida's own work as 'grossly unhistorical, politically evasive and in practice oblivious to language as "discourse"'.¹⁰ Richard Beardsworth, on the other hand, reads Derrida more subtly and describes the experience of aporia, the moment when reason fails in the face of undecidability, as the very condition of decision and action (*Derrida & the Political*). If approached from this angle, deconstruction

⁷ Johnson, *The Critical Difference*, p. xi.

⁸ Johnson, *A World of Difference*, p. 16.

⁹ Especially Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*; or Giorgio Agamben with his *State of Exception* and *Means Without Ends*. Recently Negri and Hardt have been influential with their studies *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*, respectively.

¹⁰ Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, pp. 147–48.

becomes an inherently political process: it shows any meaning with a claim to finality to be a provisional decision founded on ideology rather than a firmly grounded truth based on logic or reason. With respect to this, it is not so much that there is a rift in the history of poststructuralist thought in the US, between, say, on the one hand Foucault and Derrida, and on the other Rancière, Agamben, Negri and Hardt. Rather there are decisive nodes and connections in the work of all these.

It is precisely the political potential of deconstruction that makes it a relevant theoretical framework for a reading of *Leeuwendalers*. Since the play is a self-proclaimed celebration of peace, the deeply political questions it touches upon have often gone unnoticed. In my analysis, I will seek to activate the ‘otherness’ embedded in the seemingly familiar and uncomplicated concept of peace. I propose, in other words, to pursue seriously the deceptively simple question that the play suggests: how can we ‘know’ peace?

Within the body of Vondel’s theatrical work, the allegorical play *Leeuwendalers* appears to occupy an anomalous position. The play is the only comedy in a long line of tragedies and is usually read as a celebration of the Treaty of Münster, which put an end to eight decades of conflict between the newly formed Dutch Republic and the Spanish Habsburgian dynasty. The treaty was part of the Peace of Westphalia, which in turn settled the bitterly violent religious struggle between Protestant and Roman Catholic nations in Central Europe that came to be known as the Thirty Years’ War. By ratifying the Treaty of Münster, Spain and the Holy Roman Empire recognised *de jure* the Republic as a sovereign nation-state. Vondel did not wait for the official signing of the peace on 30 January 1648: he completed *Leeuwendalers* in 1647, when the news of a general agreement was already circulating. Chiming in with the generally jubilant mood at the prospect of peace, Vondel chose to cast his early celebration in the form of a comedy. Since the comic genre traces a shift from social upheaval to a renewed sense of harmony, it must have seemed a proper literary accompaniment to the occasion.¹¹

¹¹ Many critics have tried to distil Vondel’s political views on the Treaty of Münster from the text of *Leeuwendalers*. As a recent convert to Roman Catholicism and an outspoken proponent of the idea of a single, unified Dutch state, Vondel could have had many reasons to be dissatisfied with the treaty’s legal affirmation of the division between the northern Republic and the Spanish Netherlands in the south. For an overview of the arguments in favour of and against such interpretations, see Anton van

The plot of *Leeuwendalers*, which Vondel largely borrowed from Torquato Tasso's *Aminta* (1573) and Giovanni Battista Guarini's *Il pastor fido* (1589), can be summarised as follows. In the land of Leeuwendaal, a violent civil conflict has claimed the lives of Waerandier, ruler of the South and son of the Forest God, and Duinrijck, ruler of the North and son of the god Pan. Since the wives of both men died as a result of the fray as well, their two children are orphaned. Adelaert, the infant son of Waerandier, is entrusted to the care of Lantskroon, the new lord of the South. Vredegunt, Duinrijck's widow, has died in childbirth, but her daughter was safely delivered by the nurse Kommerijn. In her desperation to flee the war-torn countryside of Leeuwendaal, Kommerijn leaves the girl as a foundling. Vrerick, the new leader of the North, discovers her and raises the unidentified child as his own. The play starts twenty years later, when the old nurse Kommerijn returns to Leeuwendaal. She soon finds out that the bloodshed is far from over: the gods have not yet forgiven the Leeuwendalers for the deaths of their children. Each year, a youth from either the North or South, to be selected at random by the priestess, must be sacrificed to Pan in order to appease his wrath.

On the day that the fatal lot is about to be cast, the beautiful huntress Hageroos sets out to track a white deer that she hopes will serve as a replacement sacrifice. Adelaert, who is madly in love with Hageroos, follows her around to woo her, but his desperate pleas only meet with rejection: since Hageroos is an orphan of unknown parentage, she believes herself to be an unsuitable choice for the rich and noble Adelaert. Passionately lamenting his misfortune but nonetheless undeterred, Adelaert continues to chase after her. In the woods, Hageroos suddenly finds herself sexually harassed by some unknown assailant: Adelaert arrives just in time to rescue her. In spite of his heroic defence of her honour, however, Hageroos still refuses to give in to Adelaert's desire.

Meanwhile, Vrerick and Lantskroon, the lords of the North and the South, must quell the civil unrest that continues to grow as the time of the sacrifice draws near. Despite their mutual desire to cease all hostilities, they see no way to prevent or even delay the sacrificial rite. The lot is cast, and Adelaert's name comes up. Unlike his foster father, who is utterly distraught, Adelaert gladly accepts his fate: he welcomes the

Duinkerken's introduction to the play (1948). As will become clear, my own approach to *Leeuwendalers* is somewhat less topical.

chance to be rid of the pain of his unrequited love. As Pan's servant, the terrifying Wild Man, is about to pierce him with arrows, Hageroos has a change of heart and suddenly jumps in front of Adelaert. Before the Wild Man has the chance to kill them both, Pan himself intervenes: Hageroos is his own flesh and blood, and no further sacrifices will be required. Kommerijn, who has slept all day after her exhausting journey back home, is able to explain Pan's words to the perplexed bystanders: she testifies that Hageroos is Duinrijck's daughter and, consequently, a granddaughter of Pan. At the close of the play, the chorus celebrates the upcoming marriage of Adelaert and Hageroos, which will finally reunite North and South and bring peace to the whole of Leeuwardaal.

Whereas Vondel's tragedies are often characterised by a strong classicist impulse, staging complex political, social, cultural, or religious problems from a variety of conflicting viewpoints, *Leeuwardalers* insists on presenting itself as an innocuous eulogy of peace. The play's subtitle, 'A Pastoral,' already announces that its setting is bucolic: it is far removed from the city and its corruption, the elevated concerns of the courts, and the grave matters of religion and politics. In his introductory dedication to the diplomat Michel le Blon, Vondel explicitly warns those who would seek to read the play as anything more than harmless entertainment:

Anyone delving in too deep, pedantically looking for covert meanings in all the characters, verses, and words, will not find any. We have only selected and blended some paints and perfumes that would be able to serve our purpose and have thus roughly sketched, on a smaller scale, the course of war and peace so as to avoid all animosities [...].¹²

The rhetoric of this short passage would have us believe that *Leeuwardalers* is inoffensive and purely ornamental: its simple sensuous pleasantries hold no hidden depths. Nevertheless, this ostensible avowal of modesty skilfully uses the metaphors of painting and horticulture to smuggle in an intensely political pair of terms: war and peace. Although the speaker claims that the play at hand is only fanciful decoration, he already subverts his own claim by invoking this fiercely

¹² 'Wie hier te diep in verzinckt, en neuswijs, in alle personaedjen vaerzen en woorden, geheimenissen zoekt, zalze'r niet visschen. Wy hebben slechts eenige verwen en geuren, die ons voornemen dienen konden, uitgezocht, en onder een gemengt, en het beloop van oorloge en vredehandel aldus in het klein ten ruighsten ontworpen, om alle hatelijckheit te schuwen [...].': ('Dedication to Michel le Blon', ll. 57–62); Vondel, WB, 5, p. 265. All further quotations are taken from this edition; all translations are my own (SvdL).

debated opposition and all the politically sensitive material it touches upon. The rhetorical structure that manifests itself here, as well as in Vondel's choosing the pastoral comedy, is that of the paralipsis: while explicitly denying any interest in the profoundly political questions of war and peace, the play delves deeply into the structure of difference upon which this binary opposition is based. Instead of simply extolling the virtues of peace, *Leeuwendalers* demonstrates how peace can never be stably 'thought' at all. In questioning the primacy, singularity, and uniformity of this concept, Vondel's play works towards a veritable deconstruction of peace.¹³

Like many a binary opposition, the dichotomy of war and peace implies a hierarchical relation between the two terms. Although this relation has not been a transhistorically stable one in Western European tradition, *Leeuwendalers* already makes its position clear on the title page by way of its motto – *pax optima rerum*, or 'peace is the best of all things.' Peace is the preferable state of affairs, and war amounts to an undesirable interruption of that condition. The play represents a transition from a period of violent conflict to an era of peace ushered in by the marriage of Adelaert and Hageroos. Consequently, *Leeuwendalers* describes a return to an ordinary state of harmony. In the final act, the chorus describes the bounteous rewards of that state as it celebrates the wedding: the people are enjoying the festivities, there is good cheer, the cows give milk and cream, and the barrels are brimming with real butter (ll. 2013–20). All is well that ends well. Ironically, however, it is precisely these 'virtues' of peace that were identified earlier as the roots of the conflict. When Lantskroon complains of the unforgiving attitude and blind hatred of the masses, he accuses them of ill will and ingratitude. He blames

[...] peace, which gave birth to trade, and wealth, and abundance;
 These in turn gave birth to haughty, headstrong, and scornful vanity:
 This caused the dissent, too excessive and reckless,
 In the midst of the feast in honour of the glory of Pan.

¹³ Van Duinkerken suggests that we should take Vondel's advice and decline to look for 'deeper' meanings ('Introductie', p. 40). I, however, agree with Korsten, who reminds us that we are not dealing with a straightforward statement from the author here but with a textual persona instead. This 'orator' produces complex rhetorical constructions that need to be carefully analysed in their own right (*Vondel belicht*, pp. 19, 121; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, pp. 25, 113).

All ate, and drowned their senses in their jugs,
Until querulous words turned to blows and knives.¹⁴

Apparently, the sumptuous abundance engendered by peace also carries the seeds of discord within it. In its excesses, peace can bring forth that which supposedly is diametrically opposed to it, war. As a result, the two terms cannot be neatly distinguished from each other. Lantskroon's account of the drunken brawl at Pan's feast makes clear that the threat of violence is always embedded in the potential of peace to go beyond itself. If peace can produce its antithetical other, then the symmetry of this pair of opposed terms is broken: war is no longer inversely proportionate to peace but rather the result of a drifting apart within peace itself. Although it is possible to read Lantskroon's lines as a plea for moderation, this does not change the fact that it is always possible to reap the rewards of peace immoderately. When read in this light, the jubilant description of the joys of peace that the chorus gives at the end of the play becomes problematic: if peace can come to differ from itself, how then can it ever be guaranteed?

At this point, it is important to note that the problem of war and peace is structurally related to the question of difference and identity. Peace, after all, is commonly taken to denote harmony, unity, and stability; in order to 'make' peace, differences have to be settled or, at the very least, suspended. War, on the other hand, bears connotations of conflict, antagonism, and violent opposition. Peace unifies, and war divides – or so it appears. In the play, peace and identity are coupled for the first time as Adelaert attempts to persuade the huntress Hageroos to return his affections. Since Hageroos deems them socially incompatible, she will have none of it. When Adelaert passionately offers himself as her prey, she brusquely retorts that '[e]quals are best and most peacefully paired with each other'.¹⁵ Then Adelaert replies:

Not equality in wealth and standing, but equality of minds:
Equality of minds best nourishes peace and friendship:
If that is lacking, peace and friendship cannot exist;

¹⁴ '[...] pais, die neering baerde, en weelde, en overvloed; / Die baerden hoovaerdy, verwaent, en trots, en smadigh: / Zoo quam de tweedraght voort, te byster en baldadigh, / In 't midden van het feest, geviert ten roem van Pan. / Men at 'er, en verdronck de zinnen in de kan, / Zoo dat men tot gevecht en messen quam, van woorden.' (ll. 644–49)

¹⁵ 'Gelijckheit paert zich best en vreedzaam by malkandere' (l. 266).

Without them, I value neither wealth nor blood and birth.
It is peace and friendship that keep the world within bounds.¹⁶

The speech continues with an extensive image of nature as a series of amorous couples that all act according to ‘the music of like minds’:¹⁷ the surf kisses the beach, the sea embraces the dunes, pigeons coo together, ivy lovingly wraps itself around the bark of a tree, and harts and hinds tenderly lick each other. Adelaert can only pray that Hageroos will one day emulate nature as well.

The word ‘peace’ does not refer to armistices, truces, and other pacts of non-violence between states here. Seeing as Adelaert explicitly uses music as a metaphor, ‘peace’ should probably be understood as ‘harmony’: what is evoked is the idea that nature is a properly orchestrated whole. All internal difference in nature is overcome by the single amorous disposition that all its elements share. This identity of minds, Adelaert claims, even countermands all social stratification. Without the homogenising impulses of peace and friendship, distinctions based on lineage and wealth lose their value and the world will spin out of bounds. What Adelaert accuses Hageroos of, in other words, is that she disrupts natural harmony. Her obstinate incongruence causes overcast skies and makes him wither away ‘[l]ike faded green, or grass on walls and tiles’.¹⁸

For Hageroos, however, who sees identity and difference as cultural rather than natural categories, ‘peace’ can only exist between class equals. As an insignificant girl of unknown parentage, she is all too aware of the severe impact that difference can have in the social sphere. Whereas Adelaert hears the ‘music of like minds’ and sees the world as a harmonious concordance, she only registers a monotonous whining (ll. 294–95) that glosses over a very real abyss between them. Adelaert’s utopian fantasy of peace must repress this abyss in order to sustain itself, and in so doing commits the violence of indifference upon those on the other side of the class divide. By adamantly rejecting Adelaert, Hageroos exposes the idea that ‘peace and friendship’ can bridge any gap as a sentimental and dangerously oblivious myth.

¹⁶ ‘Gelijckheit niet van goet en staet, maer van gemoedt: / Gelijckheit van gemoedt best vrede en vrientschap voedt: / Waer deze ontbreekt, moet vrede en vrientschap ook ontbreken; / Waer buiten ick noch goet, noch bloet, noch afkomst reken. / De vrede en vrientschap houdt de weerelt in den bant.’ (ll. 267–71)

¹⁷ ‘[...]’t muzijck van een’ gelijcken aert’ (l. 275).

¹⁸ ‘Gelijck vertreden groen, of gras op muur, en pannen’ (l. 289).

In its guise as a ‘natural’ condition of harmonious identity, peace is a highly ideological concept that cannot tolerate internal difference. The disruptive potential of social inequality must be suppressed if the term ‘peace’ is to function at all. In a similar fashion, political peace – a state of non-violence guarded by certain institutions – must project the volatility of self-excess onto ‘war’, its binary opposite, in order to maintain the illusion that a neat separation between the two concepts is possible at all. In *Leeuwendalers*, these two convergent concepts of peace – the ideology of a harmonious world order and the pact of non-violence – meet in the prospective marriage of Adelaert and Hageroos. At the crucial moment when Pan, in a sudden act of divine intervention, rescues them both from the Wild Man’s murderous arrows, he proclaims:

Let the marriage of a pair sprung from the Gods of the Fields
Unite Leeuwendaal after so much discord and sorrow.¹⁹

Pan makes clear that the renewed unification of Leeuwendaal is inextricably bound to this particular marriage. In retrospect, then, the peace that constitutes this play’s happy ending is completely dependent on the question of whether or not Hageroos yields to Adelaert. This goes a long way to explain the youth’s eager persistence: within the structure of the play, his wooing is a crucial political project. The fate of an entire nation depends on it. Tellingly – but, from a historical perspective, unsurprisingly – the object of this project is a female body.

In his book *Vondel belicht (Sovereignty as Inviolability)*, Korsten has argued that Adelaert’s role is an ambiguous one: although he rescues Hageroos from a mysterious assailant, the text also suggests that Adelaert and this would-be rapist can be conflated. Adelaert is repeatedly compared to a dog chasing after a hare, his behaviour is almost animalistic, and, like the rapist, he is mad with desire for Hageroos. Consequently, Adelaert can simultaneously be seen as a protector and an aggressor.²⁰ In both roles, however, the crucial issue is sexual possession. This observation is further sustained by the fact that Adelaert’s texts are rife with erotic innuendo. A few examples will suffice:

If only fortune would turn me into a dog,
A partridge, or a fast hare, I would fly into your mouth:

¹⁹ ‘Het huwelijck van een paer, geteelt uit Ackergoden, / Vereenigh’ Leeuwendael, na zoo veel twist en smert.’ (ll. 1865–66).

²⁰ Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, pp. 129–29; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, pp. 114–19.

I'd want to give you all that's mine and would humbly offer you
My body, my soul, and my life as bounty for you to plunder.²¹

The maid relieves the cattle's dugs twice a day,
When they are crammed with milk and cream:
And I, though I constantly complain of my misery to you,
Am never relieved of the yoke of lovers' cares.²²

My salvation would be complete if my morning star,
My sweet Hageroos, could be present here,
And would deign to catch my spirit with her mouth
When life's essence departs through the heart's wound,
Still red and warm with blood – blood that I will gladly
Commend to her, if I were to die in her favour.²³

If one were to put it anachronistically, these passages could be called masochistic, racy, and morbid respectively. In all of them, Hageroos's body is turned into an object to which Adelaert has to gain 'access'. Whether this is to be accomplished by a fantasy of ingestion, an appeal to a woman's duty to offer 'relief', or an attempt at ghostly possession, he will in any case become one with her. Even when Adelaert is about to die, his overwhelming desire to claim the body of his love interest is the first and foremost thing on his mind. As a final request, he asks his foster father to make sure that Hageroos and he will be interred in the same grave. Should she die a virgin, her pure corpse can be used to consecrate his burial place (ll. 1758–61). The inscription he would like to see on their tombstone, however, proves that his own intentions for that corpse are anything but pure: 'Here slumbers Hageroos, lying next to Adelaert: / Her cold bones can still ignite his ashes.'²⁴ Adelaert's desire to physically possess Hageroos's body persists even beyond death.

In *Leeuwendalers*, the female body is constantly in danger of being ravished, utilised, or overtaken by men. Even their supposed concerns for its safety should in fact be read as silent affirmations of the female

²¹ 'Veranderde 't geluck my heden in een' hont, / Patrijs, of snellen haes, ick vloogh u in den mont: / Ick woude u al het mijne, en lijf en ziel en leven / Ootmoedigh tot een' buit en roof ten beste geven.' (ll. 259–62)

²² 'De meit ontlast het vee zijn uiers, stijf gespannen / Van zoete melck en room, wel tweemaal alle daegh: / En ick, die, dagh op dagh, u mijn ellende klaegh, / Wort nimmermeer ontlast van 't juck der minnezorgen.' (ll. 290–93)

²³ 'Ick zaegh mijn heil voltoit, zoo nu mijn morgenstarre, / Mijn lieve Hageroos hier tegenwoordigh stont, / En my gewaerdighde mijn' geest met haren mont / Te vangen, als de ziel ter hartwonde uit zal vaeren, / Noch root en warm van bloet, van bloet, het welck ick gaeren / Ten beste geve, indien ick in haer gunste sterf.' (ll. 1808–13)

²⁴ 'Hier sluimert Hageroos, by Adelaert gezoncken: / Haer koudt gebeente kan zijn assche noch ontvoncken' (ll. 1763–64).

body's vulnerability. When Hageroos explains how she narrowly escaped from the clutches of a rapist, the chorus replies that such a thing is bound to happen to women who roam the woods '[a]lone and unaccompanied' (*Alleen, en onverzelt*, l. 893). What the chorus implicitly chides Hageroos for here is her earlier refusal of male protection: in order not to become a possible target for any man's wild desires, she should have given in to those of a single man. To yield means being protected, to resist means being at risk. In a scene that similarly revolves around the idea of the female body being an object created for the use of men, Heereman, Lantskroon's steward, has devised a scheme to save Adelaert from his grisly fate. He asks Hageroos to don a beautiful dress and 'enthrall' the executioner, the fearsome Wild Man, with wine and music. Hageroos, however, realises full well what 'enthralling' means in this context. 'I have only just escaped from the abuser', she replies, '[a]nd do not want to betray myself so recklessly.'²⁵ Heereman's ruse amounts to using Hageroos's sexual allure as a trap; in his view, the possible loss of honour – the devaluation of her maidenly status – is a small price to pay if there is a chance to rescue Adelaert. He is quite willing to accept the danger of rape and proposes to 'trade' Hageroos's bodily integrity for Adelaert's life. This cynical gesture once more bespeaks a utilitarian view of the female body: it is a tool that can be employed in the political dealings of men, a prized object that has to be acquired or defended, and a vessel for male fantasies of sexual possession.

Within a world that invests the female body with such problematic and potentially destructive meanings, the marriage that Pan finally ordains might seem to be the most blissful solution. Yet, upon closer inspection, it turns out that the supposed nuptial bliss and subsequent peace in fact rely upon an act of silencing. When Hageroos intercedes at the sacrificial ritual and challenges the Wild Man to kill her first, she explains her sudden readiness to die to Adelaert: 'Your devotion obliged me: now I will offer up my body / And take your place.'²⁶ Tellingly, she does not give her body to Adelaert here: just as Adelaert prevented her from being raped, Hageroos now shields him from a different type of violent penetration. She is willing to give her life to repay him, but nowhere does she explicitly concede to Adelaert's will. From the

²⁵ '[I]ck ben den schender pas ontgaen, / En wil zoo reuckeloos my zelve niet ver-
raèn' (ll. 1465–66).

²⁶ 'Uw trouw verplichte my: nu geef ick 't lijf ten beste, / En trede in uwe plaets'
(ll. 1836–67).

moment that Pan intervenes and 'pronounces' the wedding, Hageroos has no more lines. The stage is left to the male authorities, who can conclude their business: Lantskroon appoints himself 'Father of Peace' ('Vredevader', l. 1984), plans the future political constellation of Leeuwendaal, and orders his subjects to give thanks to their divine saviour. Hageroos's unwavering resistance to male political desires, her adamant refusal to conform to an ideology of peace that would seek to erase difference, and her freedom to dispose of her body as she sees fit are all ignored in the end: when Pan resolves the differences between North and South by a display of divine force, he also smothers the play's one dissenting voice.

It may be surprising that Pan, the one who grants peace, simultaneously functions as an agent that curbs discordant elements here. However, the ambiguity of this particular character has been the subject of some debate. Since *Leeuwendalers* is an allegory and Pan is the only god who is continually being invoked, he is usually taken to be a representation of the one true God. In his dedication to Le Blon, Vondel takes ample time to justify his choice: since 'Pan', in Greek, means 'all', he is the most appropriate figure to refer to the divine origin of everything in nature. Apart from being a particular pastoral deity, then, Pan also prefigures the Christian God by way of his transcendental aspects. As stated by Van Duinkerken, Vondel's use of Pan skilfully balances two equally undesirable alternatives: the unabashed portrayal of heathen polytheism on the one hand and a direct representation of the conflicts of a deeply divided Christian world on the other.²⁷ W.A.P. Smit has further endorsed the notion that Vondel's Pan suggests the one true God without actually being Him. In that way, or so Smit claims, the didactic message that the Peace of Münster was an act of divine grace could be conveyed without abandoning the inoffensive guise of the Arcadian fiction.²⁸ What both Smit and Van Duinkerken propose, in other words, is to separate Pan's pagan traits from his properly monotheistic aspects and only read the figure allegorically when its presentation does not conflict with orthodox Christianity. This proposition is profoundly ideological, since it entails interpreting selectively in order to achieve a certain sense of hermeneutic unity: contradictory elements within a single character are explained away as simple reminders of the play's fictionality.

²⁷ 'Introductie', p. 46.

²⁸ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 1, pp. 456–58.

Korsten provides an elegant solution to this interpretive conundrum by arguing that the play juxtaposes pagan polytheism and Christian monotheism as sovereign religious cultures within the same body: instead of being supplanted by Christianity, classical traditions are activated and start to create a complex interdiscursive field of meanings.²⁹ Korsten's subsequent suggestion that Pan presents a full-fledged alternative to the Christian logic of the necessary sacrifice, however, is somewhat more problematic. It may be so that this highly ambiguous, semi-bestial classical deity cannot be stably translated into the one true God, but neither can he simply serve as the latter's positive antithesis. Korsten, however, seems to suggest as much when he distributes the binary pairs reasonable/unreasonable, peacegiver/warmonger, and compassion/ruthlessness between them. Although Pan eventually puts a stop to the civil war, this momentary display of reasonability is actually an integral part of the theatrics of absolute power. Precisely because it is an act of grace, Pan's intervention is also an affirmation of divine omnipotence. In 'giving' peace, he simultaneously quells Hageroos's resistance to homogenisation, forcibly expunges difference, and reaffirms his sovereign right to grant (or withhold) his bounty as he pleases. In doing so, he does not become a real alternative to divinely authorised violence but a different type of potentate instead.

To further illustrate my point, I will return to the third act. Hageroos has just informed the chorus of the attempted rape and has left to worship Pan in the chapel. Adelaert, who has captured and released her mysterious assailant, is now secretly spying on her from behind a column. At this point, the chorus observes that no one can seem to love a woman without displaying beastly behaviour: all love-smitten men grunt like boars or howl like dogs. Then, the chorus suddenly makes mention of some crucial myths concerning Pan:

But they say that Pan sought his diversions in the East,
Near a stream, and that he chased them through the reeds:
That he, to impregnate the ancient moon by night,
Disguised himself as a goat, yes, even had to become a goat;
If one is allowed to say so, since it is seen or heard by no one.³⁰

²⁹ Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, pp. 141–42; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, pp. 129–30.

³⁰ 'Al pratenze dat Pan, in Oostlant, bij een' vliet, / Zijn mallicheden zocht, en naerpeurde in het riet: / Dat hy, om d'oude maen by avont te begorden, / Ging mommen, als een bock, ja zelf een bock most worden; / Indien men 't zeggen magh, daer 't niemant ziet, en hoort.' (ll. 1053–57)

Like Adelaert, Pan can apparently fall prey to his lusts and quite literally become a beast. Unlike Adelaert, however, he does not transfer his wild desires to the heated discourse of fantasy: as a brutish but powerful god, he simply takes what he wants. In a footnote, Smit euphemistically calls the mythical narratives that are referred to in these lines ‘erotic adventures’³¹ – they have no other purpose than reaffirming that Pan is an Arcadian fiction that can never be totally converted into a symbol for God. In the case of a play that is charged with male sexual desire, that features at least one attempted rape, and in which the political fate of a nation eventually depends on whether a young woman yields her body, such a reading falls painfully short. The implication that the peacegiver, the one who is responsible for the long-awaited comic ending, is also a rapist changes the entire play. If Pan has the power to freely indulge his animal impulses, hounding and impregnating nymphs and goddesses – unseen, unheard, and, consequently, unchecked – the peace that he proclaims is dangerously dependent upon his whims. In fact, the chorus’s reference to the rape narratives makes clear that the entire plot centring on Hageroos is structured in a disturbingly similar way: a man can hardly contain his desire for a woman who refuses him, after which she is forced into submission and silenced by a superior power. When Pan simply ordains the marriage, exploits his granddaughter’s body for political reasons, and suppresses her resistance to male domination, his actions metaphorically constitute rape.

In *Leeuwendalers*, peace is anything but peaceful. The continual blazoning of the word throughout the play is an attempt to veil a different kind of violence. Stemming from internal repression, this aggression is systematically directed at the levelling of all differences that the ideology of harmony cannot tolerate. Social inequality is ignored, female dissent is overruled, and past injustices are erased by decree. It is this tension that is epitomised in the verb ‘to pacify’, which bears the connotation of ‘restoring the peace’ but also of ‘violently subjugating’. By entwining the course of war and peace with the narrative structure of rape, *Leeuwendalers* deeply unsettles the seemingly unproblematic ideology of a harmonious unity and deconstructs its claim to superiority. The play suggests that peace, a harmonious state of non-violence, can only come about by violently suppressing self-difference and otherness.

³¹ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 1, p. 458, n. 3.

In his *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, Derrida contrasts Kant's use of the concept of peace to that of his late friend. He concludes that Kantian peace is a condition that must be instituted by nation-states in order to ward off a return to the natural state of war. As a promise, however, it 'indefinitely and inevitably retain[s] within it a trace of the violent nature with which it is supposed to break'.³² This threat permanently contaminates even the most sincere promise of peace: after all, there is always the potential for renewed hostility. In *Leeuwendalers*, Pan's sovereign position allows him to violate his self-proclaimed peace whenever he would see fit. Since his track record includes human sacrifice and rape, the play does not end on an unequivocally comic note. The very institution of Pan's peace is at the same time a threat of further violence: what an absolute power gives it can just as easily withdraw. It is this notion of a whimsical and violent divine sovereignty that Lantskroon questions when he asks: 'Is a deity not able to relinquish her rights?' – and it is also this notion that Vrerick docilely affirms: 'The master does not allow the servant to reproach him'.³³

The opening question of this essay was whether deconstruction, a modern theoretical approach, would be absolutely incompatible with traditional philology. On one level, the answer would have to be that it is. A deconstructionist cannot subscribe to the notion that a text can be reconstructed according to its author's original intentions. The slippery system of language itself would make that enterprise futile. On a different level, however, the deconstructionist is in fact the ultimate philologist: he continues to pursue the text until its fabric of signification becomes too intricate to perceive. As Barbara Johnson has argued, the humanist critic stops reading when the text 'stops saying what it ought to have said' – he stops, in other words, when his interpretation fits into a familiar (historical) frame.³⁴ The deconstructionist, however, can allow mutually exclusive readings to exist simultaneously, thereby allowing the past to speak with many voices.

In her review of *Vondel belicht*, Schenkeveld indicts Korsten for turning the internal dialogues of Vondel's plays into a monologue. The orthodox Christian Vondel, who in the end accepts the human suffering that is part and parcel of God's inscrutable purposes, has been

³² Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 89.

³³ 'Vermagh een Godtheit niet te scheiden van haer recht?' (l. 683); 'De meester laet zich niet bedillen van den knecht' (l. 684).

³⁴ Johnson, 'Teaching Deconstructively', p. 140.

filtered out and is replaced by a suspiciously modern Vondel – a Vondel who rejects religiously motivated violence and emphasises the sovereign potential that is intrinsic to human society itself.³⁵ Bearing in mind my own experiences in the case of *Leeuwendalers*, however, I would put it somewhat differently: Korsten's questioning, passionate, life-affirming figure is placed *next to* the ultimately submissive believer. The polyphonous ingenuity of Vondel's verses makes it maddeningly impossible for the reader to opt safely for either interpretation. It is this aporia that enables us to fully appreciate the impact of Vondel's theatrical works, without either locking them in the past or forcibly jerking them into our postmodern age. In the end, only a reading that allows a historical text its self-contradictions, suspensions, subversions, and uncertainties can do justice to both its historicity and its existence in the present.

³⁵ Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, 'Vondel geïnterpreteerd', p. 140 *et passim*.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

RELIGION AND POLITICS – *LUCIFER* (1654) AND MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST* (1674)

Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen and Helmer Helmers

Ever since the seventeenth century, Vondel's *Lucifer* (1654) has been the subject of controversy. The bone of contention has always been the play's portrayal of the relationship between religion and politics. Soon after its first performance, a pamphleteer denounced *Lucifer* as hypocritical on the grounds that it concealed a political message in a religious cloak. According to this early critic, Vondel wrote the play 'supposedly for pious edification / so that he may rage against England'.¹ Late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century scholars have similarly read *Lucifer* as a veiled political attack, though not always on the English revolt. Some interpreted the play as an allegory of the Dutch revolt against Spain,² while one critic even suggested that *Lucifer* is an allegory of the Wallenstein revolt of 1634.

Modern Vondel scholars have rightly resisted reading the play as a straightforward political allegory. Joris Noë's observation that Vondel's piety did not permit him to write biblical plays with a topical purport – that it would have amounted to blasphemy if he had reduced sacred stories to secular allegories – is not without ground.³ Yet in exploring new ways of reading Vondel's plays, and especially his biblical plays, critics have increasingly de-politicised and de-historicised them.⁴ Only in the 1990s did scholars like Henk Duits, Bettina Noak, and Jill Sterne overcome the reluctance to historicise Vondel's plays and to read them

¹ 'Kwansuis tot stichtelijke leer, / Opdat hij tegen England ga te keer', Anonymous, 'Warachtig God, geen Jupiter' (1654). This poem was published in *Apollos Harp* (1658). Cf. Te Winkel, *Ontwikkelingsgang* IV, p. 258.

² Jonckbloet, 'Vondel's Lucifer eene politieke allegorie'; Vondel, *Werken*, ed. Van Lennep, V, pp. 291–314.

³ Noë, *De religieuze bezinning van Vondels werk*, p. 93.

⁴ See, for instance: Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*; Langvik-Johannessen, *Zwischen Himmel und Erde*; King, 'The Sacramental Thought in Vondel's Drama'; Parente, 'The Biblical Tragedies of Joost van den Vondel'; Konst, "'Het goet of quaet te kiezen"'.

politically, with an eye for topical concerns. However, they focused on the secular plays: *Batavische gebroeders* (*Batavian Brothers*), *Maria Stuart*, and *Faëton* respectively.⁵ It seems that the reluctance among earlier critics to read the biblical plays with an eye for the political implications continued to affect later readers. But it would be a mistake to posit a distinction between Vondel's religion and his politics.

Frans-Willem Korsten has recently argued that '[i]n *Lucifer* the divine or theological type of sovereignty stands opposite to the political type.'⁶ In more historical terms, the opposition is between divine right theory and a contractual conception of government in which power derives from the people instead of God. On Korsten's reading, Lucifer is the tragic character of the play: accused of hypocrisy by Rafael and the other loyal angels, he is himself a victim of God's 'ultra-hypocrisy'. He is assigned an office which gives him responsibility for maintaining peace and order among the angels. To live up to this task, Lucifer needs to act independently; he needs to 're-present God' yet lacks the tools to do so. Before God's all-seeing eye, he 'has no room for political manoeuvring'. In fact, Lucifer, despite his office, has no real power, and either has to feign possessing the sovereignty allotted to him, or has to break the existing order.⁷

Korsten carefully defines the issue of sovereignty that sits at the heart of Vondel's *Lucifer* but his is essentially a secular, presentist reading, not unlike William Empson's famous reading of Milton's *Paradise Lost*.⁸ This does not necessarily disqualify his argument. Indeed, the play does seem to portray God as a tyrant to any secular reader, past or present. Yet anyone seeking a historical reading of a play written by a pious Catholic for an audience which – although obviously pluriform – at the very least believed in the existence of a good God, has reason to be alarmed when God emerges from his analysis as an ultra-hypocrite. From a historicist point of view, the possibility or even plausibility of such an interpretation of *Lucifer* is a problem. Our purpose here is not to refute Korsten's reading, but to come to understand what makes him, as well as earlier critics, arrive at a conclusion that would seem to be at

⁵ Duits, *Van Bartholomeusnacht tot Bataafse opstand*; Stern, 'A Playwright in his Time'; Noak, *Politische Auffassungen im niederländischen Drama des 17. Jahrhunderts*.

⁶ Korsten, *Vondel belicht; Sovereignty as Inviolability*.

⁷ Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, p. 199; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, p. 178.

⁸ In *Empson, Milton's God* argues that the hero of *Paradise Lost* is in fact Satan. Very much like Korsten, Empson contends that Milton struggled 'to make his God appear less wicked than the traditional Christian one' (*Milton's God*, p. 11).

odds with Vondel's own sensibility, and arguably with many contemporary interpretations of the play.

The presupposition of a separation between religion and politics seems to be hard-wired into Vondel criticism. When Korsten states that the tragic conflict in *Lucifer* is the impossibility of politics in the face of an all-powerful and perfect God, he approaches Vondel's play with pre-established modern ideas about the relationship between religion and politics.⁹ In fact, the problem he signals is a reformulation of the problem of evil: how can there be evil (or imperfection) when God is at once wholly good and omnipotent? After all, had heaven been perfect, there would be no need to preserve order. For the same reason, Peter King even goes as far as to call *Lucifer* a 'failed theological play'.¹⁰ The problem with these readings is that the politico-religious argument of *Lucifer* is precisely what its critics reject *a priori*. By depicting heaven as a state,¹¹ Vondel is making an essentially religious claim: he shows what he perceives to be the essential analogy and continuity between religion and politics – between sacred eternity and secular history, as well as divine and human authority. Far from being blasphemous, we will argue, this is an essential part of his religious outlook.

In its emphasis on the religious dimension of the political in *Lucifer*, this essay draws on the recent 'religious turn' in literary studies, analysed, for instance, by Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti.¹² Part of the argument of this religious turn is that literary critics, in their accounts of religion, have too often seen the spiritual as a mere smokescreen for the supposedly more real concerns of power in its various manifestations. In this way, they effectively reformulate the religious in political terms. As Jackson and Marotti argue, especially New Historicists and cultural materialists, 'when they dealt with religious issues, quickly translated them into social, economic and political language'.¹³ Religion, for these critics, was almost a form of 'false consciousness'.¹⁴ Recent scholarship has shown a renewed interest in what may be termed

⁹ Of course, Korsten is not unaware of the intimate relationship between religion and politics in the seventeenth century. In fact, he devoted an entire chapter to 'Politiek en religie in omarming' (The Embrace of Politics and Religion).

¹⁰ King, 'Vondels Lucifer'.

¹¹ Cf. Osterkamp, 'Joost van den Vondel: Lucifer'.

¹² Jackson and Marotti, 'The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies'.

¹³ *Idem*, p. 167.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 167–68.

'religion as religion', turning to issues such as the nature of spiritual or mystical experience, ritual, and theological doctrine – precisely the topics that seemed to be resistant to the politicised critical vocabulary of the 1980s and much of the 1990s. In a sense, this essay seeks to contribute to this development not by depoliticising religion but by making the political religious, that is to say, by treating the notion that monarchical power is sacrosanct as rooted in a serious and sincere conviction. It is worth noting that there is a kind of methodological mirror effect at work here. The historical question that we are investigating – is power sacred? – is intertwined with the methodological developments we have outlined. In their relentless politicising of religion, late twentieth-century critics showed themselves in part to be the descendants of the political debates of the mid-seventeenth century.

In order to throw into relief the politico-religious claim made in *Lucifer*, and to clarify the terms of the debate in which it intervened, we will read the play in relation to John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667/1674).¹⁵ Both texts investigate the nature of authority by appropriating the same basic narrative of Lucifer's rebellion against God, and the political import of this myth in *Lucifer* becomes clear if we contrast it with *Paradise Lost*. Milton scholars have frequently pointed out that the political upheavals of the mid-seventeenth century called for a re-investigation of the consequences of this central Christian myth. Indeed, any conflict about authority and government on earth was ultimately bound up with the question of the Fall. As William Poole phrases the question, '[i]f man was fallen and wayward, how should he be governed?'¹⁶ The tale of the rebellion and fall of Satan in itself begged the question of the relation between politics and the sacred, between power in its earthly and divine manifestations: how are we to conceive of a human political concept like rebellion in a heavenly context? Both *Paradise Lost* and *Lucifer* are concerned with the nature of Satan's revolt, of Adam's sovereignty, and of God's kingship. Can Satan's rebellion be adequately understood in the terminology of worldly politics, and can the hierarchy that God created in heaven be construed in these terms? Conversely, can earthly authority derive its legitimacy from a divinely ordained order? These questions, prompted by the political

¹⁵ For an earlier comparison, see Bekker, 'The Religio-philosophical Orientations'. Bekker focuses on the differences between Catholic and Protestant representations of Lucifer.

¹⁶ Poole, *Milton and the Idea of the Fall*, p. 9.

upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were essentially theological in nature.

As we will argue, the solutions to these questions presented by Milton are diametrically opposed to the theological argument of *Lucifer*. A comparison between the two works is enlightening because it foregrounds the issue that is at stake: the relation between sacred power and postlapsarian human government. It is the Protestant republican Milton, rather than the Catholic royalist Vondel, who imagines an unbridgeable divide between divine and worldly power, and it is Milton for whom Satan's rebellion and the Fall of mankind justify a revolt against tyranny (although he does so emphatically *without* sympathising with Satan's rebellion, and without presenting God as a tyrant).

In the light of the above, it is striking that the earliest surviving response to the play should have chastised Vondel for blending the religious and the political, since modern scholarship has grappled with exactly the same issue. It is imperative to realise, however, that this first critique approached Vondel's play from a Reformed perspective that is akin to Milton's, and that has since come to dominate Western political thought. Similarly, those modern critics who read *Lucifer* as a political allegory effectively apply Milton's perspective – the validity of which they presuppose – to Vondel. In order to arrive at a historical understanding of Vondel's investigation of the relation between politics and the sacred, it is necessary to accept the seventeenth-century debate in which he was participating on its own terms, and to appreciate that it was as yet unresolved in Vondel's time.

The Debate on Royal Authority in the Anglo-Dutch Context

The question of the sacredness of political authority was one of the central issues in the politico-religious debates and struggles of seventeenth-century Europe. The Dutch revolt against Spain, the Bohemian rebellion, the Thirty Years War, the Fronde, and the English Revolution were separate manifestations of a broad, largely religious, pan-European conflict that had its roots in the unfinished business of the Reformation. In this section we will focus on the Anglo-Dutch dimension of the debate.

Although the Dutch Republic was on one level the product of a revolt against a sovereign king, its defenders claimed not to reject

divine kingship per se, but rather to stand up against the tyranny of the king's representatives. Indeed, the more fundamental debate about the sacred nature of authority did not reach full strength until the mid-seventeenth century. In the case of England, 1603 saw the accession to the throne of a monarch who believed firmly and vocally in sacred kingship, yet the Revolution of the 1640s was premised in part on a secular, contractual conception of monarchy. Moreover, if the Restoration was greeted by some as the return of absolutist monarchy, less than thirty years later, the Revolution of 1688 resulted in a radical delimiting of monarchical power in favour of the authority of Parliament, even in so vital a matter as royal succession.

The seventeenth-century debate about political hierarchy was partly conducted in literary texts. The poetry and drama of the period confronted different notions of authority with each other, and investigated, through the lens of the literary imagination, the implications of the various competing models. William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1605–1606) and *King Lear* (1603) are two particularly resonant examples. If the murder of Duncan is presented as a violation of divine monarchy – 'Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope / The Lord's anointed temple' (2.3.67–68) – Duncan's death also marks the demise of sacred Scottish royalty.¹⁷ Malcolm, the new Scottish king, is explicitly distanced from the divine healing powers attributed to the English Edward, while Duncan is ultimately remembered only as 'the old man' (5.2.39). *King Lear* stages a similar deconsecration of monarchy, in which the royal body loses its thaumaturgic powers and finally 'smells' only 'of mortality' (4.6.133). Both plays also recoil from their disenchanting visions of kingship: they present the demotion of monarchy as traumatic, as a matter for tragedy, and *King Lear* arguably attempts to salvage some of what it dismantles in the moral and political authority which it confers on the figures of Kent and Edgar. Both plays seem to be caught between demystification and nostalgia.

Deeply involved as it was in justifying and defining a new state without a sovereign monarch, and in providing it with a history, the drama of the early seventeenth-century Dutch Republic rarely challenged the divine nature of royal rule directly. The issue was often simply evaded, which amounted to tacit support for the prevailing ideology. P.C. Hooft's *Baeto* (1616) is a case in point. In this mytho-historical tragedy,

¹⁷ References are to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. Blakemore Evans.

Bato, Prince of the Cats and heir-apparent, renounces his rights to the throne in order to prevent civil war in his native country Vinland. With his followers, he goes into exile, where he establishes the future state of Holland. When he is offered the sovereignty of this new state, however, Bato pledges to govern only ‘by the council of the noblest and finest of the citizenry.’¹⁸ The play enacts the double, almost paradoxical foundations of the Dutch Republic’s form of government. While providing Holland with a royal founding father, it simultaneously furnishes its civilians with ancient rights of participation and council. Although it ends with a warning to ‘high princes’ not to abuse their power, it nevertheless recognises their ‘holy thrones.’¹⁹

These examples suggest that if literary works in England and the Dutch Republic alike expressed no unqualified celebration of monarchy, they also skirted the fundamental issue of the source of royal power. In the mid seventeenth century, when England experienced a civil war that culminated in the execution of Charles I, and the Dutch polity witnessed William II’s bid for sovereignty in the face of Holland’s republican resistance, this evasive treatment of the sacredness of authority became increasingly problematic. After 1649, fundamental questions about social order had to be addressed. And in this period, ‘fundamental’ meant ‘religious’.

Vondel’s Drama and the Divine Order

It is a commonplace to remark that the most prominent feature of Vondel’s drama is its profound Christianity.²⁰ The fact that the majority of his plays have a biblical subject suffices to make the point. Yet the language, the structure, and the genre of Vondel’s plays, and even his justification for writing them in the first place, are also rooted deeply in his biblical knowledge, in his (evolving) theological views, and his piety. In Vondel’s view, theatre and drama were even religious in a metaphysical and an epistemological sense. Human mimetic art occupies a central position in his longest poem, *Bespiegelingen van Godt en Godtsdienst* (*Reflections upon God and Religion*, w. 1659, pr. 1662), which seeks to refute the arguments of ‘ongodisten’ (‘deniers of God’)

¹⁸ ‘By raadt van d’ edelst’ en de best’ der burgerije’ (*Baeto*, l. 1540).

¹⁹ ‘[H]ailighe thrönen’, (*Baeto*, l. 1516).

²⁰ See, for example, Brom, *Vondels geloof* and Noë, *De religieuze bezinning van Vondels werk*.

(among whom Vondel presumably counted Spinoza) by demonstrating God's existence.²¹ In Vondel's poetic argument, although God is unknowable, it is possible to come nearer to him indirectly, by being sensitive to his ordering hand in nature and society. His eternal light cannot be faced directly, but can be seen on earth as in a mirror. This notion of mirroring, so central to Vondel's religious experience and his drama, is also important for a historical reading of *Lucifer*.

In the (Neo-Platonic) theology that Vondel developed in the *Bespiegelingen*, poetry and drama, like painting and architecture, were more than simply media which could offer biblical education or help to shape Christian morality: their very existence had a profound religious meaning. Because of their aestheticism and orderliness, the arts, as recreations of the world, could never have existed without a design, and were therefore reflections of the created order in nature and society. Indeed, Vondel imagines God as an Artist, and every Christian artist as an imitator of God. For Vondel, such reflections were not just analogies. Reflections of the divine were the way for humans to come nearer to God, while at the same time they were the only possible proof of His existence. Indeed, in the *Bespiegelingen*, Vondel echoed the *De Theologia Gentili* (*On Pagan Theology*, 1641) by his friend Gerardus Joannes Vossius, which presents the existence of an 'amplum mundi amphitheatrum' as an argument for God's existence.²² The notion of the *theatrum mundi*, so central in seventeenth-century culture, was essentially a religious concept. In identifying the world with a stage (or a painting for that matter), Vondel not only underlines the reach and importance of theatre, but also indicates that the world is a stage in a very real, literal sense: he discovers an existing, even causal relationship between them. In Vondel's theology, the (theatrical) metaphor is not only an aesthetic form, but at the same time a revelation of God's structuring Hand.

Vondel's metaphors, in other words, not only transfer meaning from one word or concept to another, but posit an ontological equivalence between tenor and vehicle. As a result, they serve as evidence or reflection of divine order. The politico-religious import of Vondel's biblical plays can only be grasped in the light of his conception of the nature of metaphor. Unlike allegory, which entails replacement and transfer, metaphor, in Vondel's understanding, depends on a conception of the

²¹ Bakker, 'Een goddelijk schilderij'; Van Otegem, 'Vondels bespiegelingen over de nieuwe filosofie'.

²² *Bespiegelingen*, 1, 475. WB, 9, p. 424 n. Cf. also *Bespiegelingen* 3, 383.

universe as consisting of infinite reflections of divine order that vary only in degree. It has often been stated that Vondel distilled history into several types,²³ but it is perhaps more accurate to say that history, too, is a hall of mirrors, and when Vondel stages history, he activates the historical figure as well as its repetitions in time.²⁴ We may trace an echo here of Erich Auerbach's famous description of *figura*, which he considers to be distinct from allegory since 'neither the prefiguring nor the prefigured event lose literal and historical reality by figurative meaning'.²⁵ In biblical typology, the type and its prefiguration are conflated: they exist as distinct historical moments, while at the same time partaking of a timeless, eternal order of things. Whereas the allegorical narrative needs to be translated or decoded, *figura* opens up multiple parallel stories that are all versions of the same fundamental historical pattern. It is Vondel's use of figuration that enables him to be political without reducing the sacred narrative to a code. Indeed, by alluding to contemporary reflections or repetitions of sacred history, he adds to its truth.

Vondel's use of the *figura*, and his religious ideas about earthly reflections of divine truths, have important implications for our reading of his plays. For Vondel, history is a two-way mirror, and therefore essentially atemporal, repetitious, and reversible. Sacred history points forwards just as secular history points backwards; the heavenly order is directed downwards, while at the same time the natural and social order point upwards. This is why Vondel's plays frequently resist being interpreted as narratives. When read or experienced as stories, as plots developing in time, they lose much if not all of their interest. Almost devoid of action and tension in the plot, and telling a story that is well-known to begin with, they simply seem to conform to universal Christian ethics. As halls of mirrors, emblems without emplotment, however, the plays come alive and start to reach out into the world of their contemporary audiences.²⁶

²³ Cf., for example, Brom, *Vondels geloof*, p. 377.

²⁴ As Korsten argues, this also applies to Vondel's use of theatrical space, which is open-ended, and consists of a series of places and images, each of which are 'meeting points of histories'. See: Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, pp. 26–31; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, pp. 31–38.

²⁵ Auerbach, 'Figura', p. 30. See also, Gellrich, 'Figura, Allegory and the Question of History'.

²⁶ For the emblematic quality of Vondel's plays, see: Smit 'The Emblematic Aspect of Vondel's Tragedies as the Key to Their Interpretation'. Unlike our interpretation, Smit's

The audiences and readers of Vondel's plays are often explicitly invited to find reflections of themselves and others in biblical history. Usually, this invitation is supposed to lead them to a single, unambiguous Christian moral. In the 'Dedication' of *Koning David in ballingschap* (*King David Exiled*), for instance, Vondel points out the moral mirror that biblical history provides: 'Like a bright mirror, the Holy Ghost shows us how the heedless growth of wantonness has centuries of sorrow and war in tow'.²⁷ Mirroring only becomes political when the biblical history, with its familiar and authoritative moral meaning, also begins to reflect multiple other (contemporary) histories. In theory, Vondel's audience is free to see whoever or whatever they want to see reflected in his plays, but Vondel uses particular signs (keywords, motives, or images) that point towards particular persons or events, which in this way become connected both to each other and to the sacred. To look for those reflections is one of the great attractions of Vondel's plays.

Lucifer exemplifies the way in which Vondel works with reflections in order to integrate the sacred and the secular. Appropriately, *Lucifer's* dedication to the Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand III opens with an image of light and reflection: 'Just as the Divine Majesty is seated in an unapproachable light, so too sits worldly power, which takes its light from God and represents the Godhead, glorified in its radiance'.²⁸ Unambiguously embracing divine right theory, the very first sentence of the first edition of *Lucifer* could not have expressed its dedicator's ideology any better. Vondel here explicitly states that he considers earthly hierarchies to be not only analogous to the heavenly order, but, like his art, reflections of it, drawing their 'light', or power, directly from

reading of *Lucifer* in this article (pp. 560–62) focuses on the universal moral of the play. Yet in an argument comparable with (but not identical to) ours, Smit wrote: 'To the emblemist all things and all situations are potential bearers of a useful meaning. I think we may even go a step further and say that to him they *are* bearers of a hidden meaning, put in them by God, available to everyone, but noticed only by those who are willing to see and to learn' (p. 554). Smit even describes a link between Vondel's former religion and his emblematic method: 'As a Mennonite, Vondel was accustomed to read his Bible, and especially the Old Testament, as a kind of Holy Emblem-book' (p. 556). Cf. also: Scholz-Heerspink, 'Vondel's *Gijsbreght van Aemstel* as Emblematic and Figural Drama'.

²⁷ '[D]e heilige Geest toont ons, als in eenen klaeren Spiegel [...] hoe het reuckeloos verydelen der zinnen eeuwen van jammeren en oorlogen na zich sleept'. WB, 9, p. 26.

²⁸ 'Gelyck de Goddelycke Majesteit in een ongenaeckbaer licht gezeten is, zoo zit oock de weereltsche Mogentheit, die haer licht uit Godt scheidt, en de Godtheit afbeeldt, in haren glans verheerlyckt' (*Lucifer*, '[Dedication to] Den overwinnelycksten vorst en Heere, Ferdinandus de Derde', ll. 1–2).

God. Rebelling against earthly powers is, in Vondel's Pauline understanding, to rebel directly against God.

In the remainder of the Dedication, Vondel elaborates on the relationship between heavenly and earthly powers. 'This calamitous example of Lucifer, the Archangel, has been followed, throughout almost every age, by rebellious tyrants, to which histories both old and young testify.'²⁹ Vondel's use of the word 'voorbeelt', meaning both 'example' and 'pre-image' or 'pre-figuration', is of special significance here. While suggesting a moral reading of the play that is to follow, in which Lucifer is an example to be shunned, a warning not to engage in rebellious activity, Vondel also invites a prophetic reading, in which biblical history is endlessly repeated and prefigures all of human history. Similarly, the famous conclusion of Vondel's 'Berecht aen alle kunstgenooten' ('Notice to all fellow-artists') is more than a statement of the play's moral tenor. When Vondel writes that he brought Lucifer to the stage 'as a clear mirror of all those who, ungrateful and ambitious, dare to rise up against sacred powers, majesties, and legitimate governments',³⁰ the mirror metaphor is an open invitation to the play's readers to look for contemporary examples of ambition in Vondel's depiction of the rebellious angel.

In the paratexts, then, Vondel intimates that *Lucifer* is structured according to the mirroring principle he would later develop in his *Bespiegelingen* in two ways. The dedication states that earthly hierarchy is a reflection of heavenly hierarchy, while both the dedication and the 'Berecht' suggest that the play illustrates the continuing re-enactment of sacred story in human history. The question is whether *Lucifer* indeed conforms to its author's stated intentions.

Heavenly Hierarchy Reflected on Earth

Although *Lucifer*'s universe is bound together by God's eternal light, heaven and earth are distinct worlds, with distinct hierarchies. In the Heavenly, spiritual realm God is the only sovereign. Lucifer may be a

²⁹ 'Op dit rampzalige voorbeelt van Lucifer, den Aertsengel, en eerst heerlycksten boven alle engelen, volghden sedert, bykans alle eeuwen door, de wederspannige geweldenaers, waer van oude en jonge historien getuigen' (*Lucifer*, '[Dedication to] Den overwinnelycksten vorst en Heere, Ferdinandus de Derde', ll. 18–21).

³⁰ '[T]en klare spiegel van alle ondanckbare staetzuchtigen, die zich stoutelyck tegens de geheilighde Maghten, en Majesteiten, en wettige Overheden durven verheffen' (*Lucifer*, 'Berecht', ll. 216–18).

called a 'vorst' ('prince'), but this does not mean he has independent powers.³¹ Lucifer's stadtholderate in Heaven depends on his feudal relation to God; although he occupies a high office, he remains a vassal, 'bound to God's commandments'.³² As Rafael points out to him, he can claim no independent power because '[b]orrowed power can be taken away, and is no inalienable inheritance'.³³ Whatever authority Lucifer has is borrowed and may be reclaimed by its owner at any time.

Lucifer's condition in Heaven contrasts sharply with that of Adam on earth. In that separate realm,³⁴ Apollion reveals to Belzebug in the first scene of the play, Adam *is* a sovereign ruler:

The mountain lion wagged its tail
And smiled at the master. The tiger laid down its nature
At the King's feet. The land-bull bowed its horn,
The elephant its trunk. The bear forgot its wrath.³⁵

Adam is explicitly referred to as a king over all living creatures. When Apollion later says that 'he rules like a God' (l. 118), Adam's royal rule is given divine status. That Adam's godlike authority is not merely a delusion of the corruptible messenger Apollion becomes clear when Gabriel later confirms Adam's (i.e. man's) sovereignty on earth. Goodness, Gabriel states:

[...] built the wondrous and admirable universe
Of the world, for the benefit of God and man
So that he [Adam] would reign in this garden.³⁶

³¹ The title 'vorst' was ambiguous in the seventeenth century, and could refer to a wide range of political statuses and offices. According to the *WNT*, 'vorst' could mean male sovereign or independent ruler, a monarch ('Vorst I, 1), but it was also used to refer to a ruler who ranked immediately below the sovereign, such as a duke or a prince ('Vorst I, 2). Indeed, especially in Bibles and religious poetry, the term often designated high court functionaries without the slightest claim to independent political power ('Vorst I, 4). In Vondel's plays and poetry, he exploits the whole range of connotations of the word. When he applies it to Lucifer, however, the ambiguity is qualified by Lucifer's rank as 'stadtholder', which renders him the highest representative of God's sovereign power rather than a sovereign himself.

³² '[V]erknocht aan Gods geboden' (l. 258).

³³ 'Geleende heerschappy staet los, en is geen erf' (l. 1599).

³⁴ The separateness of Adam's rule on earth is underlined by references to angelic *ambassadors* to earth (see e.g. ll. 278–79).

³⁵ 'De berghleeuw quispelde hem aen met zynen staert, / En loegh den meester toe. De tiger ley zijn' aert / Voor 's Konings voeten af. De lantstier boogh zijn' horen, / En dolifant zijn' snuit. De beer vergat zijn' toren' (ll. 91–94).

³⁶ '[Dees Goetheit] boude 't wonderlyck en zienelyck Heelal / Der weerelt, Gode en oock den menschen te geval / Op dat hy in dit hof zou heerschen' (ll. 211–13).

Rafael later explains to Lucifer that when God decided to share his power with Adam, he invested it in him, as opposed to giving it on loan, and destined him to wear ‘the first crown’ (d’eerste kroon, ll. 1556–57). This phrase makes Adam the first in a line of kings, and aligns the play with a particular branch of patriarchal thought which held that kingship originated in – and was justified by – Adam’s fatherhood. In his *Patriarchia* (1680), Robert Filmer similarly argued that Adam exerted ‘by Right of Father-hood, Royal Authority over [his] children, and saw Adam’s status as king as a legitimation of absolute monarchy: ‘[The] lordship which Adam by command had over the whole world, and by right descending from him the patriarchs did enjoy, was as large and ample as the most absolute dominion of any monarch which hath been since the Creation.’³⁷ When the chorus of angels sings at the end of the first act ‘let us praise God in Adam’,³⁸ then, it is the honour due to a sovereign prince who is God’s image on earth.

Critics of *Lucifer* have tended to focus on the representation of the rebellious angels Belzebub and Apollion in the first act, and what it might tell us about the state of Heaven before the Fall.³⁹ From the perspective of the relationship between sacred and secular authority, however, the most important function of the opening scene of the play is to provide an image of earth in its prelapsarian state, to foreground Adam’s privileged position, and to show the fundamental difference between angelic authority in heaven and human authority on earth. Earthly hierarchy is not a part, but a *reflection* of heavenly hierarchy: Adam rules over the animals, and shall rule over his future offspring, as God rules over the angels. The parallel between these different hierarchies forms the political premise of *Lucifer*; it is established before the revolt in heaven is conceived. The relation between the heavenly sovereign and his subjects is analogous to that between the earthly sovereign Adam and his subjects. The question is how we should assess that relation.

The Debate on Right and Lucifer’s God of Order

Although Vondel’s paratexts assert that Lucifer’s latent ambition, his ‘[political] ambition’ (staetzucht) or ‘desire for the crown’ (kroonzucht),

³⁷ Filmer, *Patriarcha: or the Natural Power of Kings*, pp. 12–13.

³⁸ ‘[L]aet ons Godt in Adam eeren’ (l. 346).

³⁹ Cf., for example, King, ‘Vondels *Lucifer*’.

is the ultimate cause of the angelic war, in the play the rebellion in heaven is occasioned by Gabriel's announcement that God has decided in time to elevate Adam to a higher state than the angels. This is unpalatable for Lucifer and his supporters, the 'Luciferisten.' They appeal to their 'holy right' (l. 1050) as first-born children of God to remain stationed above the 'earthworm' Adam.⁴⁰ In the following example, Apollion defends the former in a discussion with the Rey (Chorus) of loyal angels:

- | | |
|----------|--|
| Apollion | What counsel? How to calm them? They make an appeal to Right. |
| Rey | What right? Whoever makes the law has the power to break it. |
| Apollion | How can Justice speak an unjust verdict? |
| Rey | Are you censuring God's judgment, laying down the law for him? |
| Belial | The father teaches the child to follow his trail. |
| Rey | To follow his trail is to share his wishes. ⁴¹ |

Apollion's argument here is that established practice turned law is holier than God's decreed will. To strip the angels of their right is to be unjust. The loyal angels, by contrast, consider God's sovereignty to be above the law, and stress obedience: 'whoever makes the law has the power to break it'. Or as Michael later phrases it, 'he who competes with God is not just in the least'.⁴² Indeed, in a rhetorical question to the Luciferists, the loyal angels claim only one right, which is to remain unchanged: 'We remain who we are: are we maltreated?'⁴³ Besides that basic right, protecting them from change or deterioration, there is only law. When during his first appearance Gabriel announces that angels and men eventually should together uphold the 'opgeleide wet' – or 'law imposed' – in Heaven (l. 210), the adjective is crucial: law is only law when it is imposed by the sovereign.

⁴⁰ The motive of right in Vondel's *Lucifer* has been discussed by several critics. See Osterkamp, *Lucifer*, pp. 87–130, and Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, pp. 195–99; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, pp. 172–78. Bax has analysed the argumentation of the rebelling angels in Bax, 'De engel van wanhoop'.

⁴¹ 'Apollion: Wat raet? Hoe paeit men hen? Zy steunen op hun Recht. / Rey: Wat Recht? Die wetten geeft vermogh de wet te breken. / Apollion: Hoe kan Rechtvaardigheid een onrecht oordeel spreken? / Rey: Bestraf Godts oordeel eens, en schryft hem wetten voor. / Belial: De vader leer' het kint hem volgen op zyn spoor. / Rey: Zyn spoor te volgen is het zelve als hy te willen' (ll. 921–26).

⁴² 'D'inspanner tegens Godt is allerminst rechtvaardigh' (l. 1130).

⁴³ 'Wy blyven diewe zyn: geschiet ons ongelyck?' (l. 961).

This debate on right occupies a central position in *Lucifer*, and is repeated several times by different characters in the middle acts of the play. Yet despite this prominence, the loyal angels fail to offer a justification for their representation of the state that has convinced the play's critics. The question that keeps puzzling scholars is whether the play actually shows what is wrong with the rebel's arguments. For Korsten and Bax, for example, the principal loyal argument that angels and men are unable to judge the wisdom of God's decisions and should therefore simply comply with his will reeks of tyranny and seems to justify the revolt rather than anything else. But critics siding with the Luciferians should concede that the rebelling angels do not confront the arguments of their opponents either. In fact, there is no real debate in *Lucifer*. Rather, the play repeatedly contrasts two opposite perspectives that do not interact. Angelic logic and angelic arguments are unable to achieve consensus. *Lucifer* foregrounds the *failure* of political debate.

The argument of the rebellious angels is further disarmed by the way in which the central debate on right is framed. It is bracketed, and therefore contained, by two acts that ultimately serve to make a similar point. The first act, as we have seen, establishes the divine order: it shows that earthly hierarchy mirrors heavenly hierarchy. In the play's logic, the entire discussion about right is made redundant by the premise of Adam's sovereignty. The last act shows the restoration of order in Heaven. On a level of form, then, *Lucifer* suggests that debate is itself an aspect of disorder. In Vondel's theological views, as we have seen in the *Bespiegelingen*, this alone renders it blasphemous. Like Vondel's God in the *Bespiegelingen*, *Lucifer's* God is a God of order, as can be gleaned from the following remark by the Chorus in the third act of *Lucifer*:

One power governs all, and can bring down even the highest.
 Whatever the least of men receive is due to mercy only.
 Here nothing is arbitrary, human understanding fails.
 God's glory lies in inequality.⁴⁴

According to the Chorus, God's 'heerlyckheit' ('glory', but also 'lordship') resides in the inequality hard-wired into the heavenly state. It is this inequality, the Chorus explains, that ensures peace:

⁴⁴ 'Een maght regeert het al, en keert het bovenste onder. / Wat d'allerminste ontfangt, is loutere gena. / Hier gelt geen willekeur. hier komt vernuft te spa. / In d'ongelyckheit is Godts heerlyckheit gelegen' (ll. 939–42). For an alternative translation, see Leonard Charles van Noppen, p. 343.

In these inequalities
 Of offices, light and circles and stations, ways and walks,
 One finds neither discord, envy, nor conflict.⁴⁵

The implication of this statement, which is echoed in the *Bespiegelingen*, is that whoever challenges the inequality put in place by God creates discord, envy, and war; this conforms to the position outlined in Vondel's paratexts. In this way, *Lucifer* demonstrates that there can be no right without an ultimate authority from which it emanates. Take that authority away, as the rebellious angels do, and right either ceases to exist or ceases to be just, since an appeal to it results in conflict and chaos. This was, of course, an orthodox argument. In his spiritual poem *Jezus en de Ziel* (*Christ and the Soul*), for instance, Jan Luyken had emphasised exactly the same point. 'Why has God created angelic princes, and not all [angels] in equality?' Luyken asks, and the immediate answer is that 'God is a God of order'.⁴⁶

That *Lucifer* should repeatedly equate the political debate on right with ungodly disorder indicates an important, and paradoxical, Hobbesian current in Vondel's religious thought. When *Lucifer* states that '[i]t is natural that everyone should protect their own rights',⁴⁷ the appeal to nature and natural law here is almost a direct echo of Thomas Hobbes's political philosophy. In *Leviathan* (1651), Hobbes had argued that in a natural state, where 'every man has a right to every thing', and 'every one is governed by his own Reason', man lives in 'a condition of Warre of every against every one'.⁴⁸ To prevent this perpetual war, a reasonable man gives up his natural right and transfers his powers to one, single authority in order to protect himself. *Lucifer* conforms to the Hobbesian philosophy of power by showing that the effect of an appeal to 'natural' right in the absence of some sovereign authority necessarily leads to conflict and (civil) war. Yet whereas Hobbes's philosophy was strictly materialistic and secular, Vondel's similar conclusions are based on religious conviction. It is likely that Vondel despised Hobbes for his materialism,⁴⁹ and it is not inconceivable that he intended to design an alternative to *De cive*, a work that was well

⁴⁵ '[...] in deze oneffenheden / Van ampten, licht en kreits en stant, en trant en treden, / [Verneemtghe] geen tweedraght, nyt, noch stryt' (ll. 978–980).

⁴⁶ Jan Luyken, *Jezus en de Ziel*, p. 179.

⁴⁷ 'Naturelyck is elck beschermer van zyn Recht' (l. 942).

⁴⁸ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 42.

⁴⁹ Brom, *Vondels geloof*, pp. 377–78.

known in the Dutch Republic. Yet ironically, and perhaps in spite of himself, he repeatedly echoes his ideological enemy. Setting out to provide a religious or theological justification of divine right in the face of increasingly radical opposition, Vondel finds himself drawing on the essentially secular absolutism of Hobbes as additional support for his position. In doing so, however, he contributes to the desecralisation of monarchy that he seeks to combat: in the political context of the late seventeenth century, a purely religious defence of monarchy seems no longer sufficient. Indeed, it may well be the Hobbesian echoes in *Lucifer* that have undermined its religious sincerity in the eyes of many readers.

Sacred and Human History

In *Lucifer*, Heaven and earth are represented as separate but mirroring realms that both reflect the unapproachable, eternal light of God. The universe is structured according to repeating patterns which allow angels and men to enjoy divine order. But the play also invites a reading of postlapsarian history as an endless reenactment of the heavenly drama that it presents. In the final act, when Uriel finishes his report of the battle in heaven, he has a prophetic vision of history:

I see a gallery of war tableaux,
Born from that battle, as far as the eye can see.⁵⁰

The endless gallery of battle paintings Uriel envisages draws attention to the momentous nature of God's victory, but the more ironic implication of his comment is clear. After the Fall, human history will provide the images of which the battle he has just described is the prefiguration. In consequence, Vondel's classification of the play as a tragedy, to which Korsten rightly draws attention, not only seems to serve to turn Lucifer into a tragic hero, but also refers to its prophetic character, to its status as prefiguration of the never-ending return of rebellion and civil war.

Importantly, Uriel's vision implies that the Fall constitutes no fundamental breach between sacred and secular politics. Although man shares in Lucifer's guilt in the postlapsarian world, the battles he will fight are repetitions of the battle fought in Heaven. Necessarily, within

⁵⁰ 'Ick zie een galery, vol oorlogstafereelen, / Geboren uit dien slag, zoo wyt men af kan zien' (ll. 1935–36).

Vondel's neo-platonic theology, earthly revolts must be prefigured in Heaven (or in the Bible). Had there been no evil in Heaven, he would have been unable to explain evil on earth, and his (implicit) theodicy would have failed.

Vondel recognised, as he had to, the eternal pattern outlined above in his own contemporary history – most prominently, though not exclusively,⁵¹ in recent Anglo-Dutch developments. By having his title character fulfil the political office of stadtholder, Vondel deliberately alludes to William II's attack on Amsterdam (August 1650), which would have been a major step towards Orange's sovereignty over the Dutch Republic had it been successful. Rafael's claim that 'borrowed power [...] is no inalienable inheritance', therefore, applies also to the Orangist claims that William III was entitled to the offices and powers of his forefathers by birth.

Even more manifest than the allusions to the conflict between Orangists and the States of Holland, are the references to Civil War and regicide in England. In the light of Vondel's own political poetry, in which he had branded Oliver Cromwell a 'disguised Lucifer', even the title of his play was suggestive.⁵² But echoes of civil war and regicide occur throughout the play. The entire angelic debate on right, for example, resonates with the execution of Charles I. By having the law take precedence over sovereignty, and arguing that God has to behave according to the established laws, Apollion is effectively arguing that the angels can put God on trial. During *his* trial, Charles I refused to plead his case. His defence was limited to his refusal to recognise the court that tried him. Dutch pamphlets describing his trial minutely recorded his repeated protests, in which he argued 'not only against the unlawfulness of this pretended court, but simultaneously, that there is no Power on Earth able to interrogate me (I who am your King) lawfully'. With an appeal to Ecclesiastes 8:4 ('Where the word of a king is, there is power') Charles argued that the 'authority of [...] Kings [was] clearly confirmed and sternly commanded both in the Old and the New Testament'. Importantly, he justified absolute royal authority not only by appealing to divine authority, but also by arguing that it was

⁵¹ In the Holy Roman Empire, too, a debate was waged about the authority of the emperor, which included *jure divino* arguments.

⁵² Cf. Smits-Veldt, *Het Nederlandse Renaissancetoneel*, pp. 115–16. Reading *Lucifer*, Kritzinger observes: "n Mens voel dat dit direk gemunt is op Cromwell en Willem II, want naas gebeurtenisse uit die oudheid vorm die gebeurtenisse uit sy tyd "een der rijkste bronnen van den Lucifer" (Kritzinger, *Die Opstandsmotief by Vondel*, p. 90).

necessary to safeguard ‘the freedoms of the people.’ ‘What hope can there be,’ he claimed, ‘when power governs without rule or right?’ Although it is easy to mistake the statement for a critique of absolutism, the point is exactly the opposite. In Charles’s argument, power ceases to be just when it steps outside the hierarchical order established in the ‘fundamental rights of the kingdom.’ These are necessarily superior to any law or individual rights, because there can be no right when there is no ultimate, static authority to decide what is right. Charles, then, sought to turn what was intended as an investigation of the charges of tyranny and treason laid before him into a principled discussion of the authority of the law, and a deconstruction of the term ‘right.’ The court, however, refused to answer his principled critique. Like the debate on right in *Lucifer*, all sessions of the trial ended in a repetition of moves.

The powerful allusions to contemporary politics in the three middle acts of *Lucifer* are essential to understanding the politico-religious argument of the play. Rather than transforming it into unambiguous political allegory, the topical reflections extend sacred history, multiply it. Although the play comes close to depicting specific contemporary political figures as rebellious devils, it simultaneously reveals that earthly politics have been prefigured in heaven, and that earthly hierarchy is consequently a reflection of divine order, a continuation of an order that has been untouched by the Fall. The topical echoes in *Lucifer* have their roots in a religious conviction in which postlapsarian history is essentially a repetition of sacred history. This is the implication of Uriel’s prophetic vision.

Religion and Politics in Paradise Lost

In John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* the examination of the question of authority, and of the relation between earthly and divine authority, is woven into the narrative form of the poem.⁵³ Stanley Fish has famously

⁵³ The scholarly literature on the relations between politics and religion in Milton is vast; for this short overview we have made grateful use of the following titles: Loewenstein, *Representing Revolution in Milton and his Contemporaries*; Parry and Raymond, *Milton and the Terms of Liberty*; Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England*; and King, *Milton and Religious Controversy*; Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, esp. ch. 3 and 10; Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England*; Knoppers, *Historicizing Milton*; Achinstein, *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader*;

argued that 'Milton's method is to recreate in the mind of the reader the drama of the Fall, to make him fall again as Adam did'.⁵⁴ Throughout the poem, the reader is tempted to empathise with Satan, to be swayed by his rhetoric, and is subsequently made to realise that he succumbed to this temptation, only to lapse unavoidably into the same mistake at a later moment in the poem: the human fallibility that results from the Fall is also the reader's inescapable condition. One instance of this is the reader's postlapsarian perception of Eve in Book IV, whose prelapsarian innocence lies outside his fallen frame of reference. We cannot help sharing Satan's perspective and projecting our own, always already tainted categories onto her, seeing her 'unadorned golden tresses' as 'dishevel'd' and reading 'wanton[ness]' into the 'ringlets wav'd' (4, 306) of her hair.⁵⁵ Similarly, in Book I, Milton seems to assume that the reader will be manipulated into admiring the heroic defiance which Satan displays immediately after his fall, and corrects him in a narrative interjection: 'So spake th'Apostate Angel, though in pain, / Vaunting aloud, but rackt with deep despare' (1, 125–26).

In giving in to Satan's rhetoric, the reader also comes to share his conception of God's status as king. In his first speech to the fallen angels, Satan defines God's sovereignty in secular terms:

To bow and sue for grace
 With suppliant knee, and deifie his power,
 Who from the terrour of this Arm so late
 Doubted his Empire, that were low indeed,
 That were an ignominy and shame beneath
 This downfall[.] (1, 111–16)

Satan sees God's rule as an essentially arbitrary, tyrannical form of 'Empire' and 'power'. He construes the receiving of God's grace as subjection, and denies the divinity of God's dominion. His is a form of

Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England*; Dzelzainis, 'The Politics of Paradise Lost'. For Milton and radical religion in the Civil War period, see for example: Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*; Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*.

⁵⁴ Fish, *Surprised by Sin*, p. 1. While a discussion of the subsequent critical debate over Fish's reading is beyond the scope of this article, it is worth noting that William Poole takes Fish to task for the latter's 'construction of a robotically boring reader' (Poole, *Milton and the Idea of the Fall*, p. 195) and for downplaying Milton's radicalism. Part of the argument of this article is that the idea of a fallen readerly experience is part and parcel of Milton's radical politics.

⁵⁵ References to the works of John Milton are to the online editions published by 'The John Milton Reading Room', <<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/>>, accessed 4 March 2009.

merely earthly power, and only a plea for grace from the fallen angels would ‘deifie’ it, that is to say, convert it from secular to divine. In other words, Satan implies that it is in the angels’ power to withhold sacredness from God’s rule. It is after this speech that Milton reminds the reader of Satan’s inner despair, and the speech itself is also fraught with contradiction, for example in its final flourish, when Satan claims that God ‘in th’*excess* of joy / Sole reigning holds the Tyranny of Heav’n’ (1, 123–24), our italics). The allegation that God’s joy is extravagant or immoderate is unsubstantiated – rooted rather in Satan’s own ‘immortal hate’ (1, 107) – and catachrestic. In early modern English the word ‘joy’ could (and in these lines, of course, does) refer to ‘the perfect bliss or beatitude of heaven; hence, the place of bliss, paradise, heaven’,⁵⁶ a state that *excludes* the very possibility of immoderation. ‘Immoderation’ is applicable only to earthly and postlapsarian joy.

Satan’s insurrection, then, consists not only in the act of disobedience itself, but also in his deluded insistence on seeing the hierarchical relations in heaven in secular terms, demoting God to the status of a human monarch, and defining God’s power over him as a form of earthly tyranny. This is Satan’s fundamental category error – as well as the category error which the reader is made to commit. Part of the ‘great argument’ (1, 24) of *Paradise Lost*, antithetically opposed to that of Vondel’s *Lucifer*, is that earthly and divine power are radically different, and that the hierarchies in heaven and on earth are based on incommensurate principles, and should be understood on their own terms. *Paradise Lost* presents God in monarchic terms, the ‘mighty Father Thron’d / On high’ (6, 890–891), precisely in order to remind the reader that, in David Loewenstein’s words, ‘the courtly rituals and dynamics of Milton’s Heaven operate differently from the rituals of earthly kingship and temporal politics familiar from Stuart theory and practice.’⁵⁷ In an important sense, therefore, Satan’s contractual notions of power are inappropriate when applied to God, but valid within an earthly context.

The design of Book II, with its two sections, enacts this argument. The first section presents the Satanic Host in terms strongly suggestive of the mid-century English politics in which Milton had also been actively involved. Moloch argues for a military confrontation with the ‘Tyranny’ of God ‘who Reigns / By our delay’ (2, 59–60), just as Milton

⁵⁶ OED, s.v. ‘joy’, 2.

⁵⁷ Loewenstein, *Representing Revolution*, p. 229.

himself had justified the Civil War as a defence of freedom against tyranny, most famously in *Eikonoklastes* (1649) and in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1650), in which he argues that 'that turning to Tyranny they may bee as lawfully depos'd and punish'd, as they were at first elected.' Indeed, Satan's suggestion, in Book I, that God is dependent for his power on the consent of the angels over whom he rules echoes Milton's claim, in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, that

the power of Kings and Magistrates is nothing else, but what is only derivative, transferr'd and committed to them in trust from the People, to the Common good of them all, in whom the power yet remains fundamentally, and cannot be tak'n from them, without a violation of thir natural birthright[.]

Having said this, the debate in hell also contains the kind of contradictions that undermine Satan's first speech in Book I. Belial, for example, distorts the idea of freedom by associating it with unaccountability: 'Live to our selves, though in this vast recess, / Free, and to none accountable' (2, 254–55). The phrase 'to none accountable' implies a curious inversion of the attitude that Belial advocates: it does not so much describe an *escape* from tyranny as its very essence: reluctance on the part of rulers to be answerable to those over whom they rule. Indeed, for Milton the refusal to be held accountable was precisely the hallmark of tyrannical kingship. In *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* he writes that 'Monarchy unaccountable, is the worst sort of Tyranny; and least of all to be endur'd by free born men.'

The intimation that the devils' advocacy of a secular form of liberty is deceptive is worked out in more detail in the second section of Book II, which recounts Satan's journey to earth. Here, Satan sheds his role of near-human political leader and comes to embody an abstract evil that exists on an entirely different plane from the secular political realities of mid-seventeenth-century England.⁵⁸ His encounter with Chaos, Sin and Death (the offspring of Satan's sexual union with Sin) makes clear that the nature of Satan's actions cannot be grasped in secular, political categories. As a result the reader, too, is made to adjust once again his assessment of Satan.

This separation between real-world politics and the rebellion of Satan is a crucial element within the political argument of *Paradise*

⁵⁸ We are indebted for this point to Bradford, *The Complete Critical Guide to John Milton*, pp. 98–101.

Lost. In positing a gulf between heavenly and worldly politics, Milton divests earthly monarchic power of the sacred character with which Stuart absolutism had endowed it. In other words, it is precisely because God's kingship is so fundamentally unlike earthly sovereignty, and because the evil represented by Satan is otherworldly, that kingly authority can only be irreparably secular. In an important sense, for Milton, absolutism, in confounding the worldly and the divine, commits the same category error as Satan. Moreover, if Shakespeare, in *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, laments the separation between sacred and profane as tragic, for Milton, it is in part the *blending* of the two that sets the cosmic tragedy of the Fall in motion. In their dialogue in Book IX, Satan succeeds in convincing Eve that God's decrees can be regarded in the same spirit as those of an earthly ruler. Eve initially sees her paradisaical state as a form of liberty in which she and Adam 'live / Law to our selves' (9, 653–54). Indeed, for Milton, the fact that God has issued one sole command effectively underscores the far-reaching nature of the prelapsarian ethical autonomy enjoyed by humans. In an important sense, *Paradise Lost* presents the prelapsarian condition as pre-political in the sense that it is innocent of any *secular* notions of politics.⁵⁹ It is Satan who introduces Eve to an idiom of hierarchy and subjection, arguing that God has forbidden her to taste of the Tree of Knowledge 'but to keep ye low and ignorant, His worshippers' (9, 703–05). He even sees Eve's beauty in political terms, as a characteristic that legitimises her elevation as 'sovrán of Creatures':

in thy Beauties heav'nly Ray
 United I beheld; no Fair to thine
 Equivalent or second, which compell'd
 Mee thus, though importune perhaps, to come
 And gaze, and worship thee of right declar'd
 Sovrán of Creatures, universal Dame. (9, 607–12)

Satan, then, tempts Eve in part by importing a secular language of hierarchy and subjection into the prelapsarian world, and Milton presents

⁵⁹ Cf. Milton's remarks in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* about the origins of politics in the secular sense: 'No man who knows ought, can be so stupid to deny that all men naturally were borne free, being the image and resemblance of God himself, and were by privilege above all the creatures, born to command and not to obey: and that they liv'd so. Till from the root of Adams transgression, falling among themselves to doe wrong and violence, and foreseeing that such courses must needs tend to the destruction of them all, they agreed by common league to bind each other from mutual injury, and joyntly to defend themselves against any that gave disturbance or opposition to such agreement.'

the Fall partly as a perversion of the concept of sovereignty, and, even more fundamentally, as a lapse into politics. It is after the Fall that human relations become tainted by inequality, and the existence of tyranny has its roots in original sin. This emergence of the political sphere begins inside the human individual. The inner state of postlapsarian man is characterised by a political form of turmoil. After the Fall, 'sensual Appetite' gains power over 'Reason',

but high Winds worse within
 Began to rise, high Passions, Anger, Hate,
 Mistrust, Suspicion, Discord, and shook sore
 Their inward State of Mind, calm Region once
 And full of Peace, now tost and turbulent:
 For Understanding rul'd not, and the Will
 Heard not her lore, both in subjection now
 To sensual Appetite, who from beneath
 Usurping over sovran Reason claimd
 Superior sway[.] (11, 1122–31)

This passage underlines once more that Satan's rebellion and temptation of mankind do not bring liberty, cannot be seen as a legitimate uprising, but result in a 'usurpation' of legitimate sovereignty that affects even the inner life. After the fall, even man's inner state is tainted by politics.

In Book XII, Michael posits an explicit causal link between this inner discord and the emergence of political tyranny in the public sphere:

Since thy original lapse, true Libertie
 Is lost [...].
 Reason in man obscur'd, or not obeyd,
 Immediately inordinate desires
 And upstart Passions catch the Government
 From Reason, and to servitude reduce
 Man till then free. Therefore since hee permits
 Within himself unworthie Powers to reign
 Over free Reason, God in Judgement just
 Subjects him from without to violent Lords;
 Who oft as undeservedly enthrall
 His outward freedom: Tyrannie must be,
 Though to the Tyrant thereby no excuse. (12, 83–96)

Since Michael argues that tyranny is part of God's punishment for man's first disobedience, it is tempting to read these lines as a legitimisation of tyranny: 'Tyrannie must be'. There is also a notable friction between the emphasis on the 'justness' of God's judgement and the idea

that power derived from tyranny is ‘undeserved’. Yet this paradox captures the logic of Michael’s remarks: that tyranny is an unavoidable effect of the Fall does not mean it is justified, or to be accepted passively. Rather, it is precisely *because* it is one of the consequences of the Fall that it is to be resisted: its postlapsarian inevitability offers ‘no excuse’ for the tyrant. The parallel between man’s inner discord and the existence of tyranny helps to explain this, in that it is part of man’s ethical duty after the Fall to try and regain control over ‘sensual Appetite’. This is a defining characteristic of the ‘paradise within’ (12, 587) described in *Paradise Regained* (1671), and alluded to in the final books of *Paradise Lost*. In the former poem, Christ responds to Satan’s temptations in the desert by describing self-control as a higher form of kingship, and his words assume a fundamental interaction between the private and public spheres. Resisting the tyranny of the passions is a political act:

Yet he who reigns within himself, and rules
 Passions, Desires, and Fears, is more a King;
 Which every wise and vertuous man attains:
 And who attains not, ill aspires to rule
 Cities of men, or head-strong Multitudes,
 Subject himself to Anarchy within,
 Or lawless passions in him, which he serves.
 (*Paradise Regained*, 2, 466–72)⁶⁰

One of the implications of the rift between the political and the sacred posited in *Paradise Lost* is that absolutist monarchy effectively becomes satanic in nature. Indeed, it is Satan himself who, in spite of his rhetoric of liberty and rejection of tyranny in Book I, sounds at times suspiciously similar to earthly monarchs. The opening of Book II finds him sitting ‘exalted’, ‘high on a throne of Royal State’, and appealing to the ‘fixt Laws of Heav’n’ (2, 5; 1, 18) to justify his monarchical status. Moreover, once the seemingly open debate in Hell has been concluded, Satan acts as an authoritarian king, pre-empting further discussion: ‘Thus saying rose / The Monarch, and prevented all reply’ (2, 466–67).⁶¹ It is in part by means of such ironies that the reader is confronted with his postlapsarian fallibility. Even though Milton presents Satan’s rebellion as otherworldly in terms of its theological consequences, the

⁶⁰ See also Loewenstein, *Representing Revolution*, pp. 257–58.

⁶¹ For this point, see also Loewenstein, ‘The Radical Religious Politics of *Paradise Lost*’.

political tyranny that results from the Fall is prefigured in the role of absolute monarch that Satan assumes once he has been cast into hell.

Milton's severance between the sacred and the secular is at its clearest when notions of sovereignty are at stake. Where other realms of human activity are concerned, *Paradise Lost* frequently imagines a close analogy between the two. This appears, for example, from its insistence that the ways of God to man can be justified, and can therefore be grasped by human reason. The very act of writing a theodicy, premised as it is on the scrutability of the divine, flies in the face of the absolute division between divine and human reason that was central to Calvinism. As Stephen M. Fallon notes, 'in Milton's epic the unbridgeable gap between divine and created reason characteristic of Calvinism is a feature of hell'.⁶² Similarly, the accounts of postlapsarian history in Book XI offer a number of Old Testament models for Milton's own sense of his identity as a member of a persecuted religious minority, for example in the slaying of Abel by Cain, and in the figure of Enoch, derided by 'old and young' before he is 'snatch'd' by God, 'Unseen amid the throng' (11, 668–671). In contrast to royal power, the experience of the marginalised godly *can* legitimately be understood as a form of sacred history.

Yet the plunge into history is in itself also an index of fallenness, and the experience of persecution is one of its defining aspects, as Michael explains to Adam in Book XII:

heavie persecution shall arise
 On all who in the worship persevere
 Of Spirit and Truth; the rest, farr greater part,
 Well deem in outward Rites and specious formes
 Religion satisfi'd; Truth shall retire
 Bestuck with slandrous darts, and works of Faith
 Rarely be found: so shall the World goe on,
 To good malignant, to bad men benigne,
 Under her own waight groaning till the day
 Appeer of respiration to the just[.] (12, 531–40)

Michael's prophetic vision of a world caught in history – condemned to 'goe on [...] groaning' until the Day of Judgment – contrasts sharply with Milton's emphasis on the timelessness of God, who 'from his prospect high' surveys 'past, present, future' (3, 77–78), whose decrees are 'Unchangeable, Eternal' (3, 127), and who, in Book III, speaks about

⁶² Fallon, 'Paradise Lost in Intellectual History', p. 333.

the future creation of man and the Fall in the past tense, emphasising the extent to which He exists outside temporal categories: ‘[Man] had of mee / All he could have; I made him just and right’ (3, 97–98).⁶³ Crucially, tyranny proceeds by confounding the sacred and the profane. It appropriates for itself the paraphernalia and semblance of spiritual authority, and this is a central part of the attack on royal authority mounted in *Paradise Lost*:

[Tyrants] seek to avail themselves of names,
Places and titles, and with these to joine
Secular power, though feigning still to act
By spiritual, to themselves appropriating
The Spirit of God, promis’d alike and giv’n
To all Beleevers; and from that pretense,
Spiritual Lawes by carnal power shall force
On every conscience[.] (12, 515–22)

It is also important to note that Michael’s vision offers the reader no perspective *outside* history, but describes what it is like to be immersed in it – unlike Uriel’s vision, in Vondel’s *Lucifer*, of ‘a gallery of war tableaux, / Born from that battle, as far as the eye can see’ (ll. 1935–36). Uriel surveys all of history in a single, frozen instant, while Michael plunges the reader *into* history. This is enacted even on a level of form and syntax: the constant enjambments in this passage force the reader to read on, and the line endings offer him no respite from the uninterrupted flow of the poem. Finally, while Uriel conceives of postlapsarian history as a series of tragic rebellions, Milton portrays it as characterised by tyranny: both approach the political significance of their material from opposite ends of the political spectrum.

In *Paradise Lost* the correspondences between biblical and contemporary history serve to underline the temporal, postlapsarian condition of the human world, its unbridgeable distance from a ‘Heav’n / Now alienated’ (9, 8–9). Indeed, through its narrative strategies, the poem links the reader’s experience of temporality and change to the shifting rhetoric of Satan, and Satan’s description of Beelzebub at the beginning of his first speech effectively equates fallenness with change:

O how fall’n! how chang’d
From him, who in the happy Realms of Light
[...] didst out-shine
Myriads though bright (1, 84–87)

⁶³ For this last point, see also John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Kastan, p. 83.

Conclusion

Both Milton and Vondel employ the Lucifer myth to investigate the nature of authority, and in this way to contribute to one of the crucial politico-religious debates of the seventeenth century. Both ultimately draw opposite conclusions from their material: Vondel sees in the rebellion of Lucifer a lasting justification of divine kingship. Moreover, he posits an essential continuity and equivalence between the political order in heaven on the one hand and earthly hierarchies on the other. This also means that he is relatively untroubled by the Fall: from a political point of view, the postlapsarian condition is not fundamentally different from that of the prelapsarian world. Indeed, far from undermining the sacred nature of political authority, the Fall confirms it. In line with his belief in an unchanging politico-religious order, Vondel also imagines history as essentially cyclical – a self-repeating chronicle of a rebellion foretold – and literature as a way of making this visible.

Milton, by contrast, understands Satan's rebellion as a misguided attempt to bring politics into the realm of the divine, and consequently sees divine kingship as a manifestation of the same category error. In *Paradise Lost*, the Fall marks a fall into politics: it is only in Hell that power and authority come to be corrupted into the inequality and tyranny that Milton associated with the Stuart monarchy. The Fall is Satan's successful attempt to export the politics of Hell to earth. In other words, Milton finds in the Lucifer myth the raw material for his radical Protestant republicanism: the Fall fundamentally altered the nature of authority, and after it, no human authority can claim to be anything more than human. In line with this political vision, Milton thought of postlapsarian history as a plunge into time, in which the atemporal perspective of God forever eludes human beings.

The fundamental gap between the political argument of *Lucifer* and *Paradise Lost* can be gleaned from the following remark by the Chorus in the third act of *Lucifer*:

One power governs all, and can bring down even the highest.
 Whatever the least of men receive is due to mercy only.
 Here nothing is arbitrary, human understanding fails.
 God's glory lies in inequality.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ 'Een maght regeert het al, en keert het bovenste onder. / Wat d'allerminste ontfangt, is loutere gena. / Hier gelt geen willekeur. hier komt vernuft te spa. / In dongelyckheit is Godts heerlyckheit gelegen' (ll. 939–942).

If Milton saw inequality as satanic, on a par with the tyranny brought into the world by the Fall, Vondel presents Lucifer's rebellion as a divine justification of inequality.

If *Lucifer's* patriarchal, absolutist ideology is undermined at all, it is by the play's context. To insist on the sacrality of human government after years of European war and the recent regicide in England required a stubborn denial of political reality, an unrelenting faith, or a combination of both. Seen in this context, the conventional, divinely ordered universe evoked in the play seems out of touch with the realities of its time. Hobbes seems better to have understood that under the circumstances, an alternative, secular rationalisation of absolute rule was required. It may well have been the Hobbesian echo in *Lucifer*, then, which has led many of its readers to view its religious tenets as a mere cloak.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

GENDER STUDIES – EMOTIONS IN *JEPHTHA* (1659)

Kristine Steenbergh

Vondel's play *Jeptha of Offerbelofte* (*Jephthah or Promise of Sacrifice*, first published in 1659) has invited critical attention to the issues of its literary poetics as well as its representation of women. Vondel's introduction to his biblical tragedy calls explicit attention to the role of emotions in the play's Aristotelian poetics. Also, in adapting the story of the general who unwittingly promises to sacrifice his daughter, Vondel's play gives the anonymous biblical daughter the name Ifis ('strength'), and adds a mother named Filopaie.¹ A central question in recent criticism that takes these two issues in its stride is concerned with the role of female emotions in *Jeptha*. Critics often view daughter Ifis as unemotional, whereas Filopaie's display of emotions is seen as excessive or even hysterical, and contrasted with Jephtha's role as the focus of the audience's emotions.² This chapter will analyse the representation of the emotions in the context of the play's poetics from a gender perspective. I will argue that the play as a whole does not disapprove of Ifis's or Filopaie's emotions. Rather, an analysis of the play's gendered representation of the emotions shows how Jephtha's management of his emotions is explicitly contrasted with that of his daughter and wife to suggest that the rehearsal of strong passions in a theatrical context has a therapeutic effect. Vondel intuitively understands that Aristotelian poetics can be harnessed as a means to achieve Catholic purification and salvation.

¹ John Christopherson of Cambridge University was the first to introduce the figure of the mother to his unpublished Greek play *Ιεφθαε*. The humanist dramatist George Buchanan wrote the neo-Latin *Jephtes sive votum* in 1544. He also included a mother, named Storgê (parental love) and calls the daughter Ifis. In the Netherlands, the first dramatisation of the biblical tale was by a Capuchin monk in Ghent, J. C. van Lummene van Marke (1607). Abraham de Koning was the first to write a tragedy on Jephtha in Dutch: *Jepthahs ende zijn Eenighe Dochters treur-spel* (1615). Vondel was familiar with his play, which does not contain a mother figure and names the daughter Mirja. For a comparison of these plays, see Wijngaards' introduction to his edition of *Jeptha*, pp. 9–27.

² English would be Jephthah, but I choose Jephtha, since this is how the character is called in the play.

Poetics and Gender

Whereas earlier Dutch playwrights were indebted to Seneca for their perception of emotions as disruptions that need to be eradicated, Vondel's drama stands out because of his exceptionally close adherence to Aristotelian poetics. In brief, this view of theatre aims to enable the audience of a tragedy to moderate their emotions precisely by letting them experience strong emotions in the theatre. In his analysis of the operations of Aristotelian poetics in Vondel's *Jeptha*, Jan Konst stresses that the 'coherent unity of the plot' is of crucial importance in achieving this effect of catharsis on the audience. This unity, in his view, is achieved by a focus on the character of Jephtha, who demonstrates the didactic intent of the play. Jephtha's intense doubts about his chosen course of action in the central acts of the play invite the audience to identify with him, so that their emotions 'develop parallel to Jephtha's psychological development' and climax at the beginning of the fifth act, when the protagonist realises that he was wrong to sacrifice his daughter. Because the spectators, together with Jephtha, experience strong feelings of pity and fear at that point, they achieve *catharsis*: they are purged of their emotions.³

Although Vondel gave Jephtha's daughter a name and introduced the character of Filopaie, who is absent in the Bible, Konst does not think the female characters fundamental to the tragedy's poetics.⁴ Filopaie is irrelevant to the emotional effect of the play; she is merely a 'secondary character.'⁵ Indeed, in his view the mother's purpose in the play runs counter to the Aristotelian poetics of the play as a whole. Konst writes that Filopaie is portrayed more in accordance with Senecan-Scaligerean poetics, as a warning against the dangers of excessive emotion. Therefore, he writes, it is only when we look at the central character of Jephtha that we realise that Vondel's didactic purpose points in a different direction, that of Aristotelian poetics.⁶

From a feminist perspective, Agnes Sneller has commented on this exclusive focus on the character of Jephtha in the play's critical reception. She points out that when critics argue that the audience is able to identify with Jephtha and to share in his emotional development, the

³ Konst, *Woedende wraakghierigheid*, pp. 193, 51, 199 respectively.

⁴ Konst, *Fortuna, Fatum en Providentia Dei*, p. 280.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁶ Konst, *Woedende wraakghierigheid*, p. 51.

catharsis they experience is dependent on the sex of the individual audience member. If Jephtha is represented as a Renaissance man, the ideal woman in the play 'is a creature who does not develop at all and who acts in obedience, preferably without any resistance, like Ifis, or perhaps after extreme emotions, like Filopaie'. The latter is portrayed in the initial scenes of the play as a woman who cannot control her emotions, Sneller argues, and even if she later proves to have been misled by her husband, the image that the audience retains of her is that of a vulnerable, emotional woman. Indeed, critics have accordingly seen her as a woman who cannot govern herself.⁷ Riet Schenkeveld, too, has argued that Vondel's plays do not accord female characters much agency. She writes that in the rare cases in which women are portrayed positively, this often occurs in a context of atonement: 'The virgin martyrs bring the sacrifice of their sexuality in the most humiliating circumstances one can imagine, subjected to their male attackers with no will of their own.'⁸ Both Sneller and Schenkeveld read Vondel against the grain, and argue that the emotional purgation of the audience is only achieved at the cost of female characters, who are not allowed such development in their own right.

In his recent analysis of the tragedy in *Vondel belicht* (translated as *Sovereignty as Inviolability: Vondel's Theatrical Explorations in the Dutch Republic*), Frans-Willem Korsten counters the traditional emphasis on the character of Jephtha, and argues for the importance of Ifis and Filopaie to the plot. Korsten moves away from a strict focus on Aristotelian poetics to trace a gendered pattern of masculine sword and feminine distaff in the play. He concludes that Ifis's sacrifice establishes the sovereignty of the nation of Israel.⁹

In what follows, I will similarly analyse the play from a gender perspective rather than from the perspective of feminist criticism. Following Joan Scott, I am interested in the ways gender representations shape relations of power. In her seminal article 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', Scott defines gender not only as 'a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes', but also as a primary means by which power is articulated. It can be used this way to shape relations between the sexes, but, as Scott writes, 'concepts of power, though they may build on

⁷ Sneller, 'De marges centraal', p. 11 and *passim*.

⁸ Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, *Vondel en 't vrouwelijke dier*, p. 23.

⁹ Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, pp. 71–88; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, pp. 69–89.

gender, are not always literally about gender itself.¹⁰ The binary opposition of gender is often used to enforce other oppositions in relations of power. Literary historians can therefore use gendered oppositions as an entrance into the power structures that take shape in a text. Scott writes: ‘we must constantly ask not only what is at stake in proclamations or debates that invoke gender to explain or justify their positions, but also how implicit understandings of gender are being invoked and reinscribed.’¹¹ It is the task of the historian, she argues, to disrupt the seeming objectivity of gender structures, and to examine the nature of the debate that led to the appearance of a gendered concept. The relations of power to which Scott refers are often political, but her model can also be applied to other levels of power, such as early modern theatre’s power to condition affective experience. Stage performances shaped the ways in which audience members came to name and interpret their emotions, as well as how they understood them as ‘social and political currency.’¹² In this chapter, I will look at the gendered representation of emotions in the context of the play’s religious subject matter as well as conflicting early modern views on the operations of emotions. If we do not accept the early modern stereotype of the woman’s inability to control her emotions at face value, but read the gendered representation of emotions in Vondel’s *Jeptha* as signifying relations of power, we see how Vondel’s play uses gendered images to advocate the purging of the emotions through their expression in an isolated theatrical environment, and associates this process of purgation with the Catholic notions of purification and salvation.

Moving Stones: Ifis and the Purgation of Grief

Ifis is often described as an unimportant character. Konst, for example, remarks that her acceptance of a speedy death functions mainly to enable the portrayal of her father’s inner turmoil, and that ‘Ifis, because of her constant acquiescence, remains a flat character.’¹³ Similarly, Sneller comments: ‘And Ifis? She hardly participates. [...] Her obedience to her father is there in the beginning, and will last to the end.’¹⁴ Piet Gerbrandy

¹⁰ Scott, ‘Gender’, p. 1069.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1074.

¹² Rowe, ‘Humoral Knowledge’, p. 176.

¹³ Konst, *Woedende wraakhierigheidt*, pp. 147–48.

¹⁴ Sneller, ‘De marges centraal’, p. 8.

dismisses her as a ‘sanctimonious bore.’¹⁵ I will argue here that if we read the play not for the plot but for its representation of emotions, it becomes clear that Ifis does not suffer from a lack of feeling or inner turmoil.

Indeed, Ifis is introduced as a woman with strong emotions. We are told that when Filopaie fainted at Jephtha’s return from the battle against the Ammonites (thus missing the encounter between Ifis and her father), Ifis feared for her mother’s life. She was in tears at her bedside, moaning, crying and sighing in distress.¹⁶ Moreover, the play repeatedly draws attention to Ifis’s two months of intense grief in the mountains of Galaad, where she went after learning of her father’s vow. Ifis’s stay in the mountains is not part of the action of the play – Vondel states that in order to fit the drama into Aristotle’s unity of time, the play begins when Jephtha returns victorious from his battle against the Ephraimites, two months after his defeat of the Ammonites and his rash vow to God. Nevertheless, Ifis’s period of mourning in the mountains is referred to time and again, as if to remind the audience of what happened there.¹⁷ Indeed, in his address to friends of the theatre (‘Berecht’), Vondel chides George Buchanan for leaving Ifis’s stay in the mountains out of his play to adhere to the Aristotelian unity of time.

Why is this stay in the mountains so crucial to Vondel’s play? The expression of emotion that occurs in the isolated environment of the mountains is central to the play’s representation of the operations of affect. When she returns to the palace, Ifis tells the Steward (‘Hofmeester’) that she bewailed her fate together with the virgins who accompanied her. She describes how they noisily tore off their garments, let down their hair, groaned, sighed and moaned. Echoes repeated their sound, which they in turn imitated,¹⁸ so that cries

¹⁵ ‘[...] vervelende kwezel’, Gerbrandy, ‘Tussen Seneca en Aristoteles,’ p. 26. Dietz has characterized Ifis as a Stoic in ‘Een mens gelijk,’ pp. 36–37.

¹⁶ ‘[...] en steende, en kermde, en zuchte in zulck een noot’ (l. 35).

¹⁷ See the dedicatory poem ll. 26–29; ‘Berecht’ ll. 4–6, 17; ‘Inhoudt’ ll. 13–15; in the play ll. 11–12, 93–98, 295, 419–30, 582–85, 828–31, 1597, 1930. It is strange, in this context, that Korsten states: ‘How Iphis has talked in her period of absence is not known, but it certainly will not have been mere merry acceptance’ (Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, p. 84; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, p. 86). In a recent article, Van Gemert does acknowledge that Ifis mourned in the mountains: ‘there has been ample lamentation (e.g. in vss. 419–38, 468–73 and 1595)’. She argues that, in his representation of Ifis as a powerful character, Vondel was inspired by De Koning’s *Jepthah* (Van Gemert, ‘Schuld en boete,’ p. 134).

¹⁸ ‘Den galm geweckt, die lust scheidt na te baeuwen’ (l. 471).

resounded from rock to rock (ll. 468–82). In this description the virgins' retreat to the mountains is characterized as a time of strong emotions. The echoing rocks play an important role as the audience of the virgins' performance of grief. This is also evident from an earlier passage in which the effect of the echo figures prominently:

With my attendants I so long did go
And wander in these mountains to and fro,
And long enough for maidenhood have cried
And to our mourning echoing hills replied.
Both sun and moon in turns across the sky
Witness to how our all-pervading cry
Has moved the very rocks lying here and there.¹⁹

Here, the isolated mountainous environment is represented in terms reminiscent of a theatre, where the rocks take on the role of audience. The passage stresses the interaction between the women and the rocks by means of a pun: the word 'nagesteent' (to echo lamentingly) itself echoes the mountains, since 'steen' means stone. The women and their petrified audience enforce each other's emotions. The rocks are not mere sounding boards, as the final line of the passage stresses: they are moved by what they hear. This parallel between the interaction of Ifis and the rocks on the one hand, and that of actors and an audience is strengthened by Vondel's use of a similar image of impassioned rocks in his prefatory sonnet to Abraham de Koning's earlier dramatic version of the biblical tale. In that poem, Vondel stresses how the theatre has the power to make the audience experience events as if they truly happened. The poem states that when the maiden blood of Jephtha's daughter floods the stage 'everyone dies with her, and the stones well-nigh burst'.²⁰ In Vondel's *Jephtha*, the emotional interaction between Ifis and her audience of mountains purges her grief and enables her to master her emotions. She states that 'now there is nothing that will make me afraid' and 'I am ready now. The time for grief is past'.²¹

¹⁹ 'Ick heb dus lang de heuvels op en neder / Met dezen rey bewandelt heene en weder, / Mijn' maeghdestaet, en jeught genoeg beweent. / De berghgalm heeft ons lijckklaght nagesteent. / De zon en maen, by beurte op haeren wagen, / Getuigen hoe ons al te druckigh klaegen / De rotsen zelf beweeghde, west en oost' (ll. 419–25). All translated quotations from *Jephtha* are taken from Peter King's translation, unless otherwise indicated.

²⁰ 'Dan stervet al met haer, dan bersten schier de steenen, De Koning, *Jephthahs ende zijn eenighe dochters treurspel*, Sig *3r.

²¹ '[N]u is' er niets dat my vervaeren kan' (l. 585) and 'Ick sta bereit. de tijd is uit van treuren' (l. 704).

This ability to purge one's passions in order to achieve mastery over them is described in gendered terms in the play. The chorus of virgins who accompanied Ifis to the mountains later sings the praise of her equanimity ('gelaetenheit', l. 1639) and describes it as a stronger power than that which defeats armies, giants or lions.²² Ifis's patience is thus implicitly contrasted with the military heroism of Jephtha, which he secured with his rash vow to sacrifice her. In the same chorus, the virgins approve of those who are able to defeat their own will and desires, and value them higher than those famous for their use of reason or wisdom (ll. 1652–54). In these comparisons, the control of emotions is compared to traditional masculine virtues. This gender aspect is made explicit in the virgins' comment that Ifis's fearlessness defeats the heart of a man.²³ The comparison echoes and contradicts the Steward's earlier comparison of a man's poised heart to the agitated state of a woman's emotions: 'A fragile woman will too quickly lean / To thrill or grief: a man's heart holds the mean / Twixt both, and knows his destiny can waver'.²⁴

Ifis's patience and fortitude can perhaps be said to be unwomanly, but it could also be argued that the play shows that the Steward's voice of reason is not always right. Vondel's prefatory poem, for example, also prefers feminine patience to a male example. It presents Ifis, rather than Jephtha, as the heroine of the play, compares her with Isaac and states that 'this virgin exceeds all men [...] the strongest gives in to the weakest sex'.²⁵ Indeed, the poem views her as a forerunner of Christ in her willingness to be sacrificed (l. 32). This valuation of feminine patience and fortitude over traditional idealizations of masculine violent conquest is described as a historical phenomenon of the late seventeenth century by Mary Beth Rose, who argues that in that period in England 'the heroics of endurance, gendered normatively as female, had achieved sufficient prestige to become the primary model of literary heroism'.²⁶ Viewed from this English context, then, it could perhaps be argued that Vondel's contemporaries may not have agreed with the way modern Dutch critics portray Ifis. Rather than emotionless or a

²² 'Heeft een stercker maght / Onder zich gebragt / Dan die heiren overwint' (ll. 1643–45).

²³ 'Die het mannenhart / In het knielen tart, / Met ongezwicht gelaet.' (ll. 1686–88).

²⁴ 'Een teere vrou spat uit, al t'ongelaetigh, / In weelde en druck: een manshart draecht zich maetigh / In beide, en kent het weifelende lot' (ll. 85–87).

²⁵ '[M]enighmael tooneelen zaeght in traenen' l. 35; and 'deze maegth gaet al de mans te boven [...] De sterckste zwicht voor d'allerzwackste kunne', ll. 15 and 17.

²⁶ Rose, *Gender and Heroism*, p. 86.

bore, she may have been seen as a truly heroic character. It is crucial to my argument that the play repeatedly stresses that Ifis achieved her patient acceptance of her fate through the expression and purgation of her violent emotions in an isolated environment reminiscent of a theatre.

Rocks and Waves: Poetics and the Gender of Emotions

The motherly love of Ifis's mother Filopaie – to which her name also refers – is contrasted to Jephtha's strict adherence to his vow throughout the play. In Vondel's description of the operations of catharsis in his prologue to the play, the emotional trajectory of Jephtha's wife Filopaie from happiness to sadness and vengefulness is paralleled to that of Jephtha's path from manly behaviour in the war to recklessness and stubbornness, melancholic shock and finally remorse, because both these trajectories in Vondel's view contribute to the effect of catharsis: they 'deliver their force with a powerful emotional effect'.²⁷ Nevertheless, critics have not considered Filopaie important to the poetics of the play. Instead, they seem to have followed the Steward in his opinion of her excessive emotions. He compares her love for her daughter to that of a tigress or a lioness, who will take bloody revenge when she finds her nest robbed of her young: she will thrust her nails into the attacker's eyes (ll. 1303–16). Sneller writes that Filopaie's natural urge to love her daughter is overpowering, and suggests a lack of reason, a characteristic shared by the mother animal and the human mother. She remarks that the Steward's representation of Filopaie as hysterical stays with the audience throughout the play, and has led critics to read her as such.²⁸

I will argue that the Steward's view of Filopaie should not be read as representative of the tragedy as a whole. One of the reasons for this is that other characters use the image of parent animals in a much more positive light. Korsten has remarked that Jephtha, after his realization that it was wrong to execute his vow, also compares himself to a wild

²⁷ '[...] om hunne kracht met een machtige beweeghenisse te baeren' ('Berecht', ll. 66–67).

²⁸ Sneller, 'De marges centraal', pp. 7 and 9. A notable exception is Frans-Willem Korsten, who explicitly comments on Konst's interpretation of Filopaie as a hysterical woman, and suggests an alternative, gendered reading of the play (Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, p. 74; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, p. 73).

animal when he cries out that even a wolf does not kill its own young.²⁹ What is more, the Judge explicitly associates the image of the tiger who protects her young with maternal love and the sacrifice of Christ. He argues that the love between parents and children is a law of nature, shared by humans and animals. He not only refers to the natural behaviour of female lions, bears and tigers, but also to the Pelican, a Renaissance symbol for the self-sacrificing Christ, also used as such on the title page of Vondel's *Altaergeheimenissen* (*Secrets of the Altar*, 1645).

The pelican, when droughts are at their worst,
Does not allow its young to suffer thirst,
But pecks herself the arteries in her breast,
And draws her own heart's blood, so that the nest
May drink, her life-blood for their food outpouring.
You hear the lion, and bear, and tiger roaring
And raging if the hunters threat their lair.³⁰

The Steward's view of Filopaie, then, need not be representative of the play as a whole. He represents the voice of reason (l. 434), and consequently – as the Berecht also stresses (ll. 104–06) – does not operate from the heart, but from the head: 'So grave a matter needs much serious thought'.³¹ His reasoned opinions, however, are always contrasted with more emotional alternatives in the play. Ifis calls him a deceiver who tries to separate him from her mother: 'We know your dissimulation, / Sending my mother at this time from this place'.³² She too views Filopaie as a loving mother, and stresses that filial love is so strong as to materialize even after death: her corpse would utter her last word if her mother kneeled beside it. The Chorus that follows immediately upon the Steward's call for 'serious thought' similarly refers to family bonds when it asks whether the grey hair of Ifis's grandfather, patriarch Joseph,

²⁹ Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, p. 75; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, p. 74. Interestingly, the tiger in that quotation is still seen as the Steward would also regard it – as a ravenous predator that Jephtha managed to subdue, as he did giants and heathens.

³⁰ 'De pellikaen, by mangel van den regen, / En water, laet de jongen niet verlegen, / Maer opent zelf alle aders in zijn borst, / En tapt het bloet van 't hart, om hunnen dorst / Te lesschen, hen te spijzen met zijn spieren. / Gy hoort den leeu, en beer, en tyger tieren, / En brullen, zoo de jager 't nest berooft' (ll. 1027–33). Note that Peter King applies a shift in the sex of the Pelican: it is a male bird in Vondel's original. The Pelican was used as an image of Christ in the early modern period.

³¹ 'Zoo groot een zaak eischt rijp beraet, en zinnen' (l. 720).

³² '[M]en kent uw loze streecken, / Die moeder, voor mijne aenkomst, stiert van kant' (ll. 488–89).

would not stand on end if he heard of her fate. The Chorus suggests that her grandfather would have protected her from the sword, because he would not have been able to see his grandchild harmed (ll. 721–36). The Steward's adherence to reason, then, is contrasted in the play with other images that positively portray the emotions of motherly love and family bonds.

Another image used by the Steward to portray women as excessively emotional is also challenged by the play. The Steward uses the image of tides and waves hitting the shore when he contrasts a man's heart to that of a woman's in the opening scene of the play. Whereas a woman's heart is swayed by fortune and misfortune alike, a man's heart knows how to hold the mean: 'For good and evil know / Allotted times and turns, like ebb and flow'.³³ A man, then, is not carried with the waves of the tide, but resists that movement and holds the mean, in the Steward's view. He distrusts the tidal movement of the sea, and uses images of ships that sink when the breakers dash against the coast (l. 1301). At other moments, however, the image of tides and waves is used with a different import. When Jephtha ignores the Priest's advice to give free rein to his emotions and remains true to his bond, the priest compares him to a rock in the sea that does not heed the sound of the waves breaking on the shore.³⁴ The Steward's image of the man's heart unswayed by the tide is echoed here, but in a much more negative sense: Jephtha's reason, according to the Priest, is clouded, and the rock here designates cold-heartedness rather than steadfastness.

Since both the Steward's image of the tigress as well as that of a rock standing firm despite the pull of the tide are contrasted with other interpretations of those images in the course of the play, I think neither the Steward's opinion of Filopaië nor his opinion of gender and emotions should be taken as representative of the play as a whole. Indeed, I would suggest that with the figure of the Steward, the play introduces a remnant from earlier Senecan drama as a contrast to a radically different model of dealing with emotions. Gender contrasts are used to set off the differences between these two views. The figure of the Steward resembles that of the nurses in Seneca's tragedies, who try to reason with furious heroines such as Medea or Clytemnestra in stichomythic

³³ '[Q]uaet en goet / Elck heeft zijn tijt, en beurte, als eb, en vloet' (ll. 91–92).

³⁴ 'Kon een gety oit stercker gaen, / Wanneer de zee op strant en steenrots barrent, / Ter helle daelt, en oprijst aan 't gestarrent!' (ll. 618–20); and 'Ja, gelijk een rots in zee / Naer 't barnen en gebruisch der baren luistert' (ll. 1185–86).

exchanges such as those of Jephtha with the Steward in ll. 915–25. The Steward's influential image of Filopaie as a vindictive tigress similarly finds its roots in Seneca, where it is often used to portray the uncontrollable nature of feminine vindictive fury (see, for example, Seneca's *Medea*, ll. 862–65, where, ironically in the context of the subject of Vondel's tragedy, it is used to portray Medea's infanticidal vindictiveness).

Vondel's *Jeptha* contains more Senecan elements. It resembles the tragedy *Hercules furens*, in which a hero who has just returned from battle also kills his offspring. There, the goddess Juno takes revenge on the mythical hero Hercules. She lets the Furies possess him and drive him to madness. Believing that he sees his archenemy, the tyrant Lycus, Hercules mistakenly slays his wife and son. Only when he recovers from his fury does he realize what he has done. Vondel's *Jeptha* echoes this play in many ways. Like Hercules, Jephtha returns victorious from the wars, and like him, he slays what is dearest to him at the altar. He too cynically compares his heroic feats on the battlefield to the shedding of the blood of his own kin (l. 844, or ll. 651–53). Also like Hercules, Jephtha speaks of his hand that used to fight battles, but that now kills his child (ll. 1714–15), and shows remorse only after the deed is done. Similarly, in her vindictiveness, at the altar Filopaie mistakenly thinks she sees her husband before her, as Hercules saw Lycus, and wants to kill her own partner in her fury.

Vondel's *Jeptha*, however, does not simply imitate Seneca's tragedy. In accordance with Stoic philosophy, *Hercules furens* stresses the dangers of the passions, and uses feminine fury as an example of the effects of uncontrolled emotion. Vondel's play, however, reverses this view of the passions. It is not Jephtha's passionate fury that drives him to the murder of his daughter – instead, the play emphasizes how he swallows his feelings to carry out his vow. If Stoic philosophy fears the effects of passion, Vondel's *Jeptha* shows that the expression of anger and grief in an isolated, theatrical environment can moderate those passions. This contrast also appears in gendered terms: Seneca prefers masculine reason over feminine passion, but in Vondel's play it is the ideal of masculine repression of emotions recommended by the steward that is represented negatively, the female characters' expression of emotion is shown to lead to temperance.

Indeed, the play as a whole represents masculine repression of emotions in a negative light. Although Jephtha tears his clothes in grief and shock when Ifis is the first creature to appear out of his house upon his

return from battle (ll. 819–23, see also the title page of *De Koning's* tragedy – figure 1), he has since adhered to the Steward's advice of moderation. He has 'painfully suppressed the grief' and feels as if his heart is caught in a vice.³⁵ The Steward approves of this strategy, for when Jephtha longs to express his feelings – a process he genders feminine by comparing it to the painful pangs of giving birth – the Steward reminds him of his manly duty to remain rational: 'You used to bear yourself more manfully / On parting'.³⁶

Whereas Ifis used her two months of withdrawal to purge her emotions, Jephtha went away to battle to repress his grief. He complains that he could not express his sorrows openly: 'Others show their grief and vent their feelings, / But I suppressed my sighs in all my dealings, / And night and day my sorrow put behind'.³⁷ Peter King here translates the Dutch 'inkroppen' with 'put behind', but the term is more literally translated as 'swallowed', or 'compressed inside'. It is very much a physical term: rather than purging his grief, he has contained it inside his body. Because Ifis has used the two months of withdrawal to come to terms with her emotions, she is able to face her fate with patience. Jephtha, however, has swallowed his emotions during these two months, and is still in the same emotional state as the moment he saw Ifis come out of his house on his return from battle. Consequently, he once more starts to tear his clothes at the altar, for Ifis entreats him: 'Ah father, do not rend your garments so'.³⁸ The Court Priest suggests that the two of them withdraw a little, possibly so that Jephtha can purge his emotions in a controlled environment. Moreover, he is worried that Jephtha 'will alarm [Ifis's] heart with all this grieving'.³⁹ Similarly, Filopaie suggests that the violence of her emotions at the death of her daughter might have been tempered if she had been offered an opportunity to come to terms with the impending sacrifice.⁴⁰ Using the same word 'inkroppen', she complains that her heart will have to swallow her woe forever since

³⁵ '[...] mijn hartewee met knaegen / In 't hart gesmoort' (ll. 856–57); and 'Hoe wordt mijn hart beklemt, gelijk met schroeven!' (l. 840).

³⁶ 'Gy hebt voorheene u moediger gedraegen / In 't scheiden' (ll. 855–56).

³⁷ 'Een ander melt zijn' rouw, magh zich verluchten, / Maer ick ontzagh en vreesde een' zucht te zuchten, / En kropte mijn verdriet in nacht en dagh' (ll. 803–05).

³⁸ 'Ay vader, scheur uw kleeders niet aen flarden' (l. 1184).

³⁹ 'De lantvooght ga met my wat aen een zijde' (l. 1527); and 'Gy zult haer hart door dit gekerm vertsaegen' (l. 1543).

⁴⁰ 'Och, liet men my ten minste haer eens spreecken, / Voor 't allerjongst: zoo hadde ick noch mijn hart / Eens uitgeklaeght: nu krypt het deze smert, / Dit wee, en zal 't inkroppen al zijn dagen' (ll. 1876–79).

she was not allowed to prepare for her daughter's death by grieving together with her. A closer examination of the emotions of the female characters, then, reveals that they are not so much secondary to the actions of Jephtha, but offer alternatives to his management of emotions. Whereas Jephtha is advised to repress his excessive grief to come to rational decisions, the female characters are shown to express their violent passions in a secure environment and are afterwards more able to cope with tragedy.

Breaking Waves: Catharsis and Galenic Medicine

The view of the emotions as presented by the play is expressed most clearly by the Court Priest, who conflates Aristotelian poetics with Galenic medicine in his interpretation of the operations of the passions. Galenic medicine associates the emotions with the four humours (blood, phlegm, black and yellow bile). Through ingestion and purging, the individual is able to achieve a healthy balance in the humours. The Court Priest similarly takes a physical approach to the emotions, and stresses the importance of purging.⁴¹ The idea of catharsis is primarily a medical metaphor. Katherine Craik writes that, given Aristotle's knowledge of the purging of peccant matter by the application of drugs in medical discourse, 'Aristotelian *katharsis* can be seen as the precursor of the early modern development of humoral theory'.⁴² The scene in which the Court Priest presents his ideas on the operations of the emotions focuses on Filopaië's grief and anger after the sacrifice of her daughter. The Court Priest stands by Filopaië's side when her vindictiveness towards her husband does indeed materialize in the way the Steward had predicted. Unlike Hercules or Jephtha, however, Filopaië does not murder a family member. Instead, her performance of fury eventually contributes to the moderation of her emotions. The Court Priest leads her through a process of purgation during which he makes sure that she can hurt neither others nor herself (ll. 1779–87). He comments that reason cannot stop the flow of grief: it needs to run its course (ll. 1779–80). Therefore he lets Filopaië play out the murder of her husband on the altar scene, a space that earlier in the play is compared with a theatre. She imagines that she sees Jephtha before her and

⁴¹ See also Konst, *Woedende wraakghierigheid*, p. 28.

⁴² Craik, *Reading Sensations*, p. 46.

describes how she attacks him, like a tigress bereft of her young. She even imagines that she changes into a werewolf, the creature on the boundary between human and animal, and digs her claws into her husband's body.⁴³ This performance of grief and anger, stage-managed by the Court Priest, leads to catharsis. As in Ifis's case, Filopaië's expression of grief is echoed by mountains, vaults and caves (ll. 1814–16), and she is supported by the virgins. In both Ifis's and Filopaië's case, the feminine expression of emotions in a sheltered environment that is compared to a theatre is shown to be more effective than Jephtha's attempts to suppress his feelings, and is shown eventually to lead to a balanced state of mind.⁴⁴ Even the Steward, who initially asks 'what means we have to rock the grief to sleep?', later agrees with the Court Priest that 'a breaking heart in mourning gains relief'.⁴⁵ In the final act of the play, both Jephtha and the Steward seem to realize that the expression of emotions is a natural process that enables rather than prevents rational decisions.

The fact that the play as a whole adheres to this Aristotelian-cum-Galenic view of the passions is also evident from Vondel's use of the image of breaking waves in his 'Berecht.' There, the image is not used in the Steward's sense of rocks standing firm in a tide of passion. Rather, it describes the flow of passions in the play: 'Thus the various passions toss, tumble and break like waves on the shore, by constant changes from beginning to end'.⁴⁶ An audience riding the waves of staged passion will learn how to moderate their emotions (ll. 141–43). The effect of words on the body plays a crucial role in this process. Vondel claims that his use of iambic pentameters is especially suited to his purpose, since they are more sinewy and muscled than Alexandrines (ll. 146–59).⁴⁷ Tanya Pollard writes that: '[l]iterary language, especially when

⁴³ 'Daer ruck ick hem zijne oogen uit het hooft, / Dat valsche hart ten boezem uit, de darmen / Ten buick uit. ziet hem spartlen: hoort hem kermen.' (ll. 1854–56)

⁴⁴ Interestingly, women were considered by Galenic medicine to have an advantage over men. Michael Schoenfeldt writes that this was because 'their monthly menstrual flow functioned as a purge, accomplishing naturally what men would have to achieve through blood-letting'. (Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, p. 37).

⁴⁵ 'Wat middel om den rouw in slaap te wiegen?' and 'Een treurigh hart is met geklagh behulpen' (ll. 1888 and 1928).

⁴⁶ 'Aldus woelen, tuimelen, en barnen hier verscheide hartstoghten, door geduurige veranderingen van den beginne tot het ende' (ll. 123–25; my translation, KS).

⁴⁷ For a wonderful exploration of early modern ideas about the effect of literary language on the body, see Craik, *Reading Sensations*. On the relation between emotions and the stylistic form of language in *Jephtha*, see Van Leuvensteijn en Wattel, 'Een statistische methode'.

spoken aloud, was understood to be directly linked with the imagination and to have special rhetorical properties, taking on a synaesthetic power to transform the body at a physiological level.⁴⁸ Moreover, the published text of *Jeptha* suggests that a visit to the theatre is an ideal place to vent one's passions in a controlled environment and once more associates this idea with a woman – just as Ifis and Filopaie vented theirs in isolation, so the dedicatee of the play, Anna van Hooren, is known for shedding tears in the theatre (Dedicatory poem, l. 35).

Words Made Flesh: Vondel's Poetics and Catholic Purgation

Vondel's use of Aristotelian poetics is exceptional in a Dutch context, as well as in a broader perspective. Konst writes that 'nowhere in the Europe of the 1660s does one find plays that breathe the spirit of Aristotle, that execute his ideas to such an extent as Vondel's tragedies'.⁴⁹ How can this phenomenon be contextualized? With respect to this issue, Korsten remarks that poetics do not exist in a vacuum. A play's poetics is not merely a (diachronic) reaction to earlier poetics, but functions synchronically in a particular social, religious, or political context.⁵⁰ *Jeptha's* gendered representation of the emotions is strongly related to the biblical subject matter of the play as well as to religious conflicts in the Netherlands of the seventeenth century.⁵¹ Jephtha's strict adherence to his vow is represented as Calvinist, whereas his later realization of the importance of his emotions is associated with Catholic images in the play.

Jeptha's central theme has been defined as 'the relation between God and Man', and Korsten has situated the play in the context of the debate on predestination that raged in post-Reformation Europe.⁵² In criticism of the first half of the twentieth century, this context was more regularly integrated into analyses of the play. There, Jephtha was

⁴⁸ Pollard, *Drugs and Theater*, p. 16.

⁴⁹ Konst, *Woedende wraakghierigheid*, p. 289.

⁵⁰ Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, p. 76; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, p. 74.

⁵¹ In a different context, Parente also describes Vondel's *Jeptha* as 'Christianized poetics' and writes that the programmatic neo-classical intention of Vondel's tragedy is 'to induce his Christian audience to lament their fallen state, recognize the paradoxical relationship between faith and reason and to evince their belief through their unreserved submission to God's will' (*Religious Drama and the Humanist Tradition*, p. 147).

⁵² Konst, 'De motivatie van het offer', p. 156 and Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, p. 72; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, pp. 77–79.

compared to a Calvinist who does not listen to the priest who offers him a possibility of absolution, but listens only to his own conscience, and adheres to his own strict interpretation of his vow.⁵³ In contrast to Buchanan's *Jephthes* (1554), Vondel's play explicitly condemns this attitude: Jephtha realizes he was wrong to murder his daughter and turns to the church to beg for the forgiveness of God. Jephtha's development from a man who lets his adherence to his vow prevail over his emotions to an Aristotelian protagonist who purges his body of excessive emotion seems to run parallel to his development from a Calvinist believer in his personal relation to God to a Catholic who has faith in the intermediary role of the church as well as in a process of spiritual purification that leads to forgiveness.⁵⁴ There are several reasons why I would characterize this process of spiritual purification as Catholic. Firstly, it is of a strongly physical nature: the experience of pain is central to Jephtha's remorse. Of course, the idea that the experience of physical pain could lead to salvation is embedded in the Catholic faith.⁵⁵ To be forgiven, Jephtha would be prepared to climb steep rocks and would cross thorn-covered valleys barefoot – no pain would be too severe. In an even more explicitly Catholic vein, Jephtha also suggests wearing a hair shirt, recalling the customs of monastic penance:

If some way I could find
 To expiate my sin, there is no pain
 I would not undergo; [...]
 No glen would seem too drear or deep, no crest
 Too steep to clamber up and down them yet
 Through thorns and brambles, barefoot, bathed in sweat
 And gasping for my breath. Sackcloth I'd wear
 And ashes to express my heart's despair

⁵³ In the 1930s, interpretations of Vondel more frequently stressed the relation of his work to religious conflicts, and emphasized the role it played in shaping paradigms in the debate. Gerard Brom in *Vondels geloof*, for example, writes that Vondel's plays are heavily related to the religious conflicts of his time. 'A generation that grew up in the turbulent days of the Bestand learns to debate religion systematically and can only be fascinated by a play when it is full of exchanges of ideas that really touch the hearts of audience as well as players' (p. 286; translation my own). Verwey wrote that '[w]e understand *Jephtha* entirely if we are aware of a conflict between human feeling on the one hand and religious feeling on the other' (Verwey, 'Vondels Jephtha'). Simons has analyzed the play in the context of religious controversy (Simons, *Studies en Lezingen*).

⁵⁴ Interestingly, Samuel Coster in his *Iphigenia* (written in 1617, first performed in 1621) also used a story of the sacrifice of a child to criticize Counter-Reformation preachers.

⁵⁵ On the impact of the Reformation on cultural assumptions about pain, see Van Dijkhuizen, 'In Thy Passions Slain' and 'Partakers of Pain'.

In solitude, in forest or wild plains.
 Consider well, assemble all the pains.
 All miseries and torments, all the grief:
 If only God will grant me some relief
 I will not turn away from rigours stern.⁵⁶

The proposed process of purgation would take place in a remote area characterized by steep rocks and valleys, an isolated environment reminiscent of Ifis's refuge in the mountains of Galaäd. When Jephtha experiences remorse in the final act of the play, then, he expresses his pent-up emotions and intends to retire to an isolated area, as his daughter also reports she did in the beginning of the play. The word 'grief' in the quotation translates the Dutch 'geklagh', which refers expressly to the utterance of grief. Thus the tragedy has come full circle with Jephtha's realization that it is necessary to express one's emotions in an isolated environment in order to come to terms with them.

It is not only Jephtha's painful process of purgation that is intensely Catholic. Indeed, Vondel's adherence to Aristotelian poetics in a landscape of Senecan drama can be related to a Catholic view of the relation between word and flesh. That the use of visual representations was associated with Catholicism by iconoclast Puritans and Calvinists is of course well known (and the effect Vondel accords to Vos's visual pantomime after Act Four is interesting in this context; 'Berecht', ll. 131–44). However, in an English context at least, strict Protestants also objected to the idea that words could bring about an alteration in a listener's body. In her *Drugs and Theatre*, Tanya Pollard provides a sharp analysis of English debates about the physical effects of theatre. She writes that such quasi-magical powers of language were heavily contested, especially in discourses of science and Protestantism. William Perkins, for example, objected that 'that which is onely a bare sound, in all reason can have no vertue in it to cause a reall worke'. In his view, words cannot have 'the power of touching a substance'. In these debates, the idea that words could have a physical effect was associated with Catholicism.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ 'Verstont ick langs wat wegh / Dit lasterstuck te zoenen stont, geen lijden / Viel my te zwaer.[...] / Geen steile rots viel my te steil, geen dal / Te droef, te diep, in op en neêr te stijgen, / Door doornehaegh, baervoets, bezweet, te hijgen / Naer mijnen aem. Ik trock een hairenkleet / Aen 't lijf, en vaste in asch en harteleedt, / In eenzaamheit, en wouden, en woestijnen. / Bedenck vry, hael te zamen alle pijnen / Weedommen, en verdrieten, en geklagh: / Indien ick Godt alleen vermurwen magh, / Geen strengheit zal my hinderen, noch keeren' (ll. 1738–51).

⁵⁷ Pollard, *Drugs and Theater*, p. 135.

Puritan treatises that attacked the theatre did acknowledge the power of the speech act in the theatre, but were highly suspicious of its effects on the audience: they saw it as a danger rather than a positive effect of theatre.

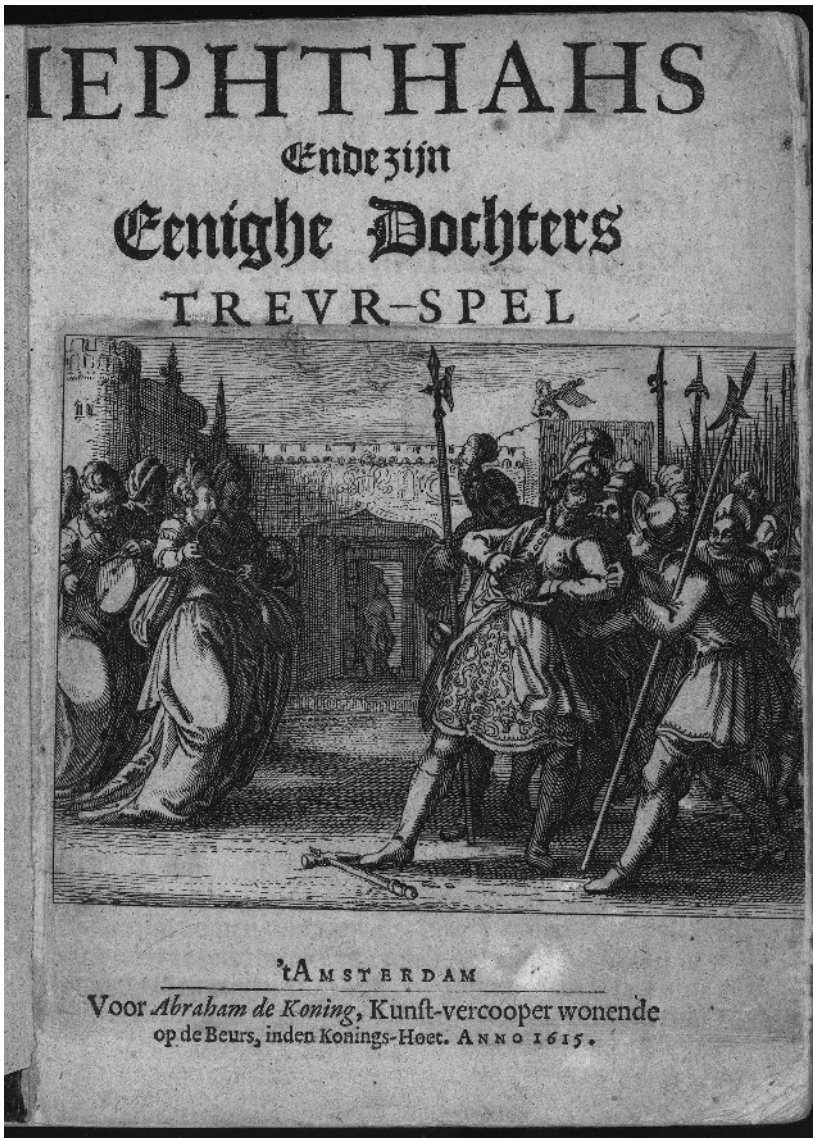
That the gendered representation of emotions in *Jeptha* is closely intertwined with the poetics of the play as well as with its religious context, is also supported by Vondel's work in a different genre. In Vondel's poetic contribution to the debate about predestination, the contrast between reason and a strict adherence to Protestant doctrine on the one hand, and 'natural' feminine emotions on the other, also figures prominently. In 1631, Vondel published a poem entitled *Decretum horribile* (*The Horrifying Judgement*), a sharp attack on Calvin.⁵⁸ The poem uses the forceful image of a mother who has lost her child to bring home the cruelty of the Counter-Remonstrant doctrine of double predestination, according to which the mother could have done nothing to prevent her baby from going to Hell. It asks whether God demands the cruel sacrifice of children:

Is God the crocodile that eats the new-born child
For dainties, on the banks of river Nile?
Where Moses in his chest was scarcely held
Floating amongst the women's cries of murder
Through bodies without count?⁵⁹

This image also features in *Jeptha*, at a meta-dramatic moment where the chorus of virgins has just intervened in the action of the play to request that Ifis's mother be present at her sacrifice. The Steward has refused this request because he fears Filopaie will behave like a tigress bereft of her child. In the chorus that follows, the virgins compare Ifis to Moses, and Filopaie to Jochebed, his mother. They sing of the mother's fears and grief as she hands her child over to the waters of the Nile. Even though the crocodile is not compared to God in the play as it is in the poem, the ravenous animal does spare the child. By recycling the images as well as the theme of the 1631 poem, the chorus seems to comment on *Jeptha* and the Steward's lack of compassion, and compares them to Calvinists. The poem *Decretum horribile* ends with words

⁵⁸ See also Konst, *Fortuna, Fatum en Providentia Dei*, pp. 69–71.

⁵⁹ 'Is God de krokodil, die 't versch geboren kind, / Aen d'oevers van den Nijl, voor leckerny verslind? / Daer Moses nauwelicks in 't kistje, word behouwen, / En drijft, door 't moordgeschrey der Isralijse vrouwen / Door lijcken zonder tal?' (ll. 69–73). I thank Helmer Helmers for helping me with this translation.



Title page of the 1615 edition of De Koning's *Jephtah*. To the left stand Ifis and her virgin chorus, while the army to the right supports Jephthah, who has dropped his sword and tears his coat in an emotional reaction to his daughter's appearance. With the courtesy of the University Library Amsterdam.

of comfort to the mother – even if the infanticides ('kindervlegels') of the Calvinist faith proclaim such cruelty, Christ has shed his blood for her child: 'He gathers them in lap of new Jerusalem / More loving than a mother hen in the fields / That with her wings the naked chick protects and shields.'⁶⁰ Here too, then, maternal love and the extreme emotions that are associated with it are contrasted to the strict adherence to Protestant dogma, which is represented as unfeeling.

Conclusion

I have argued that Vondel's *Jeptha* contrasts masculine repression with the feminine expression of passion, and shows the latter to be a more 'natural' and even more ethical approach to life. Previous interpretations of the play in terms of character and plot have viewed its female characters as sanctimonious or hysterical, but they are in fact central to the play's representation of the workings of emotion. The play uses a gendered representation of the emotions to counter a prevailing Senecan poetics in the Low Countries, which it associates with a strict Protestant outlook on the relation between human beings and God. In its stead, it employs female characters to propose a mix of Catholic, Aristotelian and Galenic paradigms – a framework that allows for a process of physical and spiritual purgation in a safe environment. This process of purgation leads to equanimity and, eventually, absolution. Vondel's tragedy in its gendered representation of the purgative effects of the performance of emotions is a spirited neo-Aristotelian defence of the affective operations of the early modern stage.

⁶⁰ 'Hij saemeltse, in den schoot van 't nieu Ierusalem, / Veel lieflicker als een klockhen, met haer' wiecken / Beschaduwet en beschermt het ongepluynde kieken' (ll. 130–32; my translation, KS).

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

CLOSE READING AND THEORY – THE DAVID PLAYS

Frans-Willem Korsten

Close Reading: Sensing the Text

It would not be far-fetched to state that *theory* is the answer to what some have called the ‘crisis in representation’, which is caused, or rather explored, by philosophical postmodernism. Friedrich Nietzsche would then act as its pivotal figure. Still, instead of considering the latter as the figure that marks a fundamental divide, his work can also be seen as a powerful voice in an ongoing discussion within the Western tradition. Both classical writings and many sorts of religious texts (including the Tanakh and the Bible) testify to a mistrust of language or, more fundamentally, to the inability to know what language, ultimately or finally, represents. One need only consider the vehement discussions in the Middle Ages between nominalists and realists.¹ To put this differently, it would be rather chronocentric to call the crisis of representation typically or solely postmodernist. The humanists in the Renaissance, for instance, experienced a different but partly similar crisis in representation. They too decided to start to close read, in relation to what was then a new kind of theory, and one that was different to what is nowadays called *theory*. In both cases, and despite historical differences, the desire that fuels close reading is to postpone the process of meaning-making. The impulse of both is to stay with the text, on the literal level, as long as possible.²

To be sure, the seemingly simple notion of ‘text’ and the difference between literal and figural remain extremely complicated issues. This,

¹ Since Carre published his study in 1946 on the issue of realism and nominalism, relatively few specific studies have been published on the medieval discussion recently, which may be surprising, considering the vehement debate in the last decades on the role and status of language.

² One of the best studies on literature and theory is Jonathan Culler’s *The Literary in Theory*. The phrase ‘making meaning’ refers to Mieke Bal’s study in semiotics, *On Meaning-Making*, see note 11.

too, is not new. On the one hand, Plato's attacks on the sophists and their instrumental use of language in *Gorgias* and his attacks on theatre in the *Republic* were based on the desire for an unequivocally clear, epistemologically decisive and ontologically ideal form of representation. Yet on the other hand, his texts on the matter testify to a fundamental problem. Plato can only attack a specific use of language by making use of language in the very same way, not because he is a flawed philosopher, but because he cannot escape language's rhetorical nature. Likewise, he can only attack theatre by making use of his persona Socrates. Had he taken himself as protagonist he would have appeared not as the individual Plato, but in and through language as the artificial *persona* Plato.³ So, generally speaking, the crisis is one in which language principally cannot rid itself of its own manipulation. There is no way of speaking, thinking or acting without some kind of persona or mask. To put this differently, one cannot say that the meaning and operation of language or subjectivity in the end goes back on some pristine and untouched X. If that would be possible, language would be truly representational. It would present x as the valid and meaningful replacement for, or a temporary instance of, what is supposed to be the real presence X.

One could say, consequently, that there is only a *crisis* for those who think that there is or should be an untouched, extra-lingual, definable, expressible truth. With respect to this issue, close reading can be called a pivotal, but also ambiguous instrument in the history of Western humanism. This history was characterized by George Steiner in his *Real Presences* as one in which a religiously inspired or philosophically underpinned trust in language is possible, and is key to the organization of truth, faith or knowledge. In Steiner's view, in classical humanism the house of representation stands because it remains possible to know what language is *about*. This knowledge of the about-ness of language allows one to stick to the notion, however imaginary, of finality in meaning or of some kind of truth (*Idea, Geist*). Within this context, close reading served to value the text for its intricacies in order to trace the arrows pointing to the text's true, original, proper or ultimate meaning. Epistemologically speaking, language, if studied closely

³ On the way in which Plato is being read in relation to his manipulation of language and masks, see Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*, in which she considers the way in which Nietzsche, Strauss, Heidegger, Gadamer and Derrida have read Plato.

enough, would lead to the right answer. Ontologically speaking, language could then be the embodiment of truth. It may be clear that close reading consequently was not, and cannot be, just a matter of technique. Close reading is not like the ability to ride a bike, drive a car or fly a plane. Close reading concerns a scholarly, political or aesthetical *choice* to approach the object in a certain way. For the humanists it was important to counteract the obsessively allegorical ways of reading in the Middle Ages. Their desire for a more literal meaning necessitated close reading, as performed for instance by Spinoza in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*Politico-Theological Treatise*). In this study he decided to read the Bible as a historically determined text in order to get to its proper meaning. I will call this humanist endeavour the *hermeneutics of close reading*.

Still, with regard to this hermeneutics, even Spinoza would have had to admit that there is no such thing as ‘the’ literal meaning. Language is, in a sense, allegorical *per se*. Saying ‘tree’, I mean something other than the word, and the tree is not made present as tree. Besides, the question is why we chose to call the object-tree a tree in the first place. There is a fundamental arbitrariness in language, as was analyzed succinctly by Ferdinand de Saussure.⁴ The vast implications of this arbitrariness would play a major role in the course of the twentieth century, and a paradigmatic discussion on the issue took place between Jacques Derrida and Hans-Georg Gadamer.⁵ Gadamer, in his *Truth and Method*, contended that interpretation, understood hermeneutically, is aimed at general consensus. Derrida argued that interpretation can and will lead to radically different meanings.⁶ His case may be exemplary for the way in which close reading would be hooked on to completely different ways of thinking about or dealing with art, which – taken together – were to be called *theory*. Scholars adhering to ‘theory’ would accept the impossibility of an ultimate kind of truth. Consequently, for them a

⁴ One of the best studies to date on structuralism with its roots in De Saussure is Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*.

⁵ The discussion was dealt with in a separate volume, edited by Michelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Derrida-Gadamer Encounter*. The vast implications of the arbitrariness of language led to strong opposition from left to right. On this see Eagleton, *Illusions of Postmodernism*; Steiner, *Real Presences*; or Posner, *Law and Literature*.

⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ‘Text and Interpretation’ and ‘Reply to Jacques Derrida’; Derrida, ‘Three Questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer’.

'crisis of representation' did not exist as such. It could positively, and preferably, be defined as the rhetoricity or theatricality of representation. It implied, in the end, a fluid or 'flat' conceptualization of language and representation instead of a hierarchical and 'deep' conceptualization. This was not just a matter of epistemology or ontology, or politics. As the texture of language was considered differently and the text itself was sensed differently, this approach to language was also a matter of aesthetics.

The very term close reading came to prominence through the work of the so-called New Critics. As was already hinted at, this did not mean they invented something new. Their work, in the 1930s, '40s and '50s, was a response to what were the dominant ways of dealing with literature and art at the time. One figurehead of the New Critics was I.A. Richards, the author of important studies such as *Practical Criticism* and *Principles of Literary Criticism*, and also, tellingly, of *Science and Poetry*. An important goal of the New Critics was to consider the work of art as an autonomous object and not as a derivative of extratextual circumstances. In a sense their main question was epistemological: what kind of thing is this object? This was primarily a reaction to the tendency to reduce the work of art to the author's life and thoughts, something W.K. Wimsatt called the intentional fallacy. The New Critics protested against this tendency to explain art without having understood or having paid real attention to what the work itself was. Like the humanists before them, the New Critics in a sense wanted to take the text literally. Their desire was to have a better understanding of, or to acquire knowledge about, the object of art through the object itself. However, in the process they ignored the interpreting subject. As for this subject, Wimsatt dubbed the undesirable effect of this elusive figure the affective fallacy. Trying to avoid both fallacies, the New Critics strived to achieve some kind of objective knowledge that could be found through close reading.⁷

The New Critics did not reign supreme. Simultaneously, especially in Europe but also in the States and elsewhere, different forms of critique of ideology were being developed, which in one way or another were connected to Marxism or which had existed since the thirties in the form of what later became known as the Frankfurt School (accompanied in the fifties and sixties by several Latin-American, African and

⁷ On this, see Littau, *Theories of Reading*, p. 97.

Asian postcolonial scholars). By and large they would criticize the type of close reading proposed by the New Critics. Scholars interested in ideology could not accept the autonomous status of the work of art as such, or consider it solely in terms of knowledge. According to them, texts were embedded in sociocultural circumstances. Different contexts were always determining the work of art, or were presented through it. In that sense art was principally sociopolitically charged and active. The type of close reading advocated by the New Critics was seen as the correlate of a decision to consider the work of art as non-political. This option was rejected or vilified by those of the critical schools, who were only able to think of the autonomy of art in a negative sense. Adorno, for instance, saw such a form of autonomy as an adequate response to the forces that beset and alienate modern human beings.⁸

In this context, for a while, close reading served as a watershed. To some it was ‘in’, whereas for others it was ‘out’ – out of the question. Still, important scholars within the critical schools of the sixties and seventies not only cherished close reading but found it politically important. Consequently, from the 1960s onwards close reading came to be considered in a radically different setting. The first conscious reflection on this shift may be Paul de Man’s *Blindness and Insight*. De Man once recalled how the favourite course he took as a student was one in which students would do nothing but read a single text. For people such as De Man, close reading was ‘as old as the hills.’⁹ They intended to use it, however, within the parameters of a radically different kind of humanism, often called post-humanism. In that context approaches such as deconstruction and feminism, which in turn were both heavily interested in psychoanalysis, would reconceptualize close reading as well.

In psychoanalysis, one is required to pay attention to the texture and the details of the object in order to open up the potential of meaning in many different directions; these will prove to be traces in both the individual and the collective cultural body. For feminism, a whole range of questions on the status of texts in a predominantly patriarchal society, with the blotting out of female texts and female voices in those texts, required close reading. Only by close reading could specific forms of the distribution of the sensible, as Rancière would call it, be traced. In

⁸ On the negatively defined autonomy of art, see Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*.

⁹ Phillips, <http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/elljwp/deMan.htm>.

this way, voices that had been smothered or covered up could be sensed again and brought to light. As for deconstruction, the principal point was that saying something must mean un-saying something, or not saying it. Here, close reading was required to sense and trace the dynamic of what is being said through the not-said. In both cases, a politics of close reading was accepted in macro and micro-political terms. The way in which a text was doing politics, on a macro or micro-level, became a major point of interest and in order to trace how this was done, one had to close read. For this type of close reading, the term *semiotics of close reading* can be used, as has been suggested by Jonathan Culler and Mieke Bal.¹⁰ One could even call it an *aesthetics of close reading*, if one takes aesthetics in the postmodernist sense. Instead of rejecting the affective fallacy, the interpreter will then have to deal with the inevitability of affective relations between object and subject, which is, indeed, a matter of aesthetics.

One of the major contemporary philosophers on the topic of aesthetics, Jean Mary Schaeffer, defined the hermeneutical approach as fitting within the frame of a speculative approach to art, which finds its ground in philosophy and theology and is in the end predominantly cognitive in nature. One studies the work in detail in order to know more about it and to find its deeper, ultimate, or true meaning. Its meaning is 'elsewhere', so to speak. In contrast, the semiotics or aesthetics of close reading fits in with what may be called an affective approach to art. This approach is in the end predominantly concerned with the ways in which art strikes, influences, shapes, binds, and touches us – also politically – in the here and now. In this case, one studies the work in detail in terms of sensation, i.e. in order to sense as fully as possible what it is doing, both in the private and the public domain, individually and collectively, and in terms of both thought and emotion.¹¹

Whereas the hierarchical conceptualization of language and representation (in terms of deeper meaning, for instance) can be hooked on to a method and theory that is equally hierarchical and 'deep', the fluid and flat conceptualization cannot. To illustrate this point, one need only look to a shift in the theory of psychoanalysis that has taken place

¹⁰ See Culler, *On Deconstruction*, or Bal, *On Meaning-Making*.

¹¹ On the dominance of the speculative approach, see Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*; on the political-aesthetic alternative, see Schaeffer, *Les célibataires de l'art*, Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, or Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

in the twentieth century. In the Freudian way of doing psychoanalysis, the idea is that one can come close to a conclusion. Obviously, the high-way to the unconscious hits a wall somewhere, as a result of which we can never know ourselves fully. We can, however, get pretty close, because psychoanalysis offers the tools and techniques to decipher the encoded messages we receive in the form of dreams, slips of the tongue, erratic or perverse behaviour, and so forth. Here, psychoanalysis still fits in a hermeneutical, perhaps even scientific model. With Lacan and others later in the century, however, psychoanalysis shifts to the fluid mode, and the constant flight of solutions and conclusions. Winnicott's idea of the 'good enough' fits in this picture. There is no key that will solve all issues in the end, which is why Lacan could state or advise you to 'enjoy your symptom'.¹²

Once we have accepted the fundamental rhetoricity of language or the theatricality of representation, there cannot be one method that fits all texts. What happens depends on the individual text, on the moment, on the actors involved, on the interests involved, and the particular kind of agency that the object or the scholar wants to address. Another way of saying this is that one can never decide beforehand which method or set of questions is required to approach a work of art. If that were the case, all that results after having chosen a distinct approach is a matter of illustration. For those scholars who indeed want to illustrate their point with a work of art this is, of course, not a problem. It is a problem, however, if we consider the work of art as a singular 'thing' that should not be appropriated or instrumentalized. To counter this, we can use *theory*.

The very term 'theory' might suggest that it is one coherent, consistently developed theory. This is assuredly not the case. Theory, here, indicates the willingness of the scholar to wager herself: instead of simply applying a theory, she aims to be guided by a theoretical approach. If there is some kind of coherence in 'theory', it might be that the acceptance of the rhetoricity or the theatricality of representation needs to be underpinned by a philosophy that has worked through both its religiously inspired desire for truth and its scientifically enforced quest for true meaning. With rhetoricity and theatricality, artificiality is implied, as is masking, staging, and acting (in the double sense of that word, as play-acting and doing). The major question in this context

¹² I am punning here on one of the most insightful and intelligent studies on Lacan and how his work can be used in order to read art: Žižek, *Enjoy your Symptom!*.

becomes not so much what representation points to, but how it affects and shapes the ones involved with, or caught in representation in a particular here-and-now. With regard to that, *theory* is a catchphrase for all kinds of politically informed and theoretically explored approaches that vary from queer theory to ecocriticism, and from gender studies to cultural analysis.

What can this kind of theory bring us when we close read the David plays? We cannot decide beforehand. The plays will have to provoke the relevant questions as much as we pose them ourselves. Turning to Vondel's David plays, then, I wish to emphasize the fact that my initial reading was accompanied by a lack of knowledge as to what they would invite me to do. In a fascinating way (as I started to notice), the difference between the two ways of doing close reading as described above was embodied in both plays. As a consequence, the plays allow me to say more on the combination of close reading and *theory* – this perhaps to some elusive and yet so utterly transparent approach to the literary work or art.

Theatricality and Mise en Scène

Vondel's *Koning David in ballingschap* (*King David Exiled*) forms the prequel to *Koning David herstelt* (*King David Restored*). Both plays date from 1660. Both relate to history in a double sense. There is first of all the collection of histories on which the plays are based, which are taken from Samuel 12, 13 and 14. For the audience of Vondel's times, these histories would have been well-known.¹³ Therefore they need not be presented by the play, although some of them are presented explicitly in a summary that precedes the printed version of the play. Subsequently, there is the history in the play itself. In *Koning David in ballingschap*, its history is developed within the limited amount of time prescribed by classical poetics, i.e. in less than twenty-four hours. In this case it concerns the actions and events from the moment David's son Absalom asks his father permission to go to Hebron (where he will start his revolt) up until the moment David has to flee eastward, away from

¹³ Vondel was also an avid reader of Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities*, and whilst there are often telling differences between Josephus and the Bible, in this case the two are by and large the same. In this case, the text of the Bible, or of the Tanakh, contains more details than Josephus's text, whereas most of the time this is the other way around.

Jerusalem. As a result not all elements from the entire biblical history of Absalom and David can be dealt with in the play, although many of them will pop up in a veiled or masked way, or in the form of references and condensed narratives.¹⁴

The history of Absalom and David is a complex one and cannot be grasped entirely by the summary. Its complexity is mostly due to the fact that David had many wives with whom he begot several sons. The eldest son of David is Amnon, by his wife Ahinoam of Jezreel. Absalom is the third son, by the daughter of King Talmi, Haggith, who is also mother to Tamar. Now the eldest son, Amnon, happens to be madly in love with Tamar and feigns illness in order to be able to ask David to assign her to him as a comforting nurse. When Tamar is with Amnon, he asks her to make pancakes, and this is what she does in his room, kneading the dough and shaping the cakes in the form of hearts. Then Amnon sends away his servants, and asks her to bring him the cakes herself. Having her near him, Amnon grabs her and rapes her. Immediately after the act he is suddenly filled with rage and hatred and sends her away. Tamar decides not to sneak away but to turn her exit into a public performance. With torn clothes and ashes thrown over her head and body, she walks through town, where she is seen by everyone – and met by her brother Absalom, who of course asks what has happened. After he has been told, he is the one who takes her with him to his place, in hiding, in an attempt to cover up the entire matter. From now on she will be cut off from the world (as the text has it). As one can imagine, Absalom is filled with contempt for his rival brother, although he decides to wait for some years. Then he goes to David in order to invite him and his sons to a feast in honour of the shearing of sheep. When David refuses, Absalom asks whether his beloved brother Amnon will not be allowed to come. David grants his permission. At the feast, when the wine has gone to Amnon's head, Amnon is killed.

When reading the plays, I could not fail to notice that their preliminary history is determined by both rhetorical and theatrical strategies of faking and masking, by skilfully presenting or arranging things, by publicly telling and showing, or veiling and hiding what should not be shown. In fact, three characteristics of rhetoricity and theatricality

¹⁴ The term 'condensed narrative' is developed in Korsten, *The Wisdom Brokers*, in order to indicate how one word, metaphor or reference can embody an entire narrative that is used in or projected into some line of argumentation in order to either serve the running argument or contradict and complicate it.

come into play: (1) characters do not present themselves as what they are, but are intentionally manipulating language and masking their actions; (2) characters present themselves publicly as what they are (rape victims, for instance), but in doing so they turn a space into a stage, thus installing the reign of theatrical representation and turning onlookers into a participating audience; (3) subjectivity is shaped by different forms of manipulation and *mise en scène*, i.e. things happen in such a way that subjects find themselves through the *mise en scène*, or their subjectivity is defined within and through the context of the *mise en scène*.

As for the first characteristic, Amnon fakes that he is ill; Absalom fakes that he loves his brother Amnon and invites him to a feast (in order to kill him). Both are theatrical actors in this way. As for the second characteristic, Tamar decides to show herself as what she is: a raped woman. However, she cannot remain to be seen as such if one wants to keep up appearances. This is why Absalom immediately has to hide her, and will have to keep her hidden. Tamar's appearance on the street will have to become an event, the veracity of which people will have to doubt. There is no way in which they will be able to test its realness. By removing Tamar from the world, something is lifted out of the realm of reality and installed in the regime of un-reality, which charges the event more strongly. This is also where the third characteristic comes in, that of *mise en scène*, which does not simply concern the spatial arrangement of props and actors, but also the arrangement of these in relation to actors and audience. It concerns the production of subjectivity. In each of these histories, independent actors are suddenly thrown into the position and status of an audience. They find themselves in a situation that is not entirely of their making, and can never entirely be of their making. Any audience is, in a complex way, intrinsically part of the *mise en scène*. It finds itself somewhere. Consequently, the status of all subjects involved becomes unclear. Insecurity is established as to the question of how to read that which happens: from what position, in relation to what, and being what? Maaike Bleeker (2008) has defined this set of questions as a defining marker of *theatricality*.

Because of all this, and because of the fact that the preliminary history is indexically taken up in the history of the play itself, the issue turns to one of how we are supposed to see and read. How are we to decide what makes sense and what does not; how are we to consider what we can and cannot know; how are we to establish by what and by whom we are affectively touched; how are we to decide who is what in

doing what? The plays provoke, or almost demand, close reading, and they ask us to reflect on the way in which we, as a participating audience, are being framed in terms of theatricality.

The dynamic of theatricality is made explicit at the beginning of *Koning David in ballingschap*. The play starts in the middle of the night, with Absalom and Tamar. The reason for the nocturnal scene appears to be that Absalom is in a sudden hurry to get away from court and has to ask David permission, who is on his way to say his prayers with the Levites. Another significance of the nocturnal scene, however, is connected to Tamar being cut off from the world. She can only appear during the night, for with daylight others will be able to see her. This, in its turn, is an index for the theme of theatricality on two other levels, namely within the play and in the historical context of the play. As for the latter, the orthodox ministers in Vondel's times had great concerns about the newly built theatre in Amsterdam, which they defined as a space of darkness, in which things were played out that could not bear the light of day. And indeed, something is happening in the play that cannot bear the light of day, for Absalom is not on his way to do penance, but to assemble his men with whom he will rise against David.

The theatrical play on dark and light leads to several forms of irony and insecurity. One ironic twist is that Absalom needs the dark because he is too nervous to play his act well. Hence it is rather ironic that David compares Absalom to the sun at a certain moment, and then goes on to state that the sun's face is less dear to him than Absalom's (l. 48). In the dark, however, Absalom's face is far from radiant. Then, when Absalom anxiously asks his sister Tamar whether he can really go to David, she reassures him: 'Feel as free as if it were day' (l. 57). But if it had been day, he would not have felt free at all. The confusion becomes most charged when David becomes irritated because Absalom has recalled recent histories, especially the one of Amnon and Tamar. 'Be silent about that', David orders (l. 115). That history has to be kept in the dark, as the metaphor in the following line suggests, since David's mercy covers up Absalom's guilt for his brother's death 'as the tombstone does its grave' (l. 116). Finally David confesses: 'This piety and this message this night I had / not expected from my Absalom, that beautiful one. May he enlighten others, whilst keeping his word in God' (ll. 119–21).

The first act, in which the night is a dominant element of the *mise en scène* whilst in the text light plays a dominant role, installs what Bleeker described as the key characteristic of theatricality: the heightened

awareness that is the result of an as yet indecisive morphing of subjects in relation to what is apparently being staged, being played out, being acted out, and being experienced and read. None of the positions is certain. Even for those who would argue that David, at least, is the one stable subject, it is of importance to note that several times in the play the prophecy of Nathan is recalled. When David had fallen in love with Bathsheba, who happened to be the wife of one of his supreme commanders, Uriah, David had ordered the latter to be killed, though in a veiled way. Uriah's death had to look like an accident on the battlefield. This did not please God, as the text of the Bible states. The prophet Nathan is chosen as mouthpiece for God's displeasure and he prophesies that because of this vile act David's house will become a place of familial murder.

That is obviously what this play is concerned with. In this sense one can see Absalom as the instrument of the prophecy – and of God. That latter element may be the most confusing one. Indeed, how are we to read what is happening? Is Absalom God's instrument or not? It is extremely unclear who is in charge of the *mise en scène*, or who is acting in the name of what. Consequently, the *mise en scène* is a determining factor in the production of subjectivity, both for the actors involved and the audience, which is not simply the actual audience as a group of onlookers but the status of an audience as a role.¹⁵ Such theatricality is reaffirmed once more in the last act of the play. This act starts with clarity, or so it would seem. We see Absalom and his major advisor, Achitofel:

Absalom: This is how Jerusalem was won without battle!

Achitofel: And not by deceit, but in beautiful daylight.

Absalom: The court's evening sun is setting rapidly in the east.

Achitofel: Against her nature, yes: who has ever seen such miracle?¹⁶

At first, both men boast that there was no need to act in disguise, since they could operate in the crystal-clear light of day. The source of that light is defined precisely the other way around, however, in the following two lines. There David is compared to the sun, which is not setting in the west but in the east – which is the direction that David has

¹⁵ On this conceptualization of *mise en scène*, see Bal, *Travelling Concepts*.

¹⁶ Vondel, *Koning David in ballingschap*, ll. 1441–44: 'Absolon: Zoo wort Jerusalem gewonnen zonder slagh: / Achitofel: En niet door laegen, maer by schoonen lichten dagh. Absolon: Deze avontzon van 't hof gaet snel in 't oosten onder / Achitofel: En tegens haer natuur. wie zagh oit grooter wonder!'

fled, across the river Jordan. The metaphor indicates there is something unnatural here, something that will backfire on the speakers. Accordingly, at the end of the play, Achitofel will lose his mind, and then regret that he has provoked the son to rise against his father by means of ‘fruitless ruses’ (l. 1861). He will be on his way to committing suicide.

As for Absalom, the most marked way in which the final act works with theatricality mirrors the opening act, and does so painfully. Achitofel has advised Absalom that the best way to get the people irrevocably behind him, is to sleep publicly with David’s ten wives, who David had left behind to take care of the castle. Here it is very clear who is in charge of the *mise en scène*. The space and all its props are described explicitly: ten beds, food, candles, all put on display on top of the palace. The theatrical nature of the event is made explicit by David’s wives themselves, using the word ‘toneel’ (play, performance, stage) when they ask Absalom: ‘[...] Let this despicable performance / not be shown in the face of the entire community’ (ll. 1698–99). The confusion as to how this community can read the spectacle in which it is simultaneously involved is produced by the fact that Absalom’s ‘performance’ intends to mark a difference between divine law and political law. His sleeping with David’s wives, as is indicated three times, is normal according to Asian custom (l. 1516), or the way of the Easterners (l. 1776), or according to the laws of Brahman (l. 1783). When Tamar protests against this appeal to the law of infidels, Absalom asks whether he may give her an ‘enlightening’ example: David’s murdering Uriah and marrying Bathsheba. With that same Tamar we are being redirected to the first act, and from there to her being raped by Amnon. The result of that act was that she could never again enter the world. The same will happen with David’s wives, who, after Absalom has used them and after David has defeated Absalom, will be locked up in a house, never to be seen again.

Sincerity and Embodied-ness

Considering what Absalom has done to David, it may come as a surprise that in the sequel, *King David herstellt*, David is obsessed by one thing only: not the threat of his own defeat, but the preservation of the life of his son Absalom. With a small band of soldiers, but in the company of his major commanders, David has fled across the river Jordan and Absalom is approaching with a much larger army. Although David

is clearly threatened, he refuses to fight, in order not to risk Absalom's life. Two characters are David's major counterparts in the ensuing argument: Joab, David's most important military leader, and Bathsheba, the ex-wife of Uriah, and now mother to David's son Solomon, who will later be appointed as David's heir. Both argue that David should fight Absalom.

Whereas Bathsheba only uses arguments, Joab is a trained political player who cheats and will use lies to influence David, or who bluntly sees to it that any possibility of a truce or reconciliation between father and son is made impossible. When Absalom sends an envoy with a peace offer, Joab cunningly takes him aside, makes sure that David will not see him, and sends him back again. When David discusses military strategies with his commanders, he again appears to be beside himself. He decides to stay in the castle of his host and not fight along with his army. The only reason he would want to fight is that he would like to save Absalom's life. After he has made the decision to stay behind, however, he emphasizes time and again that nobody may touch Absalom.

How can we understand this puzzling element in the play? The standard explanation has been that David feels too much parental love for his son.¹⁷ Such an explanation is in accordance with what Vondel explicitly describes in the preface to the play (or in accordance with what the chorus already put forward after the first act in *Koning David in ballingschap*). In terms of psychology such an explanation may have its merits, but it ignores the fact that God, via his mouthpiece Nathan, has prophesied that David's house will become the stage of internal bloodshed. David's attempts at saving Absalom appear to counter this prophecy, hence God's will.

As I have argued elsewhere, this is not the only play by Vondel that presents us with a sovereign who attempts to forestall the prescribed development of history.¹⁸ To my analysis, this position is distinctively comparable to the figure of the *katèchon*, as described in Paul's *Second Letter to the Thessalonians*, written in the first century after Christ.¹⁹ The letter is written in a time of crisis and despair. Considering the future, Paul describes how, before what ultimately needs to happen according to the divine plan, first something else will have to take place:

¹⁷ On parental love, see Konst, *Fortuna, Fatum en Providentia Dei*.

¹⁸ Korsten, 'The Irreconcilability of Hypocrisy and Sincerity'.

¹⁹ Though there is some discussion as to whether Paul is its true author.

Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming. (*II Thessalonians 2*, 3–9)

So the one who has to come first is a rebel, an unlawful usurper, who has to position himself as if he were God. Yet, although the usurper's mysterious powers can already be felt, he is being restrained. There is a force operative that does not allow this rebel to come. The figure behind that restraining force will have to be removed first, before the rebel can acquire its full powers. Where the text says 'he who now restrains it', the original has *katèchon* – a Greek term meaning 'resister'.²⁰

Due to the prophecy of Nathan, David's house has to fall apart through bloodshed. This may also explain why David so emphatically asks all his men not to kill his son, and why he does not want to kill him himself. He resists the fulfillment of the prophecy. This, of course, brings him into dangerous waters, resisting God's will and God's intervention in history. Worse still, he comes to be the positive or negative mirror-image of God. Within the Christian conceptualization, God is the one who is willing to sacrifice his own son, whereas David is not. Viewed through this resemblance, Absalom comes to resemble Jesus. But that, surely, cannot be the case for someone who has risen against his own father and has usurped power? Still, there are some strong hints in the text that point in this direction.

The play closely follows the story in the Tanakh and the Bible and in Josephus's account, according to which David's small army defeats Absalom's big one. Acknowledging his defeat, Absalom flees the scene on a hinny. At this point, it becomes relevant why earlier we were told that Absalom had such thick hair that it had to be cut each eighth day.

²⁰ The figure of the *katèchon* has been studied extensively with regard to sovereignty. On this, see Hoogers, *De verbeelding van het soevereine*. In dealing with this conceptual figure, Schmitt, *Politische Theologie* was a response to a text by Heidegger, 'Einleitung in die Phänomenologie der Religion'.

Thrown up in the air by his galloping hinny, his hair gets caught in a thorny bush, and there he remains hanging. Is it relevant to note that Vondel explicitly states in *Koning David in ballingschap* that Absalom has blond hair? Perhaps it is an insignificant detail, but it would seem to justify a closer look at that passage in the fourth act. A messenger describes what he has seen at the encampment of Absalom. Absalom is being crowned king by a descendant of Aaron:

The blond hair he crowned with vibrating beams
of gold and diamonds. There you could have seen him shining
like a morning sun, with such a grace and flair
that everybody would doubt whether nature, here, or art
spanned the crown in this one man, from top to toe
perfectly shaped, without so much as a speck on one of his limbs.
'Live long, live long, oh Prince, oh king Absalom!
Live long, most honorable heir. May your name blunt the sun's
glory and brilliance!' That was what was being shouted without end,
the hosanna of thousands, consisting of twelve groups.²¹

Of course, for those who need to frame Absalom beforehand because they know his history, this passage cannot be taken seriously. For them its true meaning is located elsewhere. But if we close read what the text presents in the here-and-now, we are affected. It is as if we meet a new Prince of Light, who is more brilliant than the sun, who will be at the beginning of a new era, and who is without flaw. His extra-ordinary status is defined by the fact that it is not sure whether he is natural or artificial. The blond hair is relevant here, because it may now be a crown itself, radiant and glorious, much like the hair, in the Western tradition, of that other extra-ordinary figure: Christ.

The allusion to Christ becomes relevant once more, when we learn how Absalom is killed. The soldiers who find him first respect David's plea not to kill Absalom. But Joab is less inclined to follow David's orders. According to Josephus (VII, 10, 241) he shoots Absalom through the heart. According to the Bible Joab takes three sticks and rams them into Absalom's breast, after which he presumably falls down

²¹ Vondel, *Koning David in ballingschap*, ll. 1033–45: 'Hy kroonde 't blonde haer met levendige straelen / gout en diamant. daer had gy hem zien praelen, / Gelyck een morgenzon, met eenen zwier van gunst, / Dat elck in twijfel troock of hier natuur, of kunst / De kroon spande in een' man, van boven tot beneden / Volschappen, zonder smet doorgaens aen al zijn leden. / Leef lang, leef lang, ô Prins, ô koning Absolon. / Leef lang, doorluchtste telgh. uw naem verdoof de zon / In glans en heerlijkheit. dat was 't geduurigh roepen, / 't Gejuich van duizenden, gedeelt in twalef troepen.'

and his men beat him to death. In Vondel's text the three sticks become spears. Hanging in the air, Absalom is pierced with spears. This in itself is not enough to compare him to Jesus. However, a close reading of the structural positions of characters on the axes of father/son and murderer/victim, in relation to God's plans with human history, and in relation to the preservation of law and order, will prove to be telling. This becomes even more evident when we include a passage from the preface to *Koning David herstelt*, in which the orator explicitly deals with that other father who did not want to kill his son, although he felt obliged to, and who was then saved by the bell: Abraham.

In the preface, three fathers, three sons, and three different forms of sacrifice are being compared. David's refusal to sacrifice Absalom is compared in a complex way to Abraham's ability to conquer his natural, paternal inclination because he loved God so much:

But the love of the patriarch Abraham, long overlooked as it had been, is proven by the fact that he, by sacrificing his own son, who was obedient to the death, conquered his self and nature, for the love of God, which is why the hero's faith and perseverance are crowned with such a glorious promise, and he represented God the father, of whom God the son himself declared: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.*²²

David, as the text of the play has it, will not be able to follow Abraham's example. He is not able to resist his natural inclination, as Bathsheba indicates: 'The patriarch Abraham did overcome his nature indeed'. David will retort: 'How many fathers are there who could follow in his lead?' (ll. 1714–15). This may be aimed at Abraham, but is also aimed, obviously, at God. Moreover, the other side is that Abraham, in his willingness to be counter-natural, is not able to resist his love for God. Or that within the Christian frame, God is not able to resist his love for mankind, for whom he is willing to offer up his own child.

It is important to understand that other plays, such as *Gebroeders*, present David as an average patriarchal figure and ordinary practitioner of *Realpolitik*. In *Koning David herstelt*, however, his resistance to the pre-ordained (prophesied) development of history is not driven

²² Vondel, *Koning David herstelt*, 'Dedication' – 'To the dear and strict Mr. Cornelis van Vlooswyck [...]', ll. 42–48: 'Maer de liefde van den aertsvader Abraham, dus lang overgeslagen, wort hier door betuigt, dat hy, in het opofferen van zijnen eenigen en ter doot gehoorzaemen zoone, zich zelve en natuur, uit liefde tot Godt, overwon, waerom 's helts geloof en stantvastigheit met zulck eene heerelijcke belofte gekroont wert, en hy Godt den vader afbeelde, van wien Godt de zoon zelf uitroept: Zo lief had Godt de weerelt, dat hy zijnen eenigen geboren zoon gaf.'

by a strategy. Likewise, the *katèchon* does not have a strategy: he is resisting the strange, mysterious forces that beset him because he clings to what he holds dear. Whereas David's general Joab is an average hypocrite and Bathsheba is concerned solely with the future of her son Solomon, David acts in response and in a here-and-now. He gives in and will keep on giving in, even when this will become unacceptable, as when he is not able to rejoice in the final victory of his army. He has to be forced by Joab to show his joy. At that moment he will lose his sincerity, but not to the extent that he will conclude that things have had a happy ending after all. Being sincere, David can only acknowledge himself to be subject to a pre-ordained plot. Consequently, there is almost no play by Vondel that ends in such a bitter way as this one.

In the light of all this it becomes of interest to see how the to-and-fro between naturalness and artificiality appears to apply less to David. His inability to kill his son is a form of sincerity comparable to that of Badeloch in *Gysbreght van Aemstel*. In my study of that character I considered the notion of sincerity as one that is predominantly non-strategic and that can come to life in response to the acts of others, not passively but in a conscious act to defend what one finds valuable.²³ As the comparison suggests, David can be seen more as a mother in his refusal to kill his own son. Again, as the word refusal also suggests, this is not passivity, something that would fit in well with a powerful cliché concerning the roles of women in the European tradition. Instead, it is an active form of resistance.

By analogy, reading is not a passive act. In the play, before rushing on to action in the standard way, David busies himself with reading what is happening to his son and to him. If I consider this in the light of Karin Littau's *Theories of Reading*, I would like to share her contention that close reading cannot be anything other than a *materialist* kind of reading, that is to say a form of reading in which the *mater* indicates a principally gendered body that does not so much disseminate but brings forth.²⁴ As for close reading, there is no possibility of escaping material concreteness and by implication, sociocultural differences or gendered ones. Close reading can never be, in whatever way, objective or universal. As the word 'close' suggests, such a kind of reading is spatially particular, intrinsically sensitive, sensible, and principally embodied.

²³ Korsten, *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, pp. 180–86.

²⁴ Littau, *Theories of Reading*, pp. 154–57.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

PSYCHOANALYSIS – LAW, THEATRE AND VIOLENCE IN SAMSON (1660)

Yasco Horsman

Thus it is necessary, at any cost, for man to live at the moment when he truly dies, or it is necessary for him to live with the impression of truly dying. This difficulty foreshadows the necessity of *spectacle*, or generally of *representation*, without the repetition of which we could remain foreign and ignorant of death, as animals apparently remain.

George Bataille

But death is precisely what cannot be internalized, and maybe this is what defines the tragic [...]. The 'consciousness' or even [...] the admission that there is nothing to do with death but to dramatize it.

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe

Samson as a Disconcerting Tragedy

Samson of Heilige Wraeck (*Samson or Holy Vengeance*, 1660) is usually not ranked among Vondel's masterpieces. Performed only three times during the playwright's lifetime, and rarely since, the critical literature on the play is scant, and if the play is mentioned at all in recent literature, it is often with reference to the play's dramaturgical shortcomings.¹ Based on the well-known story of the Jewish hero in the *Book of Judges* 13–16, Vondel's play dramatizes the last episode of Samson's life when, after being captured by the Philistines, he performs one final glorious deed, an act of 'holy revenge', in which he ultimately dies. A quick glance at Vondel's text reveals the reasons for its present unpopularity: the short play suffers from a lack of action and dramatic conflict, and more crucially, its central character hardly shows any signs of a psychological development. The play may be considered as one that revolves around a 'staetsverandering' ('a mental or emotional

¹ Weevers, for example, suggests in 'Vondel's Influence on German Literature' that the play has lost its popularity because of the lack of action on stage.

change'), as W.A.P. Smit suggests, since its protagonist does indeed transform from a subdued prisoner into a raging figure of revenge, but the psychological process that led to this transformation is barely represented in the play.² The play does not allow us to witness Samson's doubts, hesitations, and resolutions. Instead, *Samson* confronts its audience with the enigma of a heroic decision, taken in solitude – and offstage.

Yet what the play lacks in dramatic conflict, it makes up for in imagery, in particular in the concluding act of the play. Agreeing to play along with a humiliating ritual in a Philistine temple, Samson decides to sacrifice himself in what strikes a contemporary reader as a religiously inspired suicide attack, when he tears down the pillars that uphold the pagan temple, killing himself and a large number of Philistine people. These events are reported in the play by a messenger, who uses powerful and rich language to evoke the scene of this disaster in all its gory detail. A pile of debris is described in which dead and half-living victims, together with torn-off limbs, are bathing in puddles of blood. The speech of the messenger, and its explicit and violent nature, stands out in the play, and has a such a shocking impact that it almost seems to detach itself from the narrative of which it is supposed to be the resolution, leaving Vondel's reader with a visual imprint of a scene of pure violence.

Perhaps even more disconcerting than the gory imagery itself is the manner in which Vondel's preface seeks to relate this eruption of unbridled violence to the question of justice. In its dedication to Cornelis van Outshoren, who as mayor of Amsterdam was entrusted with the task of maintaining law and order, Vondel states that we should understand Samson's divine act of revenge as a foreshadowing of a new epoch of justice, which was to come with the arrival of Christ, humanity's true lawgiver. Christ, Vondel holds, will introduce a new and truly just principle of legality, which will eclipse all previously existing laws.³ Even though neither the play, nor the preface suggest that the blind, raging destructiveness of Samson's act should be understood as an example of justice in itself – indeed the principle of revenge itself is explicitly called

² Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*.

³ 'In de doot van Samson blijkt zijne wraeckzucht, zich wreckende, door eene heilige aendrift van Godts geest [...]. Hy overwint de vyanden door zijn doot, tot een voorbeeld van den beloofden verlosser, en wetgever der menschen, die [...] alle voorgaende wetgevers en wijsheit der wijzen overtreft [...]. En deze nieuwe en volkomen wet plant.' (4)

pagan and unchristian –, his divinely inspired annihilation of the pagan law should be seen as announcing a new era of justice. Vondel's preface and dedication, then, invite us to understand his play as a reflection on the relation between a religiously inspired act of destruction, and the establishing of a new (Christian) legal order.

Force and Violence in Samson

In his exploration of the relations between violence and the law, Vondel seems to anticipate a distinction Walter Benjamin draws in an essay published in 1921, between 'divine' and 'mythical' violence.⁴ In this essay Benjamin suggests that all law enforcement and lawmaking are inherently violent, since they rely on a use of force (the German *Gewalt* means both force and violence), but he argues that these two forms of legal violence, which he calls 'mythical', should be opposed to a third type of violence, which he labels 'divine violence'. Unlike both mythical forms of violence, divine violence maintains or imposes nothing. It is a purely negative, law-destroying force, which nevertheless in its very negativity serves to usher in a new historical age, with a new legal paradigm, and therefore it can be understood to be the mystical foundation underlying all positively existing laws.

In its preoccupation with both divine violence, and the establishing of a new principle of legality, Vondel's preface seems to situate his work clearly within the corpus of works in which the playwright is mainly concerned with the question of the origin of the law, or rather, with sovereignty. As Frans-Willem Korsten has convincingly demonstrated, questions of law and sovereignty are very much at the heart of Vondel's theatrical oeuvre.⁵ Vondel shares these concerns with legal philosophers of his time, such as Grotius. Furthermore, the issue of sovereignty itself was raised by the particular legal and political situation in which the Dutch Republic found itself in Vondel's time. Having just separated from Spain, the question of the source, and hence of the legitimacy of the law was a question of philosophical, legal as well as political urgency. Vondel's plays, Korsten claims, should be seen as contributing to debates about the law, through the means of theatre.

Yet the precise nature of *Samson's* contribution to these debates is not easy to assess. The preface may testify to the fact that Vondel had

⁴ Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence'.

⁵ Korsten, *Vondel Belicht, and Sovereignty as Inviolability*.

questions of sovereignty on his mind, yet it is unclear what the example of Samson is supposed to dramatize. The typological reading, proposed in the preface, in which Samson's sacrifice is linked to that of Christ, is undermined by the play's emphasis on the violent nature of Samson's act, which is clearly not very Christ-like.⁶ Furthermore, the fact that Samson's sacrifice is an act of revenge seems to be at odds with the Christian preaching of love and forgiveness, praised in Vondel's preface.⁷ If a typological reading itself is not very promising towards an understanding of what precisely Samson's act of violence is supposed to exemplify, it is even more unclear how his example can offer inspiration to a politician such as Outshoren. Indeed, what reading strategy is Vondel's reader supposed to employ to derive lessons of practical wisdom from this play?

Samson, then, poses a riddle to its readers. In this contribution I will not so much try to solve this riddle, but probe the way the play's dramatic and theatrical structure broach the question of the relation of law and violence as precisely a question of reading. Rather than presenting, I propose, positive images of sovereignty – examples, that can help one think through practical and legal-philosophical matters – *Samson* points to something unreadable at the heart of the law itself. It exposes what I propose to call the dark and violent underside of the law. The medium of theatre allows Vondel to expose this legal violence in its very negativity, without translating it into positive images.

In order to highlight this dimension of Vondel's play, I will use psychoanalytic theory, and in particular Freud's writings on the theatre. Psychoanalysis, I claim, is not only a hermeneutics attentive to the repressed underside of cultural phenomena, but it also offers a profound reflection on the theatre as a means of staging a retrieval of what

⁶ The obvious differences between Samson and Christ are often neglected by Vondel scholars who tend to take the correctness of the typological reading for granted. Peter King, for example, writes 'Samson, like so many of the later plays, can be interpreted at two allegorical levels: the typological – Samson foreshadowing the Messiah triumphing over his adversaries, and the anagogic which symbolizes the workings of grace. Samson [...] repents and requites his sin, whereby God's grace returns to him, the symbol of which is Samson's long hair, the token of strength.' *The Sacramental Thought in Vondel's Drama*, p. 208.

⁷ Vondel speaks of Christ as the 'wetgever der menschen, die door het voorschrift van de wet der liefde, in het eenige woort *Bemin* begrepen [...] de wraekgierigheid met wortel met al uit de harten zijner leerlingen ruckende' ('lawgiver of mankind, who, through the prescription of the law of devotion, summed up in the single word *Love* [...] utterly wrenching vindictiveness from the hearts of his disciples', 4).

is repressed. Therefore it can help us to articulate what is at stake in Vondel's enigmatic play.

In what follows I will first discuss the psychoanalytic approach to the theatre, in order to subsequently spell out what I think takes place in Vondel's play, to conclude with some more general reflections on the relations between law, theatre and violence.

Psychoanalysis and Theatre

As many critics have pointed out, the theatre plays a key role in Freud's work. Theatre is not only the type of artwork he refers to most frequently in his writings, but it also provided him with some of his most important concepts, such as, for example, the Oedipus complex. As Ernest Jones and Jean Starobinski have observed, crucial psychoanalytic insights were first articulated in relation to Greek and Elizabethan plays.⁸ Yet the influence of theatre on psychoanalysis reaches even further, as Jean-Francois Lyotard has argued. Lyotard claims that Freud's understanding of the 'psychoanalytic scene' – the drama that takes place in the room of the analyst – is deeply influenced by his understanding of the theatre. Lyotard writes: 'We must go a step further and grasp the fact that Freud's belief in or effective acceptance of the Sophoclean and Shakespearian scenarios is first of all a belief in the theatrical space where these scenarios are acted out, the space of theatrical representation, and in the scenography that constitutes and defines this space.'⁹

In order to make his point, Lyotard turns to a minor, oft-neglected essay that Freud wrote in 1906, and which was first published (in English translation) as 'Psychopathic Characters on Stage'.¹⁰ In the essay Freud attempts to analyze the particular type of enjoyment that watching a theatrical performance can bring. After citing the Aristotelian conception of tragedy as a ritual that serves the purposes of 'getting rid of one's emotions by blowing off steam' (88), Freud points to the

⁸ Starobinski, 'Hamlet et Freud', preface to the French translation of E. Jones, *Hamlet et Oedipe*. See also André Green, *The Tragic Effect: the Oedipus Complex in Tragedy*.

⁹ Lyotard, 'Beyond Representation', p. 156.

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, 'Psychopathic Characters on Stage'. References to this text will henceforth appear in parentheses.

remarkable fact that theatre spectators derive pleasure from identifying with characters who go through all sorts of ordeals, something which we would find highly unsettling to observe outside the theatre. We seem to go to the theatre, Freud muses, to watch scenes of pain, suffering, and most crucially of death. 'Suffering of every kind is thus the subject matter of drama', he concludes, 'and from this suffering it promises to give the audience pleasure.' (89) Watching such scenes of suffering is pleasurable, Freud suggests, not just because it gives us a 'masochistic satisfaction', but also, more specifically, because in traditional drama the suffering itself is the consequence of some heroic act of rebellion.¹¹ We therefore experience the narcissistic pleasure of identifying with a great man, in whose grandiose death we share. We go to the theatre, Freud proposes, to *experience* such deaths. As he writes elsewhere, in the theatre 'we still find people who know how to die [...]. We die with the hero with whom we have identified ourselves; yet we survive him, and are ready to die again just as safely with another hero'.¹²

After having suggested that there is a profound relationship between death, violence and the theatre, Freud's essay proceeds to outline a brief history of the theatre in which the heroic revolt of the protagonist changes from a revolt against the gods (in Greek tragedy), to human authorities (in social tragedy), against individual men (in tragedies of character) and finally, in modern psychological drama, when a character struggles against himself. He ends his short essay with a description of the type of theatre that fascinates him most, and which he labels dramas about 'psychopathic characters'. The suffering in such dramas is caused by an internal conflict between two impulses in one character, one of which is unconscious. Taking Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as his paradigmatic case, Freud suggests that this type of drama captures an audience that is, like the psychopathic hero, in the grip of similar unconscious conflicts. Freud adds that this last type of drama differs from the aforementioned ones, in that the audience should recognize the conflict at the heart of the psychopathic tragedy, but the nature of it cannot be named explicitly on stage, since this will evoke resistance in the

¹¹ 'Heroes are first and foremost rebels against God or against something divine; and pleasure is derived, as it seems, from the affliction of a weaker being in the face of divine might – a pleasure due to masochistic satisfaction as well as to direct enjoyment of a character whose greatness is insisted upon in spite of everything.' 'Psychopathic Characters', p. 89.

¹² Sigmund Freud, 'Thoughts for the Times on War and Death', p. 291.

audience.¹³ The psychopathic drama, then, relies on a complex *mise en scène* in which its central dramatic conflict is both made recognizable and remains hidden at the same time. In other words, it revolves around a gap in its textual structure, which leaves the impression that the main dramatic conflicts are played out in a ‘different scene,’ which is not fully present on stage.

Liotard draws attention to this essay for several reasons. Firstly he points out that Freud’s speculation on the effects of theatre – particularly in its psychopathic form – resemble Freud’s description of what takes place during a psychoanalytic session. According to Freud, the theatre allows us to ‘blow off steam,’ and experience all sorts of fears, desires and impulses that are otherwise repressed, because we know that by entering the auditorium we agree to participate in a *Spiel* – which in Freud’s German can refer to both game and theatrical play (as in *Schauspiel*). The ostensible artificial situation of the theatre, separated as it is from our ‘real lives,’ allows for a certain relaxation of the repressive censorship of the Ego.¹⁴ As Freud explains in his technical papers, psychoanalytic therapy relies on a comparable relaxation of the Ego, since the room of the analyst is also experienced as something that is different from our ‘real lives.’¹⁵ Psychoanalysis, like the theatre, takes place in what Lyotard calls ‘disreal spaces,’ ‘autonomous spaces no longer subject to the laws of so-called reality [...] where what is repressed can be staged, exempted from the censorship imposed by the reality principle.’¹⁶ For this reason, during therapy the *analysand* can act out – and thereby expose – repressed unconscious impulses in front of the gaze of the analyst in a quasi-theatrical setting.

Secondly, Lyotard highlights a casual remark in ‘Psychopathic Characters,’ in which Freud suggests that drama finds its origin in

¹³ ‘It appears as a necessary precondition of this form of art that the impulse that is struggling into consciousness, however clearly it is recognizable, is never given a definite name.’ (92)

¹⁴ ‘Accordingly, his enjoyment is based on an illusion; that is to say, his suffering is mitigated by the certainty that, firstly, it is someone other than himself who is acting and suffering on stage, and, secondly, that after all it is only a game, which can threaten no damage to his personal security. In these circumstances he can allow himself to enjoy being a “great man”, to give way without a qualm to such suppressed impulses as a craving for freedom in religious, political, social and sexual matters, and to “blow off steam” in every direction in the various grand scenes that form part of the life represented on stage.’ (88)

¹⁵ See Sigmund Freud, ‘Remembering, Repeating and Working Through (Further Recommendations on the Teaching of Psycho-Analysis)’.

¹⁶ ‘Beyond Representation’, p. 157.

religious sacrificial rites. Such rites, as Freud would later write in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), should be understood as re-enactments of a violent event that took place in the past – the killing (and eating) of the leader of the so-called ‘primal horde’. The memory of this event has collectively been repressed, but according to Freud religious rites and theatrical *topoi* unconsciously testify to its former existence. The ritual sacrifice – and by extension the theatre – serve to stage what Freud calls the ‘primal scene’ of a culture, an unknown event that determines the particular shape a culture takes. This implies that the theatre does for the collective what psychoanalytic therapy does for the individual: it allows for the ‘performance’ of an insight that cannot be articulated in the first person, as ‘knowledge’. Lyotard therefore concludes that psychoanalysis, in turn, should be considered as a form of theatre: it is a practice in which we can witness the *mise en scène* of the unconscious.¹⁷

According to Lyotard, the structural resemblances between psychoanalysis and the theatre complicate attempts to ‘apply’ psychoanalytic insights to the theatre. Psychoanalysis and the theatre do not relate to each other as a body of (psychoanalytic) theory, and a set of (theatrical) data, but should be understood as comparable theatrical practices. ‘Theatricality’, writes Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, agreeing with Lyotard, ‘functions as a *model* or even *matrix* in the constitution of psychoanalysis’.¹⁸ The task of a psychoanalytically informed criticism of the theatre is to spell out how both practices rely on a complex *mise en scène*, in which a repressed truth is exposed, staged and negated at the same time.

Samson and Psychoanalysis

I would argue that Vondel’s *Samson* is a remarkably good starting point for an attempt to link the theatre ‘with’ psychoanalysis. Vondel’s play not only revolves around a story about the suffering and heroic death of a great man who sacrifices himself for the greater good, thereby confirming Freud’s intuition that we visit the theatre to experience glorious deaths, but it is also a highly self-conscious investigation of the various ‘disreal’ spaces in which these scenes of suffering and self-sacrifice can be staged. As I will point out, the play consists of a comparison of three

¹⁷ Lyotard elaborates this point in ‘The Unconscious as *Mise-en-Scène*’.

¹⁸ Lacoue-Labarthe, ‘*Theatrum Analyticum*’, p. 175.

different theatrical spaces in which a sacrifice takes place: a temple, a theatre and the scene of Samson's death. *Samson* differs, however, from the Freudian paradigm, by virtue of the fact that its protagonist's suffering and death are related to a specific theme, that of the origin of the law. *Samson* examines, in various scenes, the interrelatedness of violence, theatricality and the law.

The intricate links between sacrificial violence, theatre and the law are explored in the opening scene of the play, in which Dagon, God of the Philistines, whom Vondel represents as a satanic creature, delivers a monologue in which he explains that he has come to Gaza to attend a religious ceremony, organized in his honour, which celebrates the capture of Samson. This ceremony will include a parading of the chained, blind and wounded Samson, who will be exposed to the mockery of the crowd. Dagon states that, as a pagan God, he desires such spectacles, since he feeds off the glory they bring him.¹⁹ But, as he muses, staging the spectacle of Samson's humiliation also brings political benefits. Publicly displaying Samson, a hero to the Jews, as a blinded, exhausted, suffering body, would deliver a final blow to the resistance of Jews, persuading them to adopt the pagan religion. Through the medium of theatre, then, and by forcing Samson to play a role, Dagon hopes to enforce a religious and political order upon the region of Gaza, and to impose a new principle of legality to the Jewish people. The fact that this ceremony involves the humiliation of Samson, whose suffering Dagon evokes in flowery lines of poetry, exposes the violence that is inherent in such law-positing rituals.

The importance of theatricalized scenes of violence for the sustaining of a legal-religious order is further highlighted in the second act of the play, in a dialogue between the King of Gaza and the chorus of Jewish women who have come to his court to plead for mercy on behalf of Samson. The King, who presents himself as a representative of the law, strongly resists the women's entreaties to show leniency to Samson. The law of the land dictates, the King reminds the women, that Samson's act of violence against the Philistines be met with equally strong retribution. Furthermore, the King adds, the cruelty of Samson's treatment also has a practical function, as it should deter future rebels from repeating his example.²⁰ His punishment, therefore, should be staged

¹⁹ Dagon speaks of 'gezangen en offerspelen gezangen en offerspelen, daer wy spoocken near verlangen' (ll. 17–18).

²⁰ See l. 516.

publicly, for all to see. By making a spectacle out of Samson's ordeal, the King's words seem to imply, punishment becomes an instrument of maintaining the law.

However, as the following acts make plain, the reliance of the Philistine law on a *mise en scène* for its force also implies a potential weakness. This becomes clear when the Queen persuades the reluctant King to transform the upcoming ceremony in honour of Dagon into a full-blown theatrical spectacle, during which Samson will be forced to demonstrate his skills in fencing, wrestling and dancing in front of the Philistine audience, and finally will be bribed into re-enacting his downfall in a short play. This should all be done to the delight of the Philistine audience, and to enhance the glory of the royal family and their God. Turning the religious ceremony into a theatrical event (in the strict sense of the term), that will be enacted on a newly erected stage at the centre of the temple, however, has its problems as well. The political, legal and religious success of the ceremony no longer relies on a simple display of Samson's passive, subdued body, but on his active participation. Asking Samson to become an actor – a hypocrite – blurs the distinction between his 'real' submission, and his outward *feigning* of such a submission. It is precisely this blurring that Samson will use to his own advantage. The ostensible theatrical nature of the situation he finds himself in – he is dressed up for the occasion in a theatrical costume – allows him to maintain an inner distance from the role he is playing, and to plot his revenge.

As the chorus implicitly suggests in two different songs (*'reyen'*), Samson is capable of such hypocrisy, precisely by virtue of a crucial difference between the Jewish and Pagan religion. Whereas the Pagan belief depends on rituals and sacrifices – i.e. the externalization and theatricalization of faith – the Jewish religion is depicted as relying on an internal belief. Samson is guided, the *reyen* tell us, by the 'inner light' (215–34) and 'inner vision' (991–1014) of his faith, which bind him to his God without the need for outward rituals.

In its first four acts, then, the play sets up an opposition between on the one hand the pagan religion and the legal-political order it hopes to impose, which is sustained by theatricalized scenes of violence, and on the other hand the Jewish religion that is capable of resisting the pagan force, precisely because its faith does not rely on theatrical rituals. This opposition between a theatrical and a non-theatrical belief, however, is complicated in the play's concluding act, when Samson finally turns into the figure of the 'holy revenge' that gives the play its subtitle.

Samson's awe-inspiring act of violence is not enacted on stage, but is narrated by a messenger, who confusingly compares it to a theatrical spectacle or, to be more precise, as an act that transforms the very nature of the play that the Queen had hoped to stage in the temple. When Samson, after patiently having repeated the story of his own downfall, explodes into a rage and tears down the pillars of the temple, the *comedy* of the scene of his humiliation turns into the *tragedy* of his death, as the messenger reports. (1573) Yet Samson's tragic death does not signify his downfall but his *triumph*, as it enables him, at the moment of his death, to reassume his position as a Judge ('*Richter*'), lawgiver of the Jewish People, announcing, as Vondel's preface states, a new era of justice.

Samson, then, concludes by opposing two 'spectacles': the mocking comedy organized by the Philistines, and the sublime scene of Samson's tragic death. Both scenes can be read as exemplifications of two different modes in which the law is related to theatre and to violence. The spectacle of Samson's humiliation is an instance of what Benjamin calls 'law-preserving violence', whereas Samson's brutal act of destruction evokes the law-annihilating force of the Benjaminian religious violence. But whereas the humiliation of Samson takes place on the traditional theatrical stage that is erected in the temple, the scene of his revenge consists precisely in the destruction of this artifice. By tearing down the pillars of the temple and causing its collapse, Samson destroys not just a physical building, he also erases the symbolic markers that separate the temple from the sphere of everyday life, thereby destroying the very semiotic and institutional framework that makes theatre possible. As a consequence, the play does not so much oppose two types of theatre – the 'bad' pagan versus the 'good' Jewish theatre – but it dramatizes a conflict between theatricalized violence and a violence that negates theatricality. Hence as a play *about* 'holy revenge' it attempts to dramatize something that cannot be properly staged, whose very nature implies the annihilation of the principle of staging.

The difference between the nature of Samson's act of violence, and that of the Philistines is further redoubled by a structural peculiarity of Vondel's play. The rituals in honour of Dagon are not only depicted as spectacles that *can* be performed on stage, they *are* enacted in Vondel's play, most notably in the conclusion to Act IV, when a chorale sings in praise of Dagon. Samson's holy revenge, on the other hand, is present in Vondel's play in absentia, through the words of the messenger, and in the testimony of the chorus of Jewish women who, standing outside

the temple, witness the effects of Samson's acts in the form of a *blinding* cloud of dust, and a *deafening* set of screams – effects, in short, that bar them from witnessing the scene directly.²¹ Hence the first four acts of *Samson* raise the question of the interrelatedness of law, theatre and violence, whereas Act V evokes a scene that remains structurally, thematically and psychologically *offstage*, leaving the audience in the embarrassing situation that paganism is represented on stage whilst the act of holy revenge that the play's title promised to depict remains beyond their grasp.

It is, perhaps, in this structural peculiarity that Vondel's play shows the strongest resonances with Freud's musings on the paradoxical pleasures of the theatre. As mentioned above, according to Freud we go to the theatre to experience a heroic death, to 'die with the hero with whom we have identified ourselves', as he puts it. However, as he writes in 'Thoughts for the Times on War and Death', death itself cannot be experienced directly; death remains for us fundamentally unimaginable. 'It is indeed impossible to imagine our own death,' Freud writes, 'and whenever we attempt to do so we can perceive that we are in fact still present as spectators.'²² In a gloss on this remark, philosopher Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that for Freud, the representation of the experience of death itself – which draws us to the theatre – lies beyond the means of the theatre itself. Death itself can never be made present on the stage, since it always takes place on yet another, 'different stage', that lies beyond the actual space of the theatre. Death itself is always endlessly deferred and displaced. 'Death,' Lacoue-Labarthe writes, 'cannot present itself as such, Death is submitted to the ineluctable necessity of re-presentation [...].'

If it is permissible to play on a 'popular' etymology, we might say that death is ob-scene. At the very least, Freud is convinced that death 'cannot be looked in the face' [...]. Death never appears as such, it is in the strict sense unrepresentable, or the unrepresentable itself.²³

Death is only represented on stage, Lacoue-Labarthe suggests, referring to an ancient ritual used to ward off evil deities, in an *apotropaic* way, in a gesture that similarly exposes death, and turns away from it.²⁴

²¹ 'Dit afgrijsselijck geschal verdooft onze ooren. Al dit stof verblint onze oogen.' ('This frightful din deafens our ears. All this dust blinds our eyes', ll. 1483–84).

²² 'Thoughts for the Times', p. 289.

²³ 'Theatrum Analyticum', pp. 187–88.

²⁴ For a clarifying exposition of this figure see Rappaport, 'Staging: Mont Blanc': *Between the Sign and the Gaze*, pp. 97–98.

The redoubling of the stage in *Samson*, the split between what is enacted on the ‘proper’ stage of the play, and the events that take place in the temple, leave the impression that the ‘real’ events of *Samson* take place elsewhere, not in a ‘proper’ theatrical scene, but in a scene ‘beyond all scenes’, which stages the impossibility of its own staging.²⁵

What is unique about *Samson* is not so much the very explicitness of the way in which death is made present through its very absence – this could be explained away as Vondel’s bowing to the conventional theatrical laws of propriety of his time – but the way in which its concluding scene of violence is related to the law. By dedicating his play to Outshoren, Vondel offers it as an image to be contemplated by a politician whose very function it is to formulate and codify new laws and to see to the maintenance of existing laws, someone, in short, for whom the law is not an abstraction but a positively existing body of rules. Whereas *Samson* presents the source of the law as violent, destructive, ‘obscene’ and fundamentally unrepresentable, his dedication suggests that his play can be of use to someone for whom the law is something highly present indeed.

I would argue, however, that this tension between preface and play is not just a misunderstanding by the playwright of his own work, but that it points to a structural tension between Benjamin’s distinction between divine (law-destroying) and mythical (law-positing) violence. As Jacques Derrida has pointed out in an essay on Benjamin, despite Benjamin’s insistence that divine violence lies at the origin of law, this origin becomes only readable *as* an origin *retroactively*, after a new legal order has been established.²⁶ Revolutionary violence, Derrida writes, whether of a secular or religious nature, justifies itself by borrowing from a future it has not yet ushered in. Derrida writes that such revolutionary moments are terrifying, not only because of the suffering they cause,

but just as much because they are in themselves, and in their very violence uninterpretable or undecipherable. This is what I am calling the ‘mystical’ [foundation of law] [...] It is in law, what suspends law. It interrupts the established law to found another [...] it never takes place in a presence. A successful revolution, the successful foundation of a state

²⁵ I borrow the phrase ‘a scene beyond all scenes’ from Mikkel Borch-Jacobson, who uses it to describe the scene in which, according to Lacan, *jouissance* appears. See his *Lacan: The Absolute Master*, p. 96.

²⁶ Derrida, ‘Force of Law’.

[...] will produce after the fact what it was destined in advance to produce, namely proper interpretative models to read in return, to give sense, necessity and above all legitimacy to violence that has produced, among others, the interpretative model in question.²⁷

Divine violence, then, cannot be represented directly; not only because its violent nature has a blinding and deafening impact on those who witness it, but also because it only becomes readable *as* divine violence after the fact, in a second scene, when it is *framed*, interpreted, and understood as divine violence. This means that a depiction of divine violence relies on an interpretative framework, in Vondel's case a preface that serves as a reading guide.

As do many of his other plays, Vondel's *Samson* thus testifies to the fact that the early Dutch 17th century went through a period in which the law was in crisis. As Korsten has shown, his plays should be understood as an examination of the implications of this crisis. *Samson* does not offer solutions, however, and neither does it offer concrete suggestions. Instead it exposes the underlying violence of the law itself, and the way in which the establishing of a new legal order – just as it may be – relies on a moment of violent annihilation. This violence, whose history the law has to repress in order to continue to function smoothly, cannot be represented directly. It can, however, be evoked in its very unrepresentability, in a particular type of theatre, namely that of Vondel.

²⁷ 'Force of Law', pp. 269–70.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

LAW AND LITERATURE – *BATAVISCH GEBROEDERS* (1663)

Jeanne Gaakeer

'In an age of disbelief it is for the poet to supply the satisfactions of belief'¹

Introduction: Why Law, Literature and Vondel?

In the 1970s a humanist renaissance took place in law and legal studies when the question as to what lawyers could learn from literature became the starting point for what is now called *Law and Literature*. In the course of the twentieth century, especially after the horrors of Nazi law unfolded, the positivist, rule-bound model of law typical of analytical jurisprudence came under attack. The same happened with the law's premises of objectivity and neutrality in the positivist legal tradition which championed the autonomy of law as a discipline. The underlying belief in the possibility of objective knowledge and value-free choices was severely questioned by developments in both society and science. The realisation that the formation of law and society is a reciprocal process made lawyers turn, or rather return, to the humanities. The acknowledgement that law is man-made inspired lawyers to explore the literary imagination, with interdisciplinary legal scholarship as a result.

Law and Literature traditionally has three axes. Firstly, there is 'Law as Literature', which claims that lawyers necessarily have to develop a feeling for language and literary style since language is their only tool. With language usage as a form of human behaviour, the central task of both law and literature is seen as a coming to terms with an author or speaker's claims of meaning. Put differently, legal as well as literary interpretation demands our active participation. Secondly, there is 'Law in Literature', which is primarily devoted to analyses of literary works with a law-related topic in a broad sense, ranging from questions

¹ Stevens, 'Two or Three Ideas', p. 259.

of justice to the portrayal of a lawyer-protagonist. It starts from the premise that our cultural heritage in the form of literary works holds up a mirror to lawyers as far as socio-legal and political developments and values are concerned, and shows the way in which others look upon law and the legal profession in action. Thirdly, there is the strand that addresses the subject of the regulation of literature by law, with topics such as parody, defamation, obscenity, copyright and the question, both legal and philosophical, of authorship.² By now fully institutionalised, with specialised courses in law schools, scholarly journals, and a proliferation of the topics of literary jurisprudence, *Law and Literature* belongs to the mainstream of contemporary legal theory.³

For purposes of contemporary interdisciplinary scholarship, the irony that should at once be noted is that the very process of the formation of autonomous disciplines did not come to a head until the late nineteenth century and was followed (at least for law) almost immediately by the demand for auxiliary disciplines such as statistics, economics and sociology by the legal realist movement of the early twentieth century, and, in the wake of these multidisciplinary ventures, by interdisciplinary fields as diverse as *Law and Economics* and *Law and Literature*. In short, interdisciplinary scholarship brings together two or more autonomous disciplines. This might seem paradoxical when we realise retrospectively that this development began almost immediately after the process of *Ausdifferenzierung* (differentiation) occasioned the rise of monodisciplinarity and the increased independence of national literatures from their respective literary histories – not to mention the coincidence with the rise of the nation-state and national legal systems.⁴

Elsewhere I have argued that it is high time to return to our European humanistic roots for the very reason that European scholars have hitherto largely concerned themselves with the academic work done in the US and the UK, whence the *Law and Literature* movement originates.⁵ Within the framework of this Vondel project, this reconsideration is

² 'Law as literature' is traced back to Cardozo, 'Law and Literature'. 'Law in literature' finds its origin in Wigmore, 'A List of Legal Novels' and 'A List of One Hundred Legal Novels'. For a full overview, see Gaakeer, *Hope Springs Eternal*.

³ For an overview of courses, see Gemmette, 'Law and Literature', and 'Law and Literature: Joining the Class Action'. US-based journals are *Law and Literature*, *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* and *Legal Studies Forum*; UK-based is *Law and Humanities*.

⁴ The term is coined by Luhmann, *Ausdifferenzierung des Rechts* ('Differentiation of the Law').

⁵ Gaakeer, '(Con)temporary Law'.

relevant because the separation of fields of knowledge into disciplines had not yet developed into monodisciplinarity in the early modern period; law was seen as part and parcel of the humanities, and literary works operated as sources for law.

My claim, then, would be that it is high time we should return to the literatures of the early modern period. In the present essay, I will focus on the work of two canonical Dutch authors: the humanist and lawyer Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) and the poet and playwright Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679). On the view that humanist jurisprudence in the Dutch Republic of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries deserves more than just the attention of legal historians and that, conversely, literature deserves more than just the attention of literary theorists, I propose to investigate the reception of Vondel's play *Batavische gebroeders of Onderdruckte Vryheit* (*Batavian Brothers, or Liberty Oppressed*) informed by the *Law and Literature* movement to which I claim adherence.

Not only did Vondel experience the force of the law when it tried to subject and regulate his literary output, he also proved undisputedly polemical as far as his social engagement and literary consciousness were concerned when it came to the religious intolerance, self-interest or corruption of political leaders. Vondel's engagement, for instance, is exemplified in the fate of his 1625 tragedy *Palamedes*, an allegory intended to condemn the legal murder by biased judges of the Grand Pensionary Johan van Oldenbarnevelt. Oldenbarnevelt was decapitated after a spectacular trial in 1619 in The Hague, on the pretext that he had been bribed by the then arch enemy Spain. For *Palamedes* the Court of Holland charged Vondel with the abuse of poetic licence, resulting in a prohibition of the play and the payment of a three-hundred-guilder fine. The law took hold of Vondel once more with his 1646 play *Maria Stuart*, which dramatised the historical events in England in the year 1587. Although the play had been published anonymously, Vondel's publisher Abraham de Wees was ordered to pay a one-hundred-and-eighty-guilder fine. Finally, a more obvious political statement was the open condemnation of the verdict of the judges in the Oldenbarnevelt case in *Geuze-vesper of Zieken-troost voor de vier-entwintig* (1631).⁶

⁶ My view is informed here by Witsen Geysbeek, 'Vondel', pp. 58 and 77; Calis, *Vondel*, p. 12, and Porteman and Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen*, pp. 357 and 386.

In short, Vondel's life and works are of interest to two of the aforementioned strands of *Law and Literature*: 'the regulation of literature by law' and, given its double 'mirror of society' perspective, 'law in literature'. This interest should be all the more acute since both in literary and cultural studies generally, and *Law and Literature* specifically, the debate on the canon is in full swing. Within this debate, seventeenth-century (Dutch) literature deserves our attention if only for the reason that there are parallels to be discerned in the formation of the identity of Europe, then and now, with the integration of immigrants like Vondel as a case in point. Furthermore, the topic of foundational narratives is one already initiated in *Law and Literature* for the formative period of the US, so it would make sense to do the same for European countries. For the purpose of this chapter, my focus is on the wide range of interpretations of *Batavische gebroeders of Onderdruckte Vryheit* that concern themselves with the historical background of the concept of sovereignty and the rule of law that Vondel supposedly intended to draw the audience's attention to.

Batavische gebroeders: *General Background*

Vondel's biographer Piet Calis contends that Vondel was immersed in the ideological struggle of his days: both his plays and his (satirical) poetry show a deliberate socio-political engagement with the public cause. Especially after the *Palamedes* trial literally brought home to him what it meant to be prosecuted, not just for what one believes but also for what one writes, Vondel found inspiration in the turbulent events that mattered in the lives of his contemporaries. In taking up urgent seventeenth-century issues, Vondel became prototypical of a new type of authorship.⁷ His literary works helped form public opinion. They were all the more able to do so, I would say, because Vondel was at the same time clearly influenced by a tradition of societal critique that was illustrative of the period of the Eighty Years War between the Low Countries and Spain. In this period the ideological imagery in literature shifted from predominantly biblical metaphors, with both William

⁷ Calis, *Vondel*, pp. 147 and 372–75. See also Sellin, 'Michel le Blon and England, 1632–1649', for an example of Vondel's political engagement shown in his dedication of *Leeuwendalers* (1648) to Michel le Blon, one of the architects of the 1648 Peace of Westphalia.

of Orange and his son Maurits depicted as David struggling against Saul or Goliath, to the deliberate creation of what has come to be known as the Batavian Myth, the foundational narrative for the republican form of government the Provinces wanted established as a bulwark against any princely usurpation.⁸ Vondel fits the bill with his first play, *Het Pascha* (*Passover*, 1612). When the play was published in book form, Vondel added a verse entitled ‘Vergelijkinge van de verlossing der kinderen Israëls met de vrijwording der Verenigde Nederlandse Provinciën’ (‘Comparison of the Delivery of the Children of Israel With the Liberation of the United Provinces of the Netherlands’), with the Egyptian pharaoh as Philip II and William of Orange as Moses.⁹ Vondel again conforms to a literary trend with *Batavische gebroeders*, a contribution to the Batavian Myth that underlines his subsequent development.

Initially, Vondel had high hopes for the role of the princes of Orange, although he denounced Maurits’s role in the Oldenbarnevelt case. After Maurits’s death, it was generally expected that the stadtholder – the title for the lieutenant-governor of the Dutch republic – Frederick Henry, William of Orange’s youngest son, would end the war with Spain. Between 1626 and 1632, Vondel contributed a series of songs in praise of Frederick Henry. When the stadtholder recaptured the city of Den Bosch in 1629, Vondel, in a poem entitled *Zegezang* (*Paeon*, 1629), admonished him to be a true defender of the freedom of conscience because that was the only way in which to be a true apostle of liberty.¹⁰ When Frederick Henry died on 14 March 1647, his son William II succeeded him. Soon a conflict arose when the province of Holland tried to curb the military power of the stadtholder-captain-general with its plea for a strong reduction in military expenses. In 1650, however, after the complete failure of an expedition to Brazil, the six other provinces resolved to give William II full authority to do whatever was deemed necessary to maintain law and order. A deputation of the States-General and the prince sent to all the larger cities in the Republic was refused by Amsterdam. William II gave the Frisian stadtholder Willem Frederik orders to march on Amsterdam. The assault failed, but the damage to the prince’s reputation was done. When William II died shortly after,

⁸ See Spies, ‘Verbeeldingen van vrijheid’, pp.141–58, for the initial projection of the Low Countries’ woes on Old Testament heroes.

⁹ Calis, *Vondel*, p. 77, endnotes omitted.

¹⁰ Porteman and Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen*, pp. 359–61.

Vondel wrote an acerbic poem, *Vertrouwing voor de onnozele en bedroefde Ingezetenen van Hollandt, over de doodt van zyne Hoogheit Prins Willem II, Stadhouder en Kapitein der Vereenigde Nederlanden* (*Consolation for the Innocent and Saddened Inhabitants of Holland, on the Death of His Highness Prince William II, Stadtholder and Captain of the United Netherlands*), in which he cynically remarked that William II had released the people of the Spanish yoke in life, risking death in the name of liberty – ‘this is dying for liberty’ – whereas by dying he now released the people from the yoke he himself had become to them (‘You who in life liberated us from Spanish violence / And in death rid us of your own’). Vondel included an admonition to the people: ‘Safeguard the freedom of the nation / And adhere to the nature of the laws.’¹¹ No longer would Vondel support the cause of any stadtholder, or anyone from the House of Orange for that matter. From now on, he put his trust in the Grand Pensionary Johan de Witt. In 1652, Vondel reaped the fruit of true liberty. His attack on prince Maurits’s role in the trial and death of Oldenbarnevelt, *Palamedes*, was finally released for publication, even though it was not staged until 1663 or 1664, during the first stadtholderless era (1650–1672) when the House of Orange had lost its original prominence – even though the 1654 Act of Seclusion, in which Holland had declared that no descendant of William II would occupy any position held by his ancestors, had by then, in 1660, been retracted. In the very same period, so interpretation has it, Vondel repeated his stand against the House of Orange, which by now was allied to the English House of Stuart, fearing that the son of William II would try to grab full military and political power. It was in these circumstances that 1663 saw the publication of *Batavische gebroeders of Onderdruckte Vryheit*.

Vondel himself claimed that the play was inspired by, and a reaction to, a series of etchings by the Florentine artist Antonio Tempesta (d. 1630) entitled *Batavorum cum Romanis bellum* (1612), which depicted (the causes of) the revolt of the Batavians led by Claudius Civilis against the Romans (69 CE), and another series of paintings

¹¹ The poem is presented in Witsen Geysbeek, ‘Vondel’, pp. 80–82. The quotes are: ‘[D]it is voor de vrijheit sterven. [...] Die levend’ ons van ’t Spaensch geweld / En stervende van’t uw’ bevrijdde. [...] Bewaer de vrijheit van het lant, / En houdt de wetten in haer wezen.’

inspired by Tempesta¹² that had been commissioned for the newly opened Amsterdam town hall (with Rembrandt's famous portrayal of a one-eyed Claudius Civilis presiding over the conspiracy in the forest quickly removed in 1662 by the authorities when they understood its subversive intention).¹³ This can be deduced from his introductory remarks to the play in the dedication to Simon van Hooren, where he says:

‘When I reflected on the revolt against the Romans, and the glorious deeds of the Batavians depicted in the etchings of Tempesta, and saw among the pictures one of the Roman stadtholders in his chair, with Julius Paulus drenched in blood and Nikolaes Burgerhart in chains to be deported to Rome, I resolutely desired that these histories, which had been rendered perfectly on the order of the Burgomasters, should adorn the gallery of our City Hall in a row; and an eagerness kindled in me to revive in a lively fashion the tragedy of these Brethren [...].’¹⁴

Earlier on, in *Inwydinge van 't stadhuis t'Amsterdam (Inauguration of the Amsterdam Town Hall, 1655)*, Vondel had already mentioned the Batavian revolt as a fitting subject for the gallery.¹⁵ In 1660, the aforementioned Simon van Hooren was Amsterdam burgomaster; he was also a deputy, a member of the executive of the province of Holland and Westvrieslant. To him, ‘the safeguarding of freedom was entrusted’¹⁶ or so Vondel claims when offering him a play based on Tacitus's

¹² See Schöffer, ‘The Batavian Myth during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,’ esp. p. 95, for Tempesta's etchings inspiring both the pageant held in Amsterdam to celebrate the 1648 Peace of Westphalia with 6 *tableaux vivants* about the Batavian revolt, and the four paintings for the new town hall. See Porteman and Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen*, p. 586, for the idea that Vondel saw the etchings in the home of Cornelis de Graeff, the moving force behind the paintings on the Batavian revolt for the new town hall, who kept a copy of the Otto Vaenius adaptation of Tempesta's etchings in his library.

¹³ For a detailed discussion of the Rembrandt painting, *The Oath of Claudius Civilis*, see Alpers, ‘Rembrandt's Claudius Civilis.’ Korsten also highlights the relevance of the Rembrandt painting, *Vondel belicht*, p. 226; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, p. 203.

¹⁴ ‘Toen ick den opstant tegens de Romainen, en de doorluchtige daeden der Batavieren in de kunstige prenten van Tempeest bespiegelde, en, onder andere afbeeldingen, den Romainischen stadthouder op den stoel zag zitten, daer Julius Paulus in zijn bloet geveert lagh, en Nikolaes Burgerhart [i.e. Vondel's Dutch rendering of the name Claudius Civilis] geketent near Rome gevoert wiert; en mijn lust vast verlangde dat die historien, door last der Burgemeesteren treflijck geschildert, de galery van ons Kapitoel, op eene ry, moghten bekleeden; ontvonckte my een yver om levendigh te ververschen den treurhandel der Gebroederen [...].’

¹⁵ See also Duits, ‘Tussen Bato en Burgerhart’, pp. 204 and 209.

¹⁶ ‘[D]e wacht der vryheit bevolen wert.’

description of the Batavians in the Book IV of his *Historiae*.¹⁷ Significantly, Vondel already sets the scene in the dedication when he speaks of the Batavians as a free people who have entered into an alliance with the Romans, one which the latter brutally violated.

Batavische gebroeders: *Synopsis*

Batavische gebroeders is a classical play, in the sense that it consists of five acts and honours the concept of the unity of time, place and action. The tragedy comprises a single day, starting at sunrise and ending at sunset; the scene is set in Outleger, a Roman army camp; and the subject is the harsh treatment of the Batavian people by the Romans. The first act opens with a discussion between the Batavian brothers Julius Paulus and Nikolaes Burgerhart, of royal descent, about the trials and tribulations the people have to suffer from the stadtholder Fonteius Kapito who, contrary to the oath of allegiance between the Romans and the Batavians, forces the Batavian men to enlist in the Roman army. Burgerhart (l. 76) rhetorically asks, 'Who dares to resist this, or reason against it?'¹⁸ and elaborates on the position he takes, i.e. to remain silent and have the Krijghsraet (Council of War) deal with the complaint about this situation. At this point, their sister Heldewijn asks them for help in order to save her son Vechter from being taken away by the Romans. Concerned that the lament of Heldewijn and the other women about the Roman raid will make things worse, Burgerhart and Julius take refuge inside the house. When the Krijghsraet welcomes Fonteius back from a successful campaign in the second act, Fronto, the Roman official who is to accompany the captured Batavians, sows the seed of suspicion by claiming that the Batavian brothers are planning a revolt. Initially, Fonteius and the Krijghsraet are reluctant to believe Fronto's accusations. Their change of heart occurs, however, when in the third act, after an ongoing debate on the matter, Julius and Burgerhart are summoned to appear before Fonteius, and Fonto plays his trump card. When the Batavian brothers insist that they have not

¹⁷ Tacitus, *The Histories*, 4, 12 (tr. Moore): 'Julius Paulus and Julius Civilis were by far the most distinguished among the Batavians, being both of royal stock. On a false charge of revolt, Paulus was executed by Fonteius Capito; Civilis was put in chains and sent to Nero, and although acquitted by Galba, he was again exposed to danger under Vitellius owing to the clamour of the army for his punishment: these were the causes of his anger, his hopes sprang from our misfortunes.'

¹⁸ 'Wie durft dit stuiten, of met reden tegenstaen?' (WB 9, p. 905).

incited any revolt, Fonto brings up Vechter, who was discovered concealing himself in the woods, dressed like a milkmaid. Surely this is proof of the brothers' insincerity? Fonteius is now convinced and gives the brothers a choice: one of them is to die, the other to be sent to Rome. Walburgh, the brothers' mother, desperately tries to make Fonteius change his mind, but to no avail. The fourth act ends with the brothers drawing lots because they are unable to decide rationally who is to die; they both claim this 'honour'. Julius is destined to die and Burgerhart swears not to cut his hair until he has taken revenge for this outrageous Roman act. The fifth act opens with a full description by Fronto of Julius's decapitation, after which he suggests that Burgerhart should speedily be dispatched to Rome with Vechter as his shield bearer, to prevent the Batavians from organising a rebellion to liberate Burgerhart. The play ends with Fonteius provoking Burgerhart to the limit with seemingly friendly words: as a government official, he, Fonteius, is just doing his duty. In a final outcry, Burgerhart denounces the tyrant Fonteius and challenges him to a fight. This results in his being carried away in irons, or, as Burgerhart himself says, like a lion in a cage.

The Growth of the Batavian Myth

The idea and ideal of freedom discerned and constructed in the history of the Batavian tribe offered an incentive to trace back the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic's ancestry to these *Batavi*. This development was facilitated by the humanist rediscovery of classical texts on the subject, such as Tacitus's *Germania* and *Historiae*. In the early sixteenth century, Cornelius Aurelius' *Divisiechroniek* (1517) – a history of the provinces of Holland, Zeeland and Utrecht in the Dutch language that became authoritative for at least the next hundred years – further helped the Batavian cause. Also important was the fact that the Batavian theme was picked up by the Chambers of Rhetoric.¹⁹ When the uprising against Philip II started in the course of the sixteenth century, the need for a foundational narrative that legitimised picking up the sword against the king to whom allegiance was due, became acute. The exemplary performance of Claudius Civilis helped form the political and

¹⁹ See Schöffers, 'The Batavian Myth during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,' and Spies, 'Verbeeldingen van vrijheid'.

patriotic story that in the first stage contributed the arguments for the just war against Spain. The historical narrative provided an emblem of heroism for William of Orange, and later on offered food for thought on the subject of the polity of the state and the form of sovereignty best suited to the Dutch situation. In short, the story of the Batavians generally, and that of Julius Paulus and Julius also known as Claudius Civilis in particular, gained political significance through the way in which it was adopted and, most importantly, adapted by Dutch writers until it became a *locus amoenus* in seventeenth-century literature with P.C. Hooff's *Baeto* (1617) and Vondel's *Batavische gebroeders* as cases in point.

Highly influential in the process was Hugo Grotius's 1610 contribution, *Liber de antiquitate reipublicae Batavae* (*Book on the Antiquity of the Batavian [= Dutch] Republic*), which was translated into Dutch as *Tractaet van de Oudtheyt vande Batavische nu Hollandsche Republieque*.²⁰ He provided the necessary ammunition for the argument that the government in the Dutch republic was prefigured in the Batavian past. Arguing that, '[...] the form of government which we have now, has not recently begun with us, but that the one which previously existed has become more visible', he claims that 'as long as there is no evidence to the contrary',²¹ it suffices to establish the similarity between the situation then and now. If 'then' is the situation among the Germans, with two estates of men, the princes and the people, and the government in the form of a council of the best men among them that 'possessed supreme power',²² the seventeenth-century present is, and should be, the same. Focusing on the form of alliance between the Batavians and the Romans, Grotius says: 'It is well known that there are two types of alliances: equal and unequal. An unequal alliance is one in which one people submits itself to another. An equal alliance is one in which both people retain their independence [...].'²³ It should come as no surprise, then, that the loyal people of the Low Countries, '[f]ollowing the example of their ancestors, who took up arms against the Romans who tried to secure dominion, [...] declared war on Alva [...].'²⁴ And, '[f]rom this

²⁰ For the purpose of this chapter, I have used the Dutch edition, De Groot, *De Oudheid van de Bataafse nu Hollandse Republiek*, ed. Molewijk, and the English translation, Grotius, *The Antiquity of the Batavian Republic*, ed. Waszink et al.

²¹ Grotius, *The Antiquity of the Batavian Republic*, ed. Waszink et al., ch. 1, pp. 51 and 55.

²² *Ibid.*, Ch. 2, p. 65.

²³ *Ibid.*, Ch. 3, p. 69.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Ch. 6, p. 103.

time onwards, the sovereignty of the States, which had been much obliterated by the licence of the latest princes, was brought back to light and shone out brightly.²⁵ Grotius ends his tract with a detailed account of the way in which this exemplary form of government now functions in the Provinces, especially as far as internal affairs and military command are concerned. Because our ancestors instituted this form of government, '[i]t is now our duty, if we do not want to be ungrateful or imprudent, firmly to defend this form of government, which is urged by reason, approved by experience, and recommended by antiquity'.²⁶ And even though he later retracted what in retrospect he confessed was an embellishment of those features that could well be used to further his political cause,²⁷ the result was obvious, not only in that Grotius's contemporaries harked back to an imaginary and imagined Batavian past as an allegorical vehicle to contribute to contemporary issues but also, I would say, in that later interpretations of these seventeenth-century literary works keep returning to the foundational Batavian myth and thus confirm it as well.²⁸ And while there is good reason to do so, in the sense that literary narratives that function as a foundational myth provide both a topic of scholarly interest and offer a prism through which to interpret the literary works themselves, I will suggest below that this tendency also entails the risk of one-sidedness when it comes to interpreting the legal perspectives that can be discerned in the very same works, as can be seen in twentieth-century literary interpretations of *Batavische gebroeders* to which I will now turn. In short, focus on the Batavian myth also makes interpreters miss or neglect other aspects of legal interest.

All this seems to have been presaged historically. In the introduction to his anthology of early Dutch literature, when sketching important events in Dutch history, John Bowring names in one breath Vondel and the 'story of the old Oldenbarneveldt and of the hapless De Witts. The struggles in favour of civil and religious freedom, and their triumphant

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Ch. 7, p. 105.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Ch. 7, p. 115.

²⁷ See Schöffers, 'The Batavian Myth during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', p. 93, n. 33, for the view that Grotius dissociated himself from his earlier interpretation of the Dutch past in a letter to his brother dated 24 January 1643, and De Groot, *De Oudheid van de Bataafse nu Hollandse Republiek*, ed. Molewijk, p. 25.

²⁸ See also on the conditions for success of a myth, Tilmans, 'Aeneas, Bato and Civilis, the Forefathers of the Dutch'. Tilmans distinguishes four characteristics of a myth of origin as a historical narrative form, of which the third is important, 'a myth can only be successful if it has a function in society, that is, if it can be used as a means to convey a political or moral message' (p. 123).

results – the proud march of the Batavian republic in increasing influence and dignity – everything seems to have conspired to give interest to a literature and a language which have hitherto scarcely penetrated beyond their own natural and narrow bounds.’ No wonder then that Bowring sets the tone by including a part of *Batavische gebroeders*, the Chorus of Batavian Women that ends Act II.²⁹ In the 1829 sequel to this anthology, Bowring cautiously remarks that so far, ‘Vondel has been judged of by extracts, which are in every body’s mouth in Holland, rather than by any entire piece of composition, or by the whole of his writings,’ and he approvingly mentions Witsen Geysbeek’s contribution to the Vondel critique which aims at objectivity rather than ‘the *blind* idolatry with which Vondel has been worshipped in the Netherlands’³⁰ This remark is important for interdisciplinary studies as well, for it is indeed Witsen Geysbeek that offers a sobering admonition when, after having listed the plays, he speaks of interpretive insinuations with respect to the historical referentiality of Vondel’s plays. Of *Palamedes* he subsequently remarks that ‘[i]t does not surprise us that this tragedy, when it was brought out in the open, was greeted with much enthusiasm by those who were outraged by the political murder of Oldenbarnevelt; the play made the blood of this old and honest servant of the state splatter in the eyes of the power-hungry Maurits and his kin.’³¹ On the other hand, Witsen Geysbeek is surprised at the fact that the ‘play has never been of interest apart from its political impact’, to the detriment of aesthetic valuations.³² It would seem that in Dutch academia he was alone in this view. To cite but one example: the 1837 eulogy of Lulofs, a literature professor at Groningen University, portrays Vondel as the lampoonist of Maurits and as a zealous defender of justice, liberty, and tolerance.³³ The perceived interrelation between literature and history, which was coined early on in the Vondel reception,

²⁹ Bowring and Van Dyk, *Batavian Anthology*, pp. 2–3, and 147–51, for the translation of the Chorus of the Batavian Women in Act II. Bowring must be credited for this translation. I have not found any other translation of (parts of) the play.

³⁰ Bowring, *Sketch of the Language and Literature of Holland*, pp. 40 and 127 (emphasis in the original).

³¹ ‘Het verwondert ons niet dat dit treurspel, bij deszelfs in het licht verschijning met geestdrift ontvangen werd door de genen die den staatkundigen moord van Oldenbarneveld met diepe verontwaardiging verfoeiden, en het bloed des afgeleefden eerlijken staatsdienaars den heerschzuchtigen Maurits en zijn believers bij elke gelegenheid in de oogen deed spatten [...]’

³² Witsen Geysbeek, ‘Vondel’, pp. 91 and 239–40: ‘[...] treurspel nimmer enig ander dan staatkundig belang heeft ingeboezemd’.

³³ My view is informed here by Simoni, ‘Lulofs to the Rescue’.

proved indicative of the interpretations of *Batavische gebroeders* in twentieth-century literary criticism. The predominant critical concern became the way in which the play allegorises actual historical events to which Vondel wished to draw attention in order to criticise contemporary politics.

Interpretations of Batavische gebroeders: A Short Overview

Lieven Rens offers the hypothesis that the sad plight of Julius Paulus and Nikolaes Burgerhart is modelled on the execution of Egmont and Hoorne, with Fonteius as Alva. To him this would explain why a number of references to the historical Batavian background in the play seem out of joint, i.e. why Vondel had his characters say things that do not fit the Batavian context as described by Tacitus. According to Rens, this is because the Batavian setting is a thinly disguised reference to what was recent history to Vondel: the oath of allegiance of the Dutch to the emperor Charles V and the revolt against the governor Alva, to whom Charles's son Philip II gave the right to start legal proceedings against anybody, with disregard for prior rights and privileges should the charge be insurrection against the authority of the sovereign.³⁴ Like many others after him and, in his case, in order to support his own thesis, Rens refers to Smit's 1962 interpretation of *Batavische gebroeders* as found in his Vondel study *Van Pascha tot Noah*, in which Smit claims that the play is a portrayal of a case of injustice with as its main themes aspects of 'change of fortune' (staetveranderinge) and wrongful administration of justice.³⁵

Smit is truly the spider in the Vondel web here, for he takes to task the historian Cornelissen's view, in the latter's 'Vondel en de vrijheid in 1663',³⁶ that *Batavische gebroeders* is a warning against the appointment of the son of William II, and he is himself in turn taken to task for this critique by later interpreters. To Smit, there is no evidence whatsoever in the play itself that justifies Cornelissen's view that Vondel intended the main topic to be 'repressed freedom' ('onderdruckte vryheit') rather than the fate of the two brothers. In Smit's opinion, the play is a tragedy on 'a change of fortune' – it deals with the vicissitude experienced by

³⁴ Rens, 'Egmont en Hoorne model voor de Batavische Gebroeders?'

³⁵ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 3, ch. V5, pp. 233–81.

³⁶ Cornelissen, 'Vondel en de vrijheid in 1663'.

Julius Paulus and Burgerhart. Its main focus is on the unjustified way in which the tables are turned on the brothers by means of an unjust decision made by Fonteius in an unfair trial. As evidence for this reading, Smit points to Fonteius's final words in the play: 'Unruly fortune governs the state of the world / Thus we see how one thing rises, and another falls.'³⁷ In short, how fate in one day changes Burgerhart and Julius Paulus from autonomous royal princes into traitors who are respectively condemned to be sent to Rome and to die; this is the only interpretation possible that fits Vondel's development as a playwright if, given the legal theme, the dramatic counterpart *Adonias* is taken into consideration, as Smit is convinced that it should be.³⁸

Since Vondel only had the short paragraph in Tacitus on which to ground his plot, he could give his imagination free rein while at the same time having to make sure that he connected to the concept of the history of the Batavian people as it was then known by the general public, the source of which was *Tractaet vande Oudtheyt* (*Treatise on Antiquity*) by Hugo Grotius, a friend and author to whose historical and legal works Vondel had often turned. That he chose national subject matter is not remarkable given the fact that literary history, especially research on seventeenth-century drama, gives ample evidence that history plays feature prominently in periods of heightened national consciousness, and Vondel's lifetime in general – as well as the genesis of *Batavische gebroeders* in particular – is a case in point. Duits then gives a thorough description of the political constellation and of the change that Vondel's original allegiance to the House of Orange underwent, firstly by describing Maurits's role in the Oldenbarnevelt affair, and later on by describing the attack on Amsterdam by William II. In this context it is, or so Duits argues, no surprise that Vondel would want to warn against the dangers of the office of the stadtholder in the fledgling Dutch republic; when the office is held by the wrong person, he might attempt to usurp full and absolute sovereignty. Like Cornelissen before him, Duits reads the conjunction 'of' in the title as

³⁷ 'Het wilt geval bestuurt den weereltlijcken staet. Zoo zien we hoe't een op, het ander onder gaet.' (ll. 1869–70)

³⁸ To Henk Duits, on the other hand, it is Smit who is wrong and Cornelissen who is right. Duits's own dissenting reading takes offence at Smit's dismissal of the possibility that Vondel did indeed intend his play as an allegory of the then current threat of the appointment of a descendant of William II as stadtholder. Duits, *Van Bartholomeusnacht tot Bataafse Opstand*, esp. ch. 4. For a concise version of the argument, see Duits, 'Tussen Bato en Burgerhart'. Also of interest is Poelhekke, *Vondel en Oranje*.

‘as exemplary of’, so that the play’s title and subsequently its plot should be read as the exemplary performance of the abstract concept of ‘onderdruckte vryheit’ (‘oppressed freedom’) by means of the story of Julius and Burgerhart’s change of fortune. In support of his claims, Duits offers ample textual evidence.³⁹ Furthermore, to him the evidence with respect to the inspiration Vondel found in the *Tempesta* etchings also goes to show that Smits’s view is incorrect: one of the etchings depicts the stadtholder Fonteius with Julius decapitated at his feet while Burgerhart is led away captive, and that is exactly the scene Vondel portrayed in Act V.

Lia van Gemert takes Duits’s side as far as the reference to the play’s title is concerned. In the same vein, she argues that the brothers’ passivity with respect to the Roman violation of the oath, which is understandable now that, in terms of rebellion, circumstances appear to be against them, enabled Vondel to focus on the role of the women. Heldewijn’s plea for her son’s safety and the Chorus of Batavian Women at the end of Act II suggest moral and political cowardice on the part of the brothers who cling to the oath, and to obedience. Together with Walburgh’s plea for legal justice rather than mercy for her sons (ll. 1401–78) which also predicts Vechter’s revenge should things go wrong for the Batavians, the women’s roles are important in that their clamour also helps raise suspicions of an approaching revolt in the eyes of the statesmen (*staetkundigen*) who duly report to Fronto. Thus the women stand for emotion, political insight and moral bravery. Van Gemert does not follow the reading proposed by Rens, Smit and Duits – on the basis of textual evidence that verses 1466–68, with their

³⁹ See for instance Duits, *Van Bartholomeusnacht tot Bataafse Opstand*, p. 260, his reference to verses 1673–74 spoken by Walburgh on the approaching execution of Julius Paulus, ‘Wy kussen zulck een schoone doot. Zy hanthaef ’t heiligh recht der Staeten’ which Duits takes to mean that Julius, as a representative of the States, has rightly defended the people’s legitimate rights against the tyrant, also known as stadtholder. In Julius’s speech, ll. 1743–44 ‘Stadtholders do not hesitate to cut off the head and crown of an ancient royal line on the filthy scaffolds of their court’ (‘Stadthouders schroomen niet op vuile hofschavotten / Een’ ouden koningsstam van hoofd en kroon te knotten’), Duits emphasises the plural noun ‘stadthouders’ and the noun ‘hofschavotten’ as evidence of Vondel’s intention to draw our attention to the scaffold on which Oldenbarnevelt died and to his own *Palamedes* (p. 262). Again, verses 1813–14 (‘To gain an empire is what a restless Caesar demands, / But to secure an empire is what an heir like Augustus seeks’ or ‘Het rijck te winnen eischt een’ Cezar, noit in rust; / Maer ’t rijck te veiligen, een’ nazaet als August’), refer to the then topical issue of authority and sovereignty, and Duits points to a reading of August as the *moderator reipublicae* who leads the people, and does so by gathering support from morally respectable people: Johan de Witt in 1663 (at 265).

reference to the walking stick Walburgh uses for support, resemble Vondel's earlier lines on Oldenbarnevelt – to the effect that the character of Walburgh is modelled on Oldenbarnevelt's wife. To her, Walburgh is Oldenbarnevelt himself who also did not ask for mercy but for the just application of the law.⁴⁰

The importance of the role of the women is also emphasised by Gerda Hoekveld-Meijer when she argues that the Chorus of Batavian Women in Act III represents the notion that the Republic did not owe its liberty to the Orange stadtholders but to the piety and decency of its people in the stadtholderless period. At the same time she offers yet another allegorical suggestion when she points to the similarities between the years 69 and 1660 CE. In Rome in 69, Vespasian and Vitellius fought for world dominance; in 1660, the question was whether the French King Louis XIV or the English King Charles II would rule the world. Should Charles II be the winner, this would mean the end of 'true liberty' in the Republic: William III would no doubt opt for allegiance to his uncle Charles II. In short, the country would be back to where it was under Stadtholder Maurits. To Hoekveld-Meijer, the first act already supports the reading that the Romans under Nero can be looked upon as the British under Charles II: 'Fonteius advances, following Tigelinus's trail / How wanton and greedy does he violate the borders of the Rhine / On both sides; a plague for young and old. / What woman remains unviolated?'⁴¹ Tigelijn then stands for Downing, Charles II's favourite, who came to The Hague in 1661 as an ambassador and joined the ranks of the Orangists.⁴²

In his seminal study of the representations of sovereignty in Vondel's works, Frans-Willem Korsten also agrees with Duits's view that *Batavische gebroeders* is a warning against the dangers of an all-powerful military leader. Along with Van Gemert and Hoekveld-Meijer, he claims an active political role for the women in the play. To Korsten, however, the women function as conceptual wrenches. In telling a different story, or by telling the story differently, they forcefully argue for alternative conceptions of sovereignty and liberty for the people.

⁴⁰ Van Gemert, 'Vrouwen voor vrijheid'.

⁴¹ 'Fonteius houdt voor aen het spoor van Tigelijn/ Wat geil en gierigh schendt hy d'oevers langs de Rijn / Van wederzijde, een plaegh, voor ouden en voor jongen / Wat vrou zit ongeschent?' (ll. 59–62).

⁴² Hoekveld-Meijer, *De God van Rembrandt*, esp. pp. 186–87. For Downing and the political situation, see Uit den Bogaard, *De Gereformeerden en Oranje tijden het eerste stadhouderloze tijdperk*, ch. 7 and 9.

Burgerhart is the exemplary freedom fighter, but the women are the intellect behind the enterprise.⁴³

Towards a Literary-Legal Study of Vondel: Some Suggestions

On the basis of the above survey I think it would be fair to say that, in twentieth-century literary studies, the interpretive focus on *Batavische gebroeders* has largely been on allegorical interrelation of the foundational Batavian myth and the concept of sovereignty to be espoused on that basis, i.e. ‘true liberty’, all of which is set against the background of the sociopolitical situation of the day. From the literary-legal position that I myself take, coming to the field of *Law and Literature* as both a legal theorist and legal professional, this leads me to the following observations and suggestions that together aim to offer a literary-legal research agenda and extend an invitation to those working in literary Vondel studies.

Firstly, I observe that this is a valuable point of departure from the point of view of legal and literary-legal studies, and coincidentally a timely argument for further interdisciplinary explorations in the civic tradition already in full swing in *Law and Literature*. Conceptually, however, we would do well to link further research on the subject to Robert Cover’s work, the central theme of which is, first and foremost, the conflict between law and other normative worlds and the position of the one that has to make judgments in that conflict. As Cover puts it in ‘*Nomos and Narrative*’,

We inhabit a *nomos*—a normative universe. We constantly create and maintain a world of right and wrong, of lawful and unlawful, of valid and void [...]. The rules and principles of justice, the formal institutions of the law, and the conventions of the social order are, indeed, important to that world; they are, however, but a small part of the normative universe that ought to claim our attention. No set of legal institutions or prescriptions exists apart from the narratives that locate it and give it meaning. For every constitution there is an epic, for every decalogue a scripture. Once understood in the context of the narratives that give it meaning, law becomes not merely a system of rules to be observed, but a world in which we live.⁴⁴

⁴³ Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, pp. 186 and 227; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, pp. 131 and 203.

⁴⁴ Cover, ‘*Nomos and Narrative*’, pp. 4–5.

The consequence for law is that in the normative legal world, law and literature are inseparably related and that this relation is located in narrative when the concept of narrative is taken broadly, i.e. as the way in which all human experience finds its expression, and on the understanding that every narrative asserts its prescriptive point, its moral. Thus, as a methodology for jurisprudence, the narrative paradigm can be especially fruitful when the moral dimension of law is the topic of discussion.

For US foundational narratives, this idea is elaborated upon in two by now seminal works by Robert Ferguson, *Law and Letters in American Culture*, and Brook Thomas, *Cross-Examinations of Law and Literature*.⁴⁵ These works address the topic of the interrelation of the foundation of a nation and its literature, as well as the influence of law in the process, given the unity of law and the humanities in lives of the lawyers in the formative era when there was a strong emphasis on rhetoric, hermeneutics, and the classics. Research on the civic tradition has recently been augmented once more by Brook Thomas who, while ‘not claiming that law is the key that will unlock all of the mysteries of works of literature or that literature is the key that will open up a full understanding of the law’,⁴⁶ convincingly shows how the “the Founding Fathers of American literary nationalism” created a usable past for a nation that lacked one.⁴⁷ Thomas also shows the importance of a critical attitude towards the past, given the danger of reading teleologically and thereby preserving the very myth that is in need of clarification. A literary-legal interpretation is not supposed to be a denial of the rule of law either; it should dramatise various conflicts citizens subject to law have to confront, explore dilemmas, and interweave legal and literary analysis.

For British law and literature of the Stuart era, the subject of the fictionalisation of law, or *mythopoesis*, has recently been taken up by Elliott Visconsi.⁴⁸ His aim is to show how poets and playwrights such as Milton and Dryden helped fashion the nation. To him, Dryden (for example) ‘attributes to the poet an equitable function, seeing the outstanding writer of epic or tragedy as unusually well-qualified to interpret the founding intentions of law and polity, and to grasp the

⁴⁵ Ferguson, *Law and Letters in American Culture*; Thomas, *Cross-Examinations of Law and Literature*.

⁴⁶ Thomas, *Civic Myths*, Preface, p. i.

⁴⁷ Thomas, *Civic Myths*, p. 20, endnote omitted. Also of interest is Pether, ‘Comparative Constitutional Epics’.

⁴⁸ Visconsi, *Lines of Equity, Literature and the Origins of Law in Later Stuart England*.

universally valid thesis behind the facts and circumstances of a historical narrative of origins.⁴⁹ Visconsi's suggestion that emotional identification is central to most early modern models of political obligation may be of interest for further research on the narrative ethos of early modern writers, when law and literature are integrated in a cultural moment, as is the case in Vondel.

To summarise this point, in *Law and Literature* the focus is on the dominant narratives and ideologies as portrayed in literature and law, as well as on alternative narratives, and in this sense *Law and Literature* is a site of critique. Current literary Vondel studies augur well for further inquiries into the theme of civic aspects of law and literature, but need a broader view: one more informed by legal history and theory. More work could be done in comparative literary interpretations conjoined with literary-legal jurisprudential insights, by literary and legal scholars in closer cooperation than has generally been the case thus far. How, for example, does the literature of a period further exercise the public imagination? On this view, Blair Worden's recent study on Milton would suggest a comparative study of Lucifer in Milton and Vondel, the historically salient issue of religious dispute being present in both authors' works.⁵⁰

In doing so, the need to address issues on the plane of a methodology for interdisciplinary undertakings becomes acute. For, secondly, from the point of view of law, the focus in literary Vondel studies is one-sided in its insistence on the allegorical aspects concerning liberty and sovereignty in *Batavische gebroeders*. While my literary self agrees with Korsten when he claims that the question as to whether Vondel had actually read Hobbes and other legal-political philosophers of his days is not important, as a lawyer I think that an exception should be made for Grotius's influence on Vondel in view of the idea of literature as a mirror for law, if only to involve legal historians in this form of research as well. For example, little is made of the fact that later in life Grotius distanced himself from the Batavian myth he himself helped create. Both this mystification and the fact that the history of the House of Orange as liberators of the Low Countries was relatively short have not been discussed from a legal point of view.

⁴⁹ Visconsi, *Lines of Equity, Literature and the Origins of Law in Later Stuart England*, p. 37.

⁵⁰ Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwellian England*.

Thirdly, these observations may also lead to further research on the theme of the *auctoritas poetarum*, the authority in matters of truth and fact that the humanists ascribed to poets as much as to philosophers and scholars. On this view, further inquiry might also be made into the unity of law, literature, and historiography – a unity that was presumed to exist then and has become a consideration in interdisciplinary studies today – which has its roots in the Aristotelian view of fiction as ‘the thing that may happen.’ The Aristotelian opposition of *mythos*, understood as narrative, to *logos*, as dialectical discourse, is of interest when it comes to the fictionality of Grotius’s Batavian treatise itself. It would seem that evidence of the Batavian past, whether fictional or not – *ut poesis historia?* – leads to contradictions that Grotius is incapable of resolving logically, hence his response in the form of a narrative of foundation.⁵¹ While fictions are not lies,⁵² it may be of interest for both literary and legal scholars generally and those specialising in the field of *Law and Literature* more specifically, to pay more detailed attention to literary and legal belief systems and the way in which similar concepts generate different outcomes in different disciplines.⁵³ This also suggests a joint effort to address the broader theme of the dominant epistemology and history of ideas of a period.

This strand in research could be taken together with yet another, fourth, perspective that I think could fruitfully be incorporated for methodological reasons: that of the similarities and differences in literary and legal hermeneutics. What is paradoxical and striking, at least to a lawyer, in the interpretations of the allegorical tendencies in Vondel, is that so much is being made of the authorial intention. In his conclusion on *Batavische gebroeders*, Henk Duits (for example) claims that Vondel must have had a special meaning with this play. Given the circumstance that the Burgerhart motif as developed in plays by other authors always points to the later phase of the Batavian revolt, *Batavische gebroeders* must for this very reason be about the threat of William III becoming sovereign. Duits’s claim, then, that the Batavian past was alive and kicking to Vondel, and that the audience had to know the ins

⁵¹ See Eyffinger, ‘De relatie van recht en letteren in leven en werken van Hugo de Groot’, p. 21. See also Duits, *Van Bartholomeusnacht tot Bataafse opstand*, p. 17.

⁵² See also Thomas, *Civic Myths*, p. 11, referring to Wolfgang Iser’s idea that fictions are not lies (Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*).

⁵³ My view is inspired here by Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities*, with its central argument that interdisciplinarity should seek its heuristic and methodological basis in concepts rather than in methods.

and out of the political scene in order to understand the author's intentions for the anti-Orangist plot, is highly speculative given the additional information that he offers. The play was performed only three times, so that only an elite group may have had occasion to take note of Vondel's intention. Duits's speculation that much must have depended on the players' performance in practice, i.e. on their knowledgeable internalisation of precisely that intended meaning, raises the lawyer's eyebrows when it comes to factual evidence to underpin the argument. A reading through the writerly *persona* has hazards of its own that should be addressed rather than silently overlooked. If the lawyer's astonishment and the literary scholar's position in such matters are mutually provoked, then the discourse on the interpretive positions that we take in law and literature can be furthered for mutual benefit.

Much more attention should therefore be paid to the importance of the 'turn to interpretation' in law and the social sciences made on the basis of Clifford Geertz's influential *The Interpretation of Cultures* and *Local Knowledge*. The subject of intentionalist hermeneutics as contrasted to the interpretive method of 'plain meaning' together with allegorical interpretation once again addresses questions of the function of fiction that may prove viable for the development of literary-legal studies. Not to mention the salutary, if not always workable (at least for law), influence of deconstructive hermeneutics, by now *de rigueur* for quite some time in the critical strands of legal theory, such as *Critical Legal Studies* and *Feminist Legal Studies*, a working knowledge of which would be beneficial for interdisciplinary studies. This may inculcate, if not methodological consensus, then at least methodological consciousness of the (im)possibilities and specifics of the proposed cooperation. Consider, for example, the concept of culture, the recent development of which in contemporary literary studies has already generated *Cultural Studies*,⁵⁴ and consider the need for sobering awareness of what Jack Balkin has unsentimentally called the movement of invasion or colonisation in interdisciplinary settings with the disciplines involved either as invaders with expansionist policies or as turncoats,

[...] interdisciplinarity results when different disciplines try to colonise each other. If the takeover is successful, work is no longer seen as interdisciplinary; rather, it is seen as wholly internal to the discipline as newly

⁵⁴ Mooij, 'Interdisciplinariteit', pp. 18 and 23.

constituted. Interdisciplinary scholarship, then, is the result of an incomplete or failed takeover.⁵⁵

Being mutually informed about these issues and developments can work as an antidote to blind spots on both sides of the interdisciplinary venture and thus stimulate truly joint literary-legal enterprises.

Another, my fifth, suggestion is one that is provoked by what I would claim is a certain disregard within literary interpretations of *Batavische gebroeders* of philosophical studies of Vondel's inspiration for the play. Coming to mind here is Vandervelden's study *Staat en recht bij Vondel* ('State and Law in Vondel').⁵⁶ Cited approvingly by many when it comes to the concept of sovereignty, the road directed by Vandervelden has not been much travelled since. To a lawyer, this comes as a surprise, for it is on the plane of legal-philosophical issues that the scope of literary-legal studies may be broadened. For example, more work could be done on the influence of Grotius's legal views on Vondel, especially, again, given the interrelation of literature, historiography and law. To this end, Grotius's *De iure belli ac pacis* (*On the Law of War and Peace*) is more of interest than his Batavian tractate. In it, Grotius offers his thought on what has since then come to be regarded one of the most important leading principles of civil and international law: *pacta sunt servanda*, contracts should be honoured. Vandervelden has convincingly shown the influence on Vondel of *De iure belli ac pacis* and Grotius's other famous law book *Inleidinghe tot de Hollantsche rechtsgeleertheyd* (*Introduction to Dutch Jurisprudence*). It would be interesting to read *Batavische gebroeders* through the prism of Vandervelden's view that Vondel's works are a testament of the spirit of his times: he, too, partook of the quest for certainty, the search for causal relations and foundations of belief that was characteristic of his own war-stricken and religiously divided age.⁵⁷

It may be argued, for instance, that Julius Paulus and Burgerhart's reluctance to violate the conditions imposed by the treaty with the Romans by means of which sovereignty is transferred should be read in the sense that it is the Batavian community that can decide to revolt against the Romans.⁵⁸ On this view Burgerhart's long hesitation before

⁵⁵ Balkin, 'Interdisciplinarity as Colonization', p. 952.

⁵⁶ Vandervelden, *Staat en recht bij Vondel*.

⁵⁷ See Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*.

⁵⁸ I am referring to the *pactum subjectionis* in the Hobbesian sense, see ll. 809–12: 'The power of princes consists / In appearance and outward bearing: / For to prevent

he takes action may be deemed a moral if not a political flaw. The same holds for his attitude towards Fonteius in the final scene. However, it can also be regarded as springing from his justified desire of honouring the contract made between Batavians and Romans as equals. The fact that one party, the Romans, violates the pact⁵⁹ need not mean that he, Burgerhart, should do the same. This would degrade him, and that is what he desperately wants to avoid. Furthermore, legally as well as politically, it would also be unwise, in that it would give the Romans ammunition to initiate a war against the Batavians. As Grotius says in the Prolegomena to *De iure belli ac pacis*, paragraph 15: 'Again, since it is a rule of the law of nature to abide by pacts [*stare pactis*, my addition] (for it was necessary that among men there be some method of obligating themselves one to another, and no other natural method can be imagined) out of this source the bodies of municipal law have arisen.'⁶⁰

All characters, or so Vandervelden argues, are driven by a desire for either law or justice as they perceive it. This is clear from the 'trial scene' in Act III and Walburgh's plea for her sons in Act IV, in which a moral tone and cogent legal arguments are forcefully combined. Coming to mind here are verses 984 and 985 – in which the *Krijghsraet* say '[c]onjecture does not lead to justice / Only clarity and evidence do', to which Fonteius responds that '[i]n the interest of the state, conjecture may suffice'⁶¹ – and verses 1409–12, where Walburgh says that mercy is only requested for criminals; in other words, she does not ask for mercy

them going astray, / The people holds them in cramped constraint.' ('Der vorsten maght bestaet / In schijn en uiterlijck gelaet: / Want om niet af te dwaelen / Bepaelt haar 't volck in enge paelen.')

⁵⁹ ll. 230–32: '[...] a growing host of tyrants / Suppresses freedom, and spares neither honour nor oath [...]' ('[...] een aenwas van tyrannen / Verdruckt de vryheit, en ontziet noch eer noch eedt te schenden. [...]').

⁶⁰ See De Groot, *Het recht van oorlog en vrede*, tr. Lindemans. For the English translation used here, with the Prolegomena, see <http://www.lonang.com/exlibris/grotius/> <accessed 10 January 2009>, and for one without the Prolegomena, *On the Law of War and Peace*, tr. Campbell [1814, repr. 2001], see <http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/grotius/Law2.pdf> <accessed 10 January 2009>. One wonders whether Vondel may also have been inspired by another breach of trust and contract, the 1646 incident in which it came to public knowledge that Frederick Henry was involved in a plan to marry the French *dauphin* to the Spanish *infanta*, for purposes of resolving the conflict between France and Spain. The province of Catalonia would then be exchanged for the southern part of the Lower Countries and Mazarin had offered Frederic Henry to swap Maastricht for Antwerp via the envoy D'Estrades. Frederick Henry pretended not to be involved when things came to light, but the suspicion of a plot remained.

⁶¹ 'Men recht op geen vermoên, maer klaerheit en bewijzen'; 'Men mag om staetbelang oock rechten op vermoên.'

on behalf of her sons because the stand they take is justified. In fact, one might argue that the whole of the play is law in action, that it is a court session in which opposite points of view are being taken agonistically. There is the dramatic tension in the debate on the choice between resistance and maintaining reticence, the Aristotelian dialectics of *deliberare* and *agere*: the women versus the brothers and Fronto versus Fonteius Kapito in the early phase, Fonteius versus the Krijghsraet later on, Walburgh confronting Fonteius, and the final clash between Fonteius and Burgerhart that ends the play.

Playing the devil's advocate one might, on the one hand, argue that the plea for liberty for the brothers and the Batavians – with liberty also equating to wanting what is reasonable – simply means asking for what has been agreed upon between them and the Romans (*pacta sunt servanda*), and what the *bona fides* requires. In short, what is asked for is justice in the (somewhat circular) Grotian sense of being the virtue of the will to do what is legitimate, with legitimate meaning 'in conformity with the law'. On the other hand, however, the Aristotelian idea that tragic conflict is not, or not only, the duality of good and evil, but rather the conflict embodied in the protagonist himself leads me to the observation that Burgerhart is such a character.⁶² The dictates of his conscience seem more important to him than the question of what is to be done under the circumstances; they are more important to him than intellectual judgments. On this view, it may be argued that Burgerhart's main flaw is that of *hamartia*: he cannot get beyond his self-conceit and exclusive interest his own integrity. Unsupportive of the Batavian women, his sister and mother included, he opts for silence in order not to arouse Roman suspicion, and this mistaken way of acting follows from his *hamartia*, his character flaw of being stuck in what he deems is right, and that leads to catastrophe.

I would suggest yet another line of research, namely a more thorough exploration and discussion of the moral-formal dilemma perceived in *Batavische gebroeders*, for this, I would argue, lies behind Burgerhart's *hamartia*, and connects the play to one of the topics of ongoing debate within contemporary 'Law in Literature', in which Sophocles' *Antigone* and Herman Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor* feature

⁶² See (for example) Spies, 'Argumentative Aspects of Rhetoric and Their Impact on the Poetry of Joost van den Vondel'.

prominently.⁶³ Basically, the moral-formal dilemma arises if a character is confronted with what he regards as a choice between applying the law against what his conscience dictates him, or following one's conscience, or what one deems to be the right thing to do, i.e. having one's moral view prevail over the dictates of the law. Put differently, it is also the conflict between 'the will to form', the one-sided attachment to what external demands order one to do, and a contextual interpretation of the same external demands. Comparable to Captain Vere in Melville's *Billy Budd* and both Antigone and Creon, who are each in their own way adamant with respect to their view of what justice and law demand, Burgerhart is stubborn in clinging to his idea of honouring the treaty with the Romans, *pacta sunt servanda*, without looking at what would be best for his people under the circumstances. In other words, and paradoxically perhaps, here we find the dialectics of an interpretation of his legal character or *ethos*, whereas in literary interpretations the focus is predominantly on his sense of justice – which is, incidentally, also rather narrowly defined, at least from the point of view of legal philosophy. What Burgerhart sorely lacks, and what the women reproach him for, is insight into the true demands of the situation; he lacks *agnitio* (recognition) in the Aristotelian sense, or as Vondel put it, 'herkennisse'. This may well be linked fruitfully to the observation that in the play the women stand for practical wisdom, they see what must be done and thus can be the agents for a break in the action, a *peripeteia*, not incidentally a role that women have fulfilled in literature since Homer had Andromache and Hecuba voice their desire for peace in the *Iliad*.

At the same time, it is precisely Burgerhart's indecision that makes identification with his dilemma possible. Dramatically, when the choice is being made for him when Fonteius decides to send him to Rome after having executed Julius Paulus, his final break with his principle of obedience to the demands of the original alliance with the Romans – his obedience to a secular leader as a matter of fact – exemplifies what the women have tried to bring about before: that he should exercise prudence rather than formally apply the law. Only at the end of the play is he granted *anagnorosis*, the final recognition of the truth. Is it too late

⁶³ For a seminal text on the moral-formal dilemma, see Cover, *Justice Accused*, esp. pp.1–7. See also Verheul, 'Herman Melville and the Moral-Formal Dilemma'.

or just in time for further action? Burgerhart's mirror image here is Fonteius Kapito whose tragedy is that he has to enforce the law and thus be obedient to law as much as Burgerhart, though in a different way. Consider, for example, verse 416 where Fonteius says, 'We are executors of his will', or verse 891, 'I acknowledge we also bear the name of guardians of the state', and his cognitive dissonance in verses 1815–17, 'my Lord, excuse us, and learn to bear your grief. / We can do no less than mourn your great sorrow. / That blow came from Rome, not from our will'.⁶⁴ The same goes for the *Krijghsraet* too, as verses 1473–75 show: 'Illustrious princes, whom a Nero's empire befits, / Do condone the war council, justified to execute the commands / of the Stadtholder (he orders it)'.⁶⁵ Those coming to literary-legal studies from the legal side of things will therefore benefit from a reading of the play informed by literary insights pertaining to the function of dramatic action, since this topic is unfortunately not part of the legal curriculum.

For my final, seventh, suggestion, I return to the topic of Grotius's influence on Vondel for the very reason that law 'goes European'. Following Korsten, further research may be done on the importance of Grotius for Vondel on the concept of the polity of the state on the basis of another play. In 1635, Grotius wrote *Sophompaneas* (*Joseph at Court*) in Latin. Vondel translated his friend's work within a few weeks, and this translation was often performed as part of Vondel's own Joseph trilogy. This is important, because in *Sophompaneas* Grotius has Joseph voice a new political arrangement for Egypt identical to the one Grotius had in mind for the Dutch provinces. This is another example of literature as a mirror of society. Combined with my first suggestion for further research on constitutive fiction(s) and my third point on the fictional aspect of law and literature, this opens up the possibility for a further sophistication of the strand of 'Law in Literature' as discussed above, in the form of attention to the law of fiction in both law and literature and to the fiction of the enterprises of law and literature themselves. As the examples of *Sophompaneas* and the foundational

⁶⁴ 'Wy zijn uitvoerders van zijn' wil'; 'k Beken wy draegen oock den naem van staet-behoeders'; '[M]yn heer, ontschuldigh ons, en leer uw leed verdraegen. / Wy kunnen min niet dan uw' grooten rou beklaegen. / Van Rome quam die slagh, en niet by onzen wil.'

⁶⁵ 'Doorlichtste vorsten, wien een rijck van Nero past, / Verschoont den krijghsraet toch, gewettigt om den last / Des stedehouders (hy gebiedt het) uit te voeren.'

narratives in the American civic tradition suggest, law can originate from works of literature. The way in which law is depicted in a literary work may be influential or formative when it comes to developing law in its institutional, ordering garb of norms, rules, and statutes. In other words, law *in* literature can be studied not only for its descriptive aspect – an indication of how the law is perceived by those external to it – but also for its prescriptive aspect.⁶⁶ If we take this line of thought one step further, we can also say that an investigation of how fiction itself works in law and in literature is strongly suggested for the whole field of *Law and Literature*. To this end, law would indeed benefit from a cross-examination by literature, both at the level of law's fictions in its language of concepts and the level of the fiction of the story of law told as part of a broader culture.

As far as the latter is concerned, and to return once more to Grotius, not only with his thought on the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*, but also with his ideal of bringing about *pax, unitas* and *humanitas*, Grotius's contribution is that he aimed to subject warfare to legal rules in *De iure belli ac pacis*, and thus tried to contribute to peace. Connected to this is his proposal for an integrated view of Christianity and classical views and precepts – with Cicero prominently present – with which he hoped to contribute to a certain unity in the diversity of opinions of his times, a way to regulate social conflict on many planes which I think we should take as *paideia* with respect to contemporary attempts at establishing unity and solidarity in Europe.⁶⁷

Not only does this line of thought pertain to the quest for certainty but also to the development of law in the European Union. Brook Thomas is quite right when he claims that 'the increased fluidity of national boundaries does affect citizenship'.⁶⁸ Obviously, in our days, since we can no longer afford to attach totemic significance to national literatures and legal systems and/or jurisprudences of national identity, given the overarching influence and power of the supranational level within the European Union, an interdisciplinary and historical approach can nevertheless enhance our knowledge and understanding

⁶⁶ A literal example of the latter can be found in numerous works of American literary realism, such as Frank Norris's novels *The Octopus: A Story of California* and *The Pit* (1902), and Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* (1906), which resulted in the codification of the Pure Food and Drug Act.

⁶⁷ See Eyffinger, 'De relatie van recht en letteren in leven en werken van Hugo de Groot', p. 21.

⁶⁸ Thomas, *Civic Myths*, p. 1.

of our national past and (that of) our partners in the treaty that is the European Union while at the same time providing a space in which cultural translation can take place. Such an approach also leaves ample room for methodological integration and collaboration on the subject of a literary-legal methodology. If Habermas is right when he claims that a political culture is more important and influential cement for society than a shared language on the basis of ethnic or cultural origin,⁶⁹ we lack an overarching discussion of European sovereign power so far, i.e. one comparable with the discussions on national sovereignties, while at the same time we have to acknowledge that ongoing globalisation, the internet and other technologies make for tensions of various kinds as territorial boundaries dissolve. 'Gens semper Batav(or)um, nec inhospita Musis', Grotius wrote, and Witsen Geysbeek took this as an epigraph for his critical literary biography. In discussing law in the context of the original national communities that form Europe, we would indeed do well to be hospitable to the muses, Batavians that we all are.

Further Reading on the Topic of Law and Literature

Works pertaining to the relation between law and letters in the foundation of the polity

- Biet, Christian, *La Jeu de la Valeur et de la Droit: Droit et littérature sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Honoré, 2001).
- Carta, Paolo, 'Humanisme juridique du XXe siècle', *Laboratoire Italien*, 5 (2004), 13–37.
- Cau, Maurizio, 'Hans Kelsen et la théorie de l'État chez Dante', *Laboratoire Italien* (5:2004), 125–50.
- Ferguson, Robert A., 'We Do Ordain and Establish: The Constitution as Literary Text', *William and Mary Review*, 29 (1987), 3–35.
- Pech, Thierry, *Conter le Crime: Droit et littérature sous la Contre-Réforme* (Paris: Champion Slatkine, 2001).
- Soifer, Aviam, *Law and the Company We Keep* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1995).
- Suretsky, Harold, 'The concept of ideology and its applicability to Law and Literature studies', *ALSA Forum*, 5 (1981), 29–39.
- Thomas, Brook, *American Literary Realism and the Failed Promise of Contract*, (Berkeley: 1997).

⁶⁹ Habermas, 'Citizenship and National Identity', p. 264.

Some general studies in Law and Literature

Beekman, Klaus and Ralf Grüttemeier, *De wet van de letter: Literatuur en rechtspraak* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak & Van Gennep, 2005).

Biet, Christian, 'L'empire du droit, les jeux de la littérature', *Europe*, 4 (2002), 7-22.

Cau, Maurizio, and Marchetto, Giuliano, 'Droit et littérature', *Laboratoire Italien*, 5 (2004), 7-12.

Dolin, Kieran, *A Critical Introduction to Law and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

Ost, François, *Raconter La Loi: aux sources de l'imaginaire juridique* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2004).

Posner, Richard, *Law and Literature: A Misunderstood Relation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988, revised edition 1998).

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

NEW PHILOLOGY – VARIANTS IN *ADAM IN BALLINGSCHAP*
(1664)

Jan Bloemendal

Adam in Ballingschap, its Genesis and First Readers

When Vondel wrote his *Adam in ballingschap* (*Adam Exiled*) in 1664, its model had been published more than sixty years earlier and its author – who had been a good friend of Vondel's – had been dead for almost twenty years. It was in 1601 when a young Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) wrote and published his *Adamus exul* (*Adam Exiled*), on the theme of the first and foremost human tragedy, the loss of paradise.¹ Or, as Grotius himself put it in the letter of dedication to Henry of Bourbon: 'the fall of Man from his pure and felicitous state into his present misery.'²

The subject of both tragedies is what John Milton called 'man's first disobedience / And the fruit of that forbidden tree / Whose mortal taste brought death into the world / And all our woe, with loss of Eden,' told in Genesis 1–3 and by Flavius Josephus.³ And seemingly the object of both plays is 'to justify the ways of God to men,' as Milton put it in his famous poem on the same subject, *Paradise Lost* (1667, 1, 26).⁴ Vondel openly acknowledges his debt to Grotius's tragedy in the letter of dedication. He wrote a creative imitation, in which he made ample use of amplification. Whereas Grotius employed only one *Sathan*, for example, Vondel introduced three 'hellish' characters, and whereas Grotius presented only one *angelus*, Vondel replaced this angel with three of

¹ Grotius, *Sacra in quibus Adamus exul tragoedia*, The Hague (Albertus Henricus) 1601; Grotius, *Adamus exul*, ed. Meulenbroek.

² Grotius, *Adamus exul*, ed. Meulenbroek, pp. 24–25: 'Historia est prima quae in Sacris occurrit Literis et Catastrophen habet Homini ex integro felicique statu in hanc miseriam lapsus'.

³ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* (*Jewish Antiquities*) 1, 1, 4 [40–51].

⁴ Cf. Tate, *Milton's Paradise Lost and Vondel's Adam in ballingschap*; Nyquist, 'Reading the Fall'.

them.⁵ He also changed the role of Eve, who in Grotius's play had been the evildoer par excellence, even before the Fall. Vondel's Eve is an ideal woman at the beginning, one that becomes a *malefactor* only at the end.⁶ Furthermore, Vondel added a wedding party, which could have resulted from his wish to write a tragedy with a Sophoclean *peripeteia*, in contrast to his Senecan model.⁷

During his lifetime, only two editions were published, both in 1664 at the same printer's office. After Vondel's death, other editions appeared in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, separate ones in 1698 and 1736, and an edition as part of *Alle de treurspelen (All the Tragedies)* in 1720.⁸ Naturally it was included in all subsequent editions of the collected or complete works. It was not until 1910 that *Adam in ballingschap* was performed in Holland;⁹ Vondel himself never saw the play on stage.

Contrary to Grotius's play, Vondel's tragedy aroused some controversy. Three poems were promptly published in attack: one by Vondel's enemy Jacob Steendam, probably in 1664; one by Jan Pietersz. Beelthouwer (a good friend of Spinoza) in 1664 and 1671; and one by the otherwise unknown Meynarda Verboom, also in 1664. The latter took up the defence of Eve and was a *gender* reader even before the term existed.¹⁰

Vondel and the Book

In contrast to Shakespeare, who as a theatre professional was interested only in performances of his plays, Vondel engaged in the printing of his

⁵ Vondel, *Lucifer, Adam in Ballingschap, Noah*, ed. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, p. 301.

⁶ See also Vondel, *Lucifer, Adam in Ballingschap, Noah*, ed. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, pp. 303–07.

⁷ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 3, pp. 362–64; 372–74.

⁸ Unger, *Bibliographie*, nos. 676, 677, 678 and 679, and 27a [2]; Schuytplot, *Catalogus*, nos. 741–746.

⁹ A free (and spectacular) adaptation by Jan Frans Cammaert was rather popular in Flanders between 1756 and 1796; see Langvik-Johannessen, '1746: In de Brusselse Muntchouwburg wordt Charles Simon Favart directeur: Jan Frans Cammaert brengt de spektakelrijke première van Vondels *Adam in ballingschap*.'

¹⁰ Unger, *Bibliographie*, nos. 878 (Steendam), 876 and 877 (Beelthouwer) and 879 (Verboom). The first two poems are published by Van Lennep and Unger, *De werken*, 1664–1667, pp. 323–25 and 327–38. Van Lennep (10, p. 458), gives an outline of the third. For the poem by Steendam, see also *Vondelkroniek*, 1 (1930), p. 82. The poem by Verboom was edited by Riet Schenkeveld in her *Met en zonder lauwerkrans*, pp. 304–12. See also her contribution in this volume, and Van Gemert, *Women's Writing*, pp. 48–49.

dramas. This difference poses anew the question of the relation between printed text and performance. The book historian and Shakespeare scholar Kastan rightly states that both are dissimilar and discontinuous modes of production.¹¹ The print conserves the text and fixes in time and space the word that performance releases as the very condition of its being. Viewed this way, performance *makes*, rather than *enacts* the text, and both of the expressions in common currency - ‘page to stage’ and ‘stage to page’ - are problematic.¹² Thus printed texts of dramas have a life of their own. This chapter deals with the various (printed) texts of Vondel’s dramas.

Remarkably, during his long lifetime Vondel himself had his dramas published by only a few printers. Vondel’s firstling, *Het Pascha* (*Passover*), was published in 1612 at Adriaen Cornelison’s bookshop in Schiedam, his second tragedy, *Hierusalem verwoest* (*Jerusalem Destroyed*), in 1620 by Dirck Pietersz. Pers in Amsterdam, and his *De Amsteldamsche Hecuba* and the highly controversial play *Palamedes* (1625–1626) by Jacob Aertz. Calom. Two or three plays were published by the famous cartographer and publisher Willem Blaeu: *Sofompaneas* and *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (1635 and 1637), and most probably *Hippolytus* (1628). When Blaeu died – perhaps to Vondel’s relief, since the printer was a notoriously slow worker –¹³ Vondel went to Abraham de Wees. After his death in 1654 his widow continued her husband’s office, as often happened in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Vondel stuck with this publishing house until his last translations: *Herkules in Trachin* and *Feniciaensche* (*Phoenician Women*) of 1668. All plays were printed in quarto, except for *Het Pascha* of which the first edition was printed in octavo. We know almost nothing of the amount of copies that were printed. Only in the case of *Lucifer* is it recorded by Vondel’s biographer Geeraardt Brandt that 1,000 copies of the first print were made.¹⁴ Furthermore, it is known that at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Vondel’s plays were amply available.¹⁵

¹¹ Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book*, pp. 7–8.

¹² The remark on the title page of the 1729 edition that it is ‘[n]ow for the first time printed word for word as it is being staged on the Amsterdam Theatre’ (see *infra*) is telling. A different text had been performed than the one printed. Because of its controversial theme *Palamedes* was not performed at all.

¹³ Oey-de Vita, ‘De edities van Gysbreght van Aemstel’, pp. 94–95.

¹⁴ Brandt, *Leven van Vondel*, ed. Verwijs, p. 94 (ed. Leendertz, p. 45; ed. Van Oostrom and Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, p. 59); cf. Molkenboer, ‘Vondels drukkers en uitgevers’, p. 24.

¹⁵ The board of the guild of booksellers were asked for advice on a request from the Rotterdam publisher Pieter vande Veer. On 11 January 1700 they replied to the effect

In 1660 twenty-three of Vondel's plays were reprinted by Kornelis de Bruyn in the handy octavo size.¹⁶ De Bruyn bound them together in two composite volumes, each work having its own pagination. Apparently in order to advance the interest of the 'Fellow Compatriots who Love Art and Poetry' (Konst- en Rijmlievende Landtslieden) for the 'Founding Father of Dutch Poetry' (Vader en Vinder der Nederlandsche Poëzye) De Bruyn added his own preface and a laudatory poem by Jan Zoet.

This collection of Vondel's works was meant to be taken to the theatre as text booklets. Other, voluminous, editions of his collected works earned Vondel his place in the pantheon of Dutch poets.¹⁷ However, the terms 'Collected Works' or 'Complete Works' have to be qualified beforehand. The first collections of Vondel's works were composite sets of separate editions bound together by a private collector or by a publisher. In these instances no external editors were involved. The first real attempt to publish Vondel's *Alle de wercken* was made in 1793 when two Dordrecht and Bergen op Zoom publishers planned a project of fifteen or sixteen volumes.¹⁸ In the preface the editor, the retired minister Bernardus Bosch, expressed his conviction that every lover of Vondel could now afford to buy all his works.¹⁹ This was the beginning of a series of complete works edited by one (external and amateur) editor.²⁰

It was only in 1855, with the edition by the Dutch novelist Jacob van Lennep, that Vondel got his first genuinely Complete Works, in twelve

that that many copies of Vondel's works were available 'both in verse and in prose [...] in several copies and formats' (soo in rijm, als in prosa [...] in verscheijden stucken en formaten) printed by Dirk Boom, Jan de Wees, Gijsbert de Groot, And. van Damme, and W. and J. Lamveld and 'obtainable in large amounts from the same persons' (bij deselve nog in groote quantiteit te bekomen), see Molkenboer, 'Vondels drukkers en uitgevers', pp. 27–28.

¹⁶ Unger, *Bibliographie*, no. 24; cf. Molkenboer, 'Vondels drukkers en uitgevers', p. 27.

¹⁷ Dongelmans, 'The Prestige of Complete Works'. Cf. Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book*, p. 69, where he states that the Shakespeare folio edition tried to create him as an author; *ibidem*, p. 72, where he shows how the folio edition presented itself as literary, and especially ch. 3: 'From Contemporary to Classic: Textual Healing', pp. 79–110.

¹⁸ Vondel, *Alle de wercken*, ed. Bosch. Unger, *Bibliographie*, no. 37; Schuytplot, *Catalogus*, no. 2.

¹⁹ See Dongelmans, 'The Prestige of Complete Works', p. 70.

²⁰ In the 1820's the Amsterdam publisher and bookseller Marten Westerman published a new edition in 21 volumes (Unger, *Bibliographie*, no. 38).

volumes. Van Lennep arranged the works in chronological order, in order to relate them to Vondel's life, and added annotations.²¹ The edition was rather expensive. An inexpensive edition was produced in two volumes made by the professor of Dutch literature Johannes van Vloten.²² He modernised the spelling, annotated the text, and started to put Vondel on a pedestal in the preface by equating him with the painter Rembrandt and the admiral Michiel de Ruyter when he lauded him as the greatest Dutch poet. In 1867 this edition was reprinted with a new introduction that fitted in with the emancipation of the Roman Catholics in the (self-proclaimed Calvinist) Netherlands that had started in the meantime. Because of his conversion to Catholicism, Vondel became their icon and this edition served as a banner of their growing self-confidence.²³

A monumental edition of Vondel's complete works (*De werken: Volledige en geïllustreerde tekstuitgave*, or *The Works: Complete and Illustrated Text Edition*, 1927–1937) was the result of a collaboration between several specialists, edited in ten substantial volumes by the 'Wereldbibliotheek' (World Library), also known as the 'Maatschappij voor Goede en Goedkoope lectuur' (Society for the Distribution of Good and Inexpensive Literature), abridged as 'WB'. The edition was very expensive. Other, less expensive 'Complete Works' were published in 52 volumes by the Utrecht publishing house 'De Torentrans, edited by H.C. Diferee, and by the 'Hollandsch Uitgeversfonds', edited by Reinder Blijstra and Hettel Bruch, in twelve volumes. The Dutch poet and professor of Dutch literature Albert Verwey edited an equally inexpensive edition in one volume, which was reprinted, with a new introduction by Mieke Smits and Marijke Spies, for the Vondel commemoration year 1987. Vondel had been granted the prestige of several editions of his complete works.

But Vondel himself had been the 'editor' of his own works as well. He was critical about his works and kept correcting and changing them, either as a result of the changing circumstances, which allowed him to

²¹ *De werken van Vondel*, ed. Van Lennep, see Unger, *Bibliographie*, no. 39. The Leiden publisher Sijthoff bought the Van Lennep edition from Binger and asked the archivist Unger to revise and update it. It was published in thirty thin, very inexpensive volumes between 1888 and 1893.

²² Published by the Schiedam publisher Roelants; see Unger, *Bibliographie*, no. 41.

²³ Unger, *Bibliographie*, no. 43. See also Dongelmans, 'The Prestige of Complete Works', p. 74.

say more or less than before, or for stylistic reasons or reasons of delicacy.²⁴ In the letter of dedication to *Joseph in Dothan* Vondel informs the readers about his conduct. Professor Van Baerle will help him to discern what is correct or wrong, 'and mending the faults, he will cause them to be corrected in the next print.'²⁵ Vondel cared about his work.

Old and New Philology

At first glance, it seems quite unproblematic to edit a play written by Vondel. Seldom do we have manuscripts, in many cases a set of contemporary editions that do not contain many different readings. Vondel's language is not always easy, ranging as it does from formal to colloquial, from the rhetorical *genus sublime* to the *genus humile*, but it can be explained in annotations. But the textual constitution itself does not seem overly complicated. It is no surprise, therefore, that in the vast body of scholarship on Vondel, the several editions attracted only occasional attention and, where they did so, this attention came from 'new bibliographers.'²⁶

Of course, there may be discussion surrounding the alteration to which the text has been subjected for the convenience of the readers, such as changes to spelling or punctuation, or translating it into modern Dutch.²⁷ Such choices may be fundamental, but they mainly depend on the intended readership of the editions.²⁸ Secondly, there is the intention of the editor, which is an important factor. What kind of edition does he or she want to produce? It may be a critical edition, an

²⁴ See Kalff, 'Vondels zelfcritiek'; Oey-de Vita, 'De edities van Gysbreght van Aemstel', pp. 82–87. On Vondel changing his works, see Brandt, *Het leven van Vondel*, ed. Verwijs, p. 124 (ed. Leendertz, p. 61; ed. Van Oostrom and Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, pp. 77–78). Several reasons are given by Kalff in 'Vondels zelfcritiek'.

²⁵ '[...] en de mislagen beterende, oirzaeck geven, die in den naesten druck te verbeteren', WB, 4, p. 76.

²⁶ See (for example) Hellinga, *Copy and Print*; Gerritsen, 'De eerste druk van de *Palamedes*'; idem, 'Vondel and the New Bibliography'; Oey-de Vita, 'De edities van Gysbreght van Aemstel'. All authors mentioned draw attention to the material form and history of the book, which is the object of new or analytical bibliography. Analytical bibliography can be divided into descriptive (or physical) and historical bibliography. The former takes as its point of departure the description of the book, the latter the context in which a book is produced, i.e. is printed, published and distributed.

²⁷ Korsten, 'Twee nieuwe Vondels, of te oude?'. On literary criticism as preserver of heritage, see also Van Vaeck, 'Omgaan met "dichters van cierlijckce netheit"'.

²⁸ See Sneller's review of Schenkeveld's edition of *Lucifer*, *Adam in ballingschap*, and *Noah*, and Korsten 'Twee nieuwe Vondels, of te oude?'.

annotated edition, a genetic edition, a reading text, or a facsimile edition, each with their own needs in terms of textual constitution and presentation, as well as in terms of commentary, each intended for a different readership.²⁹ But in all cases, the editor is steering the interpretation of the reader by his or her choices with regard to the text, the annotations and the way in which those annotations are presented.

The issues on which there can be a more or less thorough debate seem to be the interpretation of some lines, scenes or the play as a whole, and the kinds of annotation the text requires.³⁰ This commentary may differ, dependent on the type of edition produced and on the basic assumptions of the editor.

The Amsterdam ‘neophilologist’ Wytze Hellinga stated fundamentally that an editor should ‘preserve texts and prepare their revival by research and information’, and a commentator should enable the readers to understand the ‘supply of facts’ as it functioned in the days of the texts themselves, so that the distance between the old text and the modern reader would disappear.³¹ According to others, whose opinion differs slightly, the task of the commentator is to provide the modern reader with as much information as the ideal contemporary reader would have had.³² And a third stance – now scarcely applicable – is to reveal ‘the author’s intention’.

Before writing the commentary an editor has to establish ‘the’ or at least ‘a’ text.³³ Modern editors of Vondel’s plays often base themselves on the WB edition produced in the 1920s and the 1930s.³⁴ And that they do so is quite understandable, as this has been the standard edition since its publication. The WB editors chose the first editions as their starting point. At any rate, they attempted to publish an ‘ideal

²⁹ Mathijssen, *Naar de letter*. Within the Dutch and German context, the ‘historico-critical edition’ and the ‘study edition’ are also discerned.

³⁰ These questions have been raised by Frans-Willem Korsten (‘Twee nieuwe Vondels, of te oude?’) and by Agnes Sneller in their reviews of the editions by Konst and Schenkeveld-van der Dussen.

³¹ Hellinga, ‘De commentaar’, pp. 110 (‘teksten te bewaren en de herleving ervan door onderzoek en voorlichting voor te bereiden’), and 117. Cf. Spies, ‘Vondel in veelvoud’, p. [9]/246.

³² See Matthijssen, *Naar de letter*, pp. 333–51.

³³ The exemplary edition of two of Vondel’s poems on shipping made by Marijke Spies.

³⁴ Vondel, *Gysbreght*, ed. Smits-Veldt, idem, *Jeptha* etc., ed. Konst, pp. 304–07; idem, *Lucifer* etc., ed. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, pp. 331–33 (here, p. 331, unfortunately for *Adam in ballingschap* WB, 9 is referred to, instead of WB, 10).

text', as close as one can get to the 'author's intention'.³⁵ In the case of *Adam in ballingschap*, too, the editor Molkenboer, has chosen to take one of the two editions from 1664 as his basis.³⁶ In a way, in doing so he dovetailed with positivistic classical textual criticism in the paradigm of Lachman.³⁷ This 'Lachmannian method' also tried to establish an *Urtext*, as close to the author's ideal text as possible. For early modern and modern texts, the *ultima manus* ('Ausgabe letzter Hand') is often taken as the starting point of the edition, depending on the type of edition to which is aspired. This reveals a fundamental difference between classical and modern philology: classical philology deals with the transmission of the text, its modern counterpart mainly with its genesis. Of course, this difference has to do with material differences; there are no autographs of classical authors, while in some texts that are the object of modern philology several (autograph) phases of the same text are extant.

In 1989 the French medieval scholar Bernard Cerquiglini upset medieval scholarship with his book *L'éloge de la variante* (translated as *In Praise of the Variant*).³⁸ He pleaded for a theoretical reappraisal of the variants in medieval manuscripts, with an appeal to the reception of the texts, distinguishing between manuscripts and printed books. Medieval readers did not consume an ideal text, but the text as it was before their eyes. They did not have a concept of a definitively complete text, but a text was considered 'open', and each reader or copyist, even the author himself, was expected to adapt the text to perpetually new circumstances and (social) contexts in which the text was copied.³⁹ Therefore, he states, the task of an editor should not – or, I add, not only – be the constitution of an ideal text, but the presentation of a text with its variants in the several manuscripts. Cerquiglini, therefore, focussed on two main points: firstly, that variance is an essential feature of the medieval text, and secondly, that modern scholars have mistreated the medieval text by editing the variance out of it. His approach was one of the foundations of 'New Philology', as it was labelled by

³⁵ See Mathijssen, *Naar de letter*, pp. 21, 122, etc.

³⁶ Unger, *Bibliographie*, no. 676; Schuytvlot, *Catalogus*, no. 741.

³⁷ See Mathijssen, *Naar de letter*, pp. 20–22; West, *Textual criticism*.

³⁸ Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la variante*; idem, *In Praise of the Variant*. For this survey I was helped by the convenient summary presented by Werner Gelderblom in an unpublished paper 'Erasmus en de nieuwe filologie'; he is also to provide an example of the application of New Philology to Neo-Latin texts in his anticipated edition of the poems by Janus Secundus.

³⁹ Provocatively he stated: 'Now, medieval writing does not produce variants; it is variance', Cerquiglini *In Praise of the Variant*, pp. 77–78 (see also idem, *Éloge de la variante*, p. 111).

Stephen Nichols in a thematic issue of *Speculum* bearing that name. Since the term encountered some opposition from the ‘old’ philologists, Nichols proposed to change it into ‘material philology’.⁴⁰

It seems that the label New Philology is mainly ideological, while ‘material philology’ (note the difference in capitals and minuscules) has a mainly practical orientation. In any case, ideologically, ‘New’ and ‘Old’ Philology differ at several levels and in several respects. Whereas ‘Old’ is concerned with the independent authority of a text with its verbal essence, ‘New’ deals with the text as it is in its material form; whereas the aim of ‘Old’ is to reconstruct the text (if necessary) by intervention, apart from its original context, ‘New’ sets out to simulate the material forms of the text in comparison and contextualize it; whereas ‘Old’ has as its hero the author, for ‘New’ the scribe or the printer holds more importance; finally, ‘Old’ loves unity, ‘New’ is fond of variance.⁴¹

At first sight, such explicit attention to variance does not apply to early modern texts. We do not have many variant texts caused by mis-readings, or the interpolation of glosses. And more fundamentally, the invention of movable type made it possible to make texts in hundreds of copies without variance.⁴² But even then variants appear. The starting point differs, however; variants are now often a result of the genesis of the text – in the author’s mind or on the printer’s press – or of its reception.⁴³ On the other hand, the variants were not only caused by the reception of Vondel’s works, but they steered it as well. For this reason the variants of Vondel’s texts should retain their significance. As for the editions that Vondel supervised himself, this helps to assess the relationship between the printer and the author; as for the other editions, it may shed some light on the ways in which the plays were received.

There are some fundamental assumptions underlying these considerations: the need for relativism in the conception of the text; the conviction of a ‘variability over time and space of any given work itself’; the idea of the dynamics of the text itself with its own ‘material history’, with its ‘vast and largely uncharted alterations imposed by that history and by the mediation of generation upon generation of printers, editors, publishers’, i.e. the conviction that there is no such thing as ‘the

⁴⁰ Nichols, ‘Introduction’; idem, ‘Why Material Philology?’.

⁴¹ See also <http://magyar-irodalom.elte.hu/colloquia/000601/cerq.htm>.

⁴² See, for example, Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* and Martin, *The History and Power of Writing*.

⁴³ In the Middle Ages it was the scribes who steered or even determined the reception.

text.⁴⁴ But nowadays scholarship is aware of the ‘fluidity’ of texts, especially theatrical texts. This certainly holds true in view of the paradigm shifts literary scholarship has witnessed, from the nineteenth-century ‘evolutionary’ and ‘progressive’ model (the author and his work were considered to develop and improve over time), through the ‘monolithic’ model (the literary text conceptualised as monolithic, invulnerable, existing in its extratemporal reality) to the postmodern, rather deconstructionist model of the text as a ‘network’ or ‘sphere of influence.’⁴⁵ This opens the door to a more materialistic view of the text with increased interest in the several textual carriers, away from a Platonic or Neoplatonic idealist view of the search for the ‘ideal’ or ‘best’ text.⁴⁶

With regard to the relationship between text and performance, analytical bibliography applies directly to the printed editions, but indirectly its results may shed some light on the performance tradition. Some editions reflected and steered the staging of the plays – leaving out the chorus lines, for instance, or adding *tableaux vivants*. Thus the editions influenced staging, and vice versa: performances had their impact on the editions.

New Opportunities in Editing Vondel's Texts

The question, then, is what implications such considerations could have for the philology of Vondel's texts. First of all, an editor should list the several editions and their sequel and relationships. There he can make use of analytical bibliography, analysing the typographical material, the paper used, and the bindings.⁴⁷ Even in establishing the prints, problems may arise. In the same year, two editions of *Adam in ballingschap* appeared, slightly differing from each other. Which one was first? It can also be a serious problem to determine the order of the editions, as has been shown in the case of *Palamedes*.⁴⁸ The edition dated 1626 must have been printed before the editions that have the year 1625 on their title page. Vondel altered the play considerably in 1652.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ See Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance*, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance*, pp. 17–25; one could also speak of multiple factors; cf. Roland Barthes' famous essay ‘From Work to Text’.

⁴⁶ Cf. Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance*, pp. 29–30.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., Hellinga, *Copy and Print*; Gerritsen, ‘Vondel and the New Bibliography’.

⁴⁸ Gerritsen, ‘De eerste druk van de Palamedes.’

⁴⁹ In his edition Jacob van Lennep printed the variants alongside the text. After in 1650 there were no stadholders in Holland anymore, more editions appeared

The editor of a scholarly edition should take the changes into account, but anyone publishing a reading text should make a choice between the first edition and the *ultima manus*. As early as the seventeenth century it was necessary to annotate the edition. Geeraardt Brandt did so, and his remarks were published in 1705 as *Aanteekeningen op J. van Vondels Palamedes* in the ‘Amersfoort edition’ of Vondel’s tragedy.⁵⁰

The editor of Vondel’s plays should take all these aspects into account before editing them. He or she should consider the specific circumstances of every play: its editions, several versions, proofs, and the annotations of Vondel and others. And the editor must always be aware of Vondel’s attitude towards his works; he involved himself in the printing process and kept altering his texts.⁵¹ Here, some telling examples of problems the editor may encounter will be discussed: several differing versions of the text can exist, as in the case of *Gysbreght van Aemstel*; he may have to deal with the printer’s proofs corrected by the author; remarks by Vondel on a performance may have been preserved, leading to a new text, as in *Gebroeders (Brothers)*; or different prints that look alike may have been produced in the same year, such as the two first prints of *Adam in ballingschap*.

Several Versions – Gysbreght van Aemstel

Gysbreght is notorious for the history of its printings.⁵² There are two different editions from 1637 and 1638. Vondel altered the text under the influence of the Amsterdam ministers’ critique. The title page therefore states that it was ‘corrected and enlarged by himself’ (door

(see Unger, *Bibliographie*, pp. 38–39), and Vondel may have felt free to publish his pamphlet again. Kalf, ‘Vondels zelfcritiek’, and Walch, *De varianten van Vondel’s Palamedes* – both influenced by the romantic Dutch ‘Beweging van Tachtig’, which focused on style and expression of emotions – assumed that the changes were mainly the result of linguistic and stylistic motives.

⁵⁰ See Kemperink, ‘Een bijzonder exemplaar van Vondels Palamedes’. Unger, *Bibliographie*, pp. 5–6, assumed Rotterdam as the place of print, on the basis of typography and iconography. The annotations of Brandt were edited by Unger, ‘Vondeliana IV: Palamedes’, pp. 59–67. There is another edition of *Palamedes*, reputedly printed in Amersfoort by P. Brakman, containing a biting poem on William II, who attacked Amsterdam in 1650, on the occasion of his death. The poem never made it to the WB edition. See the contribution by Gaakeer in this volume, and Witsen Geysbeek, ‘Vondel’, pp. 80–82.

⁵¹ Oey-de Vita, ‘De edities van Gysbreght van Aemstel’, p. 83.

⁵² See Markus, ‘De Gysbreght bestaat niet’; Oey-de Vita, ‘De edities van Gysbreght van Aemstel’.

hem zelf verbetert en vermeert). He also changed the term of address for Hugo Grotius in the letter of dedication.⁵³ In 1659 the widow of Abraham de Wees published a version that Vondel had altered thoroughly.⁵⁴ After his conversion to Roman Catholicism, Vondel could no longer tolerate terms such as ‘fate’ (noodlot) anymore, and he changed them into expressions such as ‘God’s Providence’ (Gods schickinge) or ‘misfortune’ (ongeval). He also left out the mute characters, perhaps to leave out a scene in which nuns were slaughtered in their monastery as something too blasphemous to show or tell.⁵⁵ Another telling detail is the change of the address for Grotius from ‘Your Excellency’ (Exc[ellentie]) into ‘Your Honour’ (Edele). In the very sentence in which he dedicated the play to Grotius, he even left out ‘Excellentie’ without any substitution.⁵⁶ Furthermore, Vondel added four lines to the monologue of Raphael, after l. 1864, referring to Roman-Catholic faith:

If for you the demolition of religiousness is too hard,
Stick firmly to the old faith and God’s altar,
In the footsteps of the older ones who led the way courageously.
Thus one rushes to God immediately, through all stars.⁵⁷

In 1720 Johannes Oosterwyk bought all copies left in the bookshop of Abraham de Wees and made his own quarto edition, in which for *Gysbreght* he followed the version of 1659. This edition must be the *ultima manus*, so it is striking that WB and the last *Gysbreght* editor Smits-Veldt made their edition on the basis of the 1637 publication without giving an account of their choice.

Gysbreght van Aemstel was also printed in octavo, by Pieter vande Veer mentioned above.⁵⁸ Most of his editions were made in the 1660’s, but according to Markus, *Gysbreght* was published in 1700.⁵⁹

⁵³ A discussion of the variants can be found in Albach, *Driehonderd jaar Gysbreght van Aemstel*.

⁵⁴ The situation is highly complex; of this print three copies are extant, all are differing from each other. One of the three (UBA Vdl 8 C 12) must stem from 1699; see Markus, ‘*De Gysbreght van Aemstel bestaat niet*’.

⁵⁵ A list of the changes can be found in WB, 3, pp. 927–31.

⁵⁶ He was able to do so as Grotius had died in 1645.

⁵⁷ ‘Valt u ’t verwoesten der godtsdienstigheid te lastigh, / Volhardt by ’t out geloof en Godts altaer standvastigh, / Op ’t spoor der ouderen, u moedigh voorgetreên. / Zoo draeft men recht naer Godt, door alle starren heen.’

⁵⁸ Markus, ‘*De Gysbreght bestaat niet*’. Pieter vande Veer could be a fictitious name; see Gerritsen’s introduction to Schuytvlot, *Catalogus*, p. xxiii. See also p. 491, n. 15.

⁵⁹ Markus, ‘*De Gysbreght bestaat niet*’.

Three copies are extant, that also differ from each other.⁶⁰ They can be traced back to the 1659 version, but some parts, for instance the letter of dedication, are based on the 1637 edition. The editions by the widow of Gijsbert de Groot (1704 and 1709), and by the widow of J. van Egmond (s.a.) were also in octavo.⁶¹ Each follows the version of 1659 with some slight misprints. The octavo editions by the heirs of J. Lescaille contain other misprints; their layer must have been 1699/1716, following the 1659 version.⁶²

Another landmark was the abridged edition of 1729, made by David Ruarus under the influence of changing perceptions of tragedy and theatre and of changing ideas on staging matters of religion.⁶³ It was not before 1876 that the 'original' text was returned to. The title of the 1729 edition contains the phrase: 'Now for the first time printed word for word as it is staged on the Amsterdam Theatre' (Nu voor de eerste reize van woord tot woord gedrukt, gelijk het op den Amsterdamschen Schouwburg gespeeld wordt).⁶⁴ The 'original' reading text had been reprinted repeatedly, but on stage something completely different was being played.⁶⁵ This shows the intricacy of the relationship between the changing attitude of the literate and the printing history: prints may steer performances and vice versa, and people may or may not give the printed text sacrosanct status.

So *Gysbreght van Aemstel* underwent several changes, by Vondel himself and by the neoclassical audiences and readerships of the eighteenth century. One would hope for an edition of the 1659 version that takes into account the changes made by Vondel himself at that time and in 1638, as well as the changes in the 1729 edition, so that the author's and the readers' responses can be seen at a glance.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ UBA Vdl 1 G 32a and 32b in octavo; Vdl 2 E 62, printed in quarto, but with the typesetting for an octavo size.

⁶¹ UBA Vdl 1 G 36; Vdl 1 G 39 and 316 F 36 respectively.

⁶² Unger, *Bibliographie*, no. 254; Schuytplot, *Catalogus*, no. 530a.

⁶³ Van der Haven, 'De herziene schouwburgdrukken van 1729'; Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gysbreght van Aemstel'*, p. 37 'verthoonige vande superstitione vande paperije als misse en andere ceremonien'; Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gysbreght van Aemstel'*, pp. 13 and 20. In an appendix, Markus printed the 1637 text with the changes of 1729 in a second column.

⁶⁴ UBA Vdl 2 G 27; Unger, *Bibliographie*, no. 262.

⁶⁵ The text of the preface and the changes can be found on the Internet, in the contribution by Markus, 'De Gysbreght bestaat niet', appendices 1 and 2. It is a pity – although understandable – that Markus compared the 1729 edition with the one of 1637 and not with 1659, which had actually been altered.

⁶⁶ There is no edition of *Gysbreght* like *The Three-Text Hamlet* by Bertram and Kliman, offering a parallel edition of three differing texts of *Hamlet*.

Vondel's Proofs – Maria Stuart

Maria Stuart appeared in 1645 with a fictitious printer's address 'In Cologne, at the old printing office' (Te Keulen in d'oude druckerye). In one year, six editions saw the light of day.⁶⁷ Vondel left out his own name and the name of the printer and the publisher because he deemed the subjects too holy to expose them to satire and mockery. Yet the name of the author and the printer soon became known and the magistrates ('Schepenen') of Amsterdam imposed a penalty of 180 guilders on Vondel.⁶⁸ The publisher, who was actually Abraham de Wees, paid the fine.

In 1912 the Vondel-Museum bought a manuscript that was the printer's proof of this play, annotated by Vondel himself.⁶⁹ It shows that, at least in this case, the playwright painstakingly checked this proof. He corrected typesetter's errors, but also altered verses. Thus in lines 791–92 the text reads 'Laet schepes loopen en verslinnen / Wat wil [...]'. This is incomprehensible, but Vondel indicated that the final 's' of 'schepes' should be combined with 'loopen', so that the lines ran 'Laet schepe slopen en verslinnen / Wat wil [...]' (Let anyone wishing to do so scrap ships and devour them).⁷⁰ He also changed words; on p. 225, for instance, he altered 'secta hominis' (cut off by [the hand of] a man) into 'secta odio' (cut off by hatred) and in line 691 'knotte' (truncated) into 'maaide' (mowed), which corresponds better to the 'scythe' (zeis) that is the instrument for this purpose.

Gebroeders – Notes on a Performance

In the case of *Gebroeders* a copy is extant with autograph annotations by Vondel himself.⁷¹ In it he preserved his memories of a special

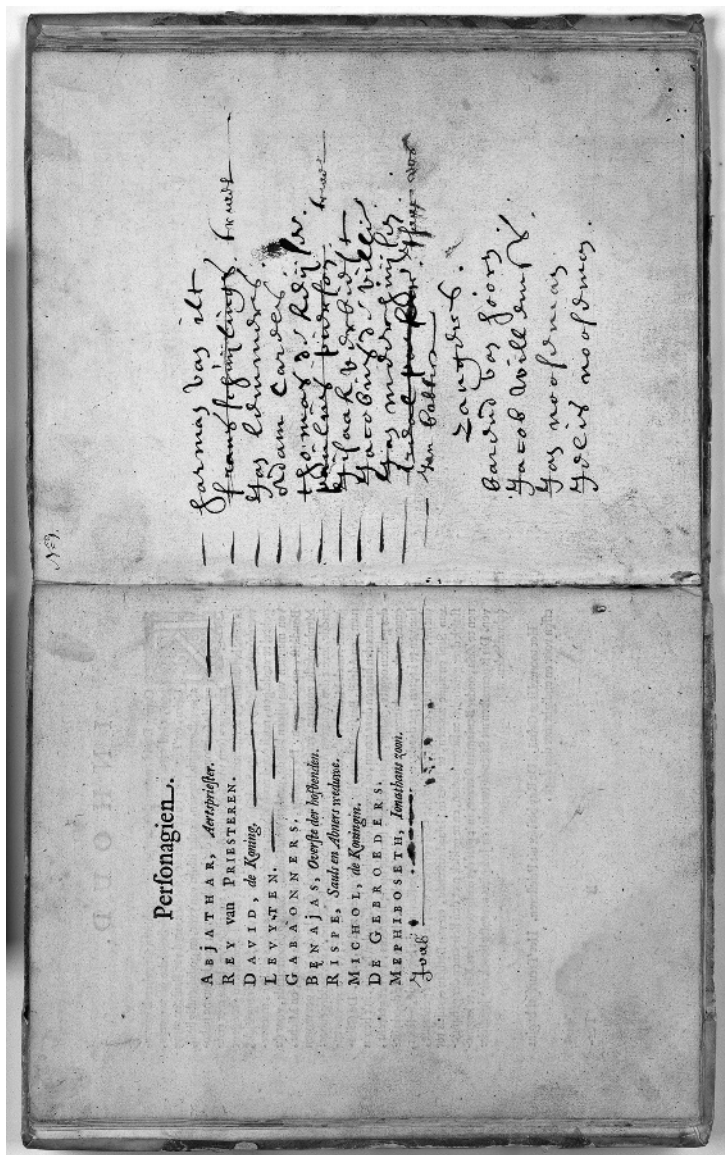
⁶⁷ Unger, *Bibliographie*, nos. 431–36; Schuytvlot, *Catalogus*, nos. 633–43.

⁶⁸ Sterck, *Oorkonden*, p. 221.

⁶⁹ Sterck, *Oorkonden*, pp. 220–34. Now in the University Library of the University of Amsterdam.

⁷⁰ Sterck, *Oorkonden*, p. 224.

⁷¹ Leerintveld, 'Een bijzonder exemplaar van Vondels *Gebroeders*'; Smits-Veldt, 'De aantekeningen bij Vondels *Gebroeders*', transcription in WB, 3, pp. 900–02. The copy is in the Royal Library in The Hague, shelf no. 392 H 28; facsimiles in Geesink and Bossers, *Vondell*, p. 89; Albach, *Langs kermissen en hoven*, p. 48; Van Gemert, *Tussen de bedrijven door?*, p. 127; *Honderd hoogtepunten van de Koninklijke Bibliotheek*, p. 127; Oey-de Vita and Geesink, *Academie en Schouwburg*, p. 228.



Joost van den Vondel, *Gebroeders*, t'Amsterdam, by Dominicus vander Stichel, for Abraham de Wees, 1640. 4°. KB 392 H 28, fol. 6v-7r.

performance for the magistrates of Amsterdam on 20 April 1641.⁷² On an extra leaf bound between B and Bij he noted the actors (fig. p. 503). He also changed the cast. These handwritten changes did not materialise in a printed edition until the 1970s, when Karel Porteman adopted them in his edition.⁷³

On a second leaf, inserted between [x]v and [x2]r Vondel described the props used at the performance, such as the ark and a candle, and the garments of the priests and the high priest. Moreover, he wrote down that musicians played on wind instruments and that the priests sang. For instance, on p. [B4]r, there is a note stating that ‘the tableau vivant of the Ark of the Covenant and the candle, and the additional song is spoken by the priests thus’ (de vertoonning. van de bondskist en kandelaer en de toesang. word aldus van de priesters gesproken). All this also affected the performance.

Another important change concerned the expansion of the role of general (‘veldheer’) Joab. His role was enlarged by adding a few clauses from other characters: general Benajas and highpriest Abjathar. The direct cause of this change was perhaps the talent of the seventeen-year old actor Jan Baptist van Fornenberg, whom Vondel provided with the role of Joab.⁷⁴

Different Prints – Adam in Ballingschap

Adam in ballingschap was published twice in 1664 by the widow of Abraham de Wees.⁷⁵ The two editions are printed by two different printers: the successor of Thomas Fonteyn and Daniel Dakkamude, both in Amsterdam. At first sight, the two editions are identical, but they are made with different letters, contain several variants in spelling and have some differences in wording. They even have different vignettes – one (B) with the printer’s motto ‘Elk zyn beurt’ (Each has his turn), the other one (A) without. To cite a few other instances, in

⁷² This date was found by Leerintveld, ‘Een bijzonder exemplaar van Vondels *Gebroeders*’.

⁷³ See Vondel, *Gebroeders*, ed. Langvik-Johannessen and Porteman, esp. pp. 37–38.

⁷⁴ Vondel, *Gebroeders*, ed. Langvik-Johannessen and Porteman, p. 37; Albach, *Langs kermissen en hoven*, pp. 44–46. Korsten, *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, p. 97, argues that the change was motivated by the content of the conflict.

⁷⁵ Unger, *Bibliographie*, nos. 676 and 677; Schuytvlot, *Catalogus*, nos. 741 and 742. I will refer to them as ‘A’ and ‘B’. The fingerprint of A is 166404 – b A2 \$nae: b2 H3 aele; the fingerprint of B is 166404 – b1 1 \$nae: b2 H3 rael.

the Title of the dedication A has ‘oudemannahuis’ and ‘weeshuis’, B ‘Oude Mannen-huis’ and ‘Weeshuis’. Although the spelling differs within each copy too, A often spells words ending in an alveolar plosive consonantal sound using a ‘t’ (e.g. ‘out’, ‘tyt’ and ‘niemant’), whilst B does so using ‘dt’ (e.g. ‘oudt’ ‘tydt’ and ‘niemandt’).⁷⁶ On p. Br, A has ‘Erfrechtveerdigheid’, B ‘Erfrechtvaerdigheid’. On p. 23, A has ‘in de lommer’, B the metrically less correct combination ‘in lommer’. The question subsequently arises as to whether A is a text emended by the printer or by Vondel himself, with B therefore being the oldest version, or whether B is a rashly made reprint of A, with A therefore being the oldest one. In any case, the variants enable us to trace one of them, B, as the layer for the subsequent editions of Joannes de Wees, 1698, and Steeve van Esveldt, 1736.⁷⁷ The 1720 edition is more complex, containing variants from both editions.⁷⁸

What is the use of this exercise? I think there are four reasons for doing this. Firstly, something can be said about Vondel, his spelling and his treatment of his texts; secondly, one could look at later editions in order to establish which text was the layer of this edition; and thirdly, it says something about the readers’ reception of Vondel’s works. The fourth reason is the most fundamental – it shows the fluidity of texts which we think of as a fixed entity, but above all it affects our attitude to the text and opens our eyes to their manifold material forms. A good edition therefore takes these variants into consideration and presents them.

From the Book to the Computer

In 2003 the *Digitale Bibliotheek der Nederlandse Letterkunde* (www.dbnl.nl) began to digitise the WB edition of Vondel’s works. Now Vondel’s texts are available all over the world. This development makes us once more aware of the fact that a text in itself is not sufficient, but needs mediation through materialisation in any form. In other words, we can read the text only by means of a visualisation. The electronic text is an additional form to the printed book. Of course, the monumental material form of the WB series is lost at the dbnl website, but

⁷⁶ P. A2r and p. 3.

⁷⁷ Unger, *Bibliographie*, nos 678 and 679; Schuytvlot, *Catalogus*, nos 743 and 746.

⁷⁸ Unger, *Bibliographie*, no. 27a; Schuytvlot, *Catalogus*, no. 744.

the advantage of being able to consult the text on a computer is tremendous. It renders the text readily searchable for words, citations, etc. And yet the dbnl site has not yet been able to explore the possibilities of digitised texts (the costs would have been too high for the project). At the Huygens Institute for the History of Netherlands in The Hague tools are being developed for further exploration of the opportunities presented by electronic texts. There is the option of presenting several text formats (such as facsimiles, transcriptions, transliterations and annotations) next to each other on the screen.⁷⁹ The users may make their own choices, or even add their own comments, either for their own eyes only or to share their remarks with others. Several scholars can work together on an edition, using information-sharing programs such as *e-Laborate*. But even larger text corpora may be searched and analysed. For instance, style analysis can be carried out, or the dissemination or development of concepts and ideas in Vondel's dramatic oeuvre can be sorted out at a single glance. Although we present our electronic texts – and hypertexts – in forms that look like books, using traditional bookish fonts, they actually differ from the traditional book, as well as offering new opportunities, for old and new philology too.

Coda

What is new about this story? In classical philology, text editions contain intricate *apparatus critici* with variant readings and emendations suggested by previous scholars. The same holds for some editions of early modern Latin texts. This has also been done (though presented in a different way) in some editions in the *Monumenta Literaria Neerlandica* series. So the presentation of variants in itself is not new in philology. But for the works of Vondel, such an exercise has not been carried out in this way. In the WB edition the variants of some texts are listed in appendices, yet are not closely related to the text itself. Thus the variants are relegated to a position of subordination, and the text itself is presented as an ideal one.

As I stated earlier, the aim of classical and modern philology differs; classical text editions pertain to transmission of the text, while in

⁷⁹ The electronic text has been called a 'liberation technology' that renders it possible 'to free the writing from the frozen structure of the page', Bolter, *Writing Space*, p. 21, quoted in Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book*, p. 112.

editions of, shall we say, poets of the 20th century the issue is the genesis of the text. As such, classical philology tries to trace back to the ‘original’ text, while in many cases modern philology tends to try and pin down the ‘final’ text that corresponds to the author’s ‘intention.’⁸⁰ Vondel’s editors stood in the tradition of classical philology. Therefore they used the first text authorised by Vondel himself.

I am not arguing a case for the contrary (for editing Vondel’s ‘final’ versions – ‘Ausgaben letzter Hand’), nor a case for the same (editing Vondel’s first texts). Rather, I favour a combination, a fully fledged place for the variants in line with New Philology and doing justice to the fluidity of the texts or the dynamic process in which they were formed and transmitted, both in prints and performances. In this form, each text should be subjected to its own set of questions. In the case of *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, Vondel himself changed the text to such an extent that a separate edition of the second version (or a parallel edition) could be expedient, all the more so since the ‘Urtext’ has already been published several times. For *Maria Stuart*, the adoption of Vondel’s remarks in an *apparatus criticus* on the page itself may make it perfectly and verifiably clear what he did to the text, and for *Gebroeders* it could be prudent to present the reader with Vondel’s own annotations close to the text itself. And in the case of *Adam in ballingschap* the variants could be put in an *apparatus* to make it possible to see the differences between the two versions at a glance.

Of course, not all variants are of the same value, but the material history of the texts and their fluidity should be shown, just as is often done in the restoration of buildings and paintings that do not do away with the several changes in time. The editor should show the inconsistencies, lacunas and the like, rather than reason them away as has been done in twentieth-century preoccupation with a ‘monolithic’ text in which everything fits in with everything else. Thus the variants, even the ones that at first sight seem to be uninteresting, play a major role, since they affect our perception of early modern texts. The task of the reader will also change – instead of reading a text in which the editor has made the choices for him – to the exclusion of other readings – the scholar using an edition should make his or her own choices, and

⁸⁰ See (for example) Greg, *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare*, p. x: ‘The aim of a critical edition, should be to present the text, so far as the available evidence permits, in the form in which we may suppose that it would have stood in fair copy, made by the author himself, of the work as he finally intended it.’

reflect on the choices she or he makes. Thus editing texts and reading such editions is not just a game for connoisseurs, it can become a kind of deconstruction and reconstruction. Seen in this way, showing the variants should be part of editing. For variants are parts of the text in their own right, they *are* the text, and they deserve to be emancipated.

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

PHILOSOPHY – NOAH (1667) ON GOD AND NATURE

Wiep van Bunge

Noah, of Ondergang der Eerste Weerelt (Noah or Downfall of the First World) is the last play Vondel wrote, and he never saw it performed. Although it was published in 1667, it was probably written in 1665, when Vondel was turning 78 and had 14 more years to live.¹ It really was the product of a Golden Age; in 1665 Vermeer painted the *Girl With a Pearl Earring*, Anthonie van Leeuwenhoek built his first microscope, and Spinoza started writing the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (Theological-Political Treatise)*. These were indeed exciting times; the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* started appearing, Newton carried out his first optical experiments, after Cambridge University was temporarily closed on account of the plague, and Britain went to war with the Dutch Republic. In Paris, the first issue of the *Journal des Sçavans* appeared, while Racine published his *Alexandre le Grand* and Molière his *L'amour médecin*.

In view of the theological importance of the Flood and the astounding facts involved, the story of Noah had surprisingly little impact on the literary tradition of the Netherlands. While the Ark was depicted variously and repeatedly throughout Christendom from the first centuries onwards, Noah's story appears to have failed to inspire authors in the way Adam's had, let alone Moses's.² From St. Augustine onwards, the story of the Flood and in particular the reconstruction of the logistics involved in shipping all the animals that Genesis purports were

¹ I use the edition made by Molkenboer in WB, 10, pp. 391–454. Act One, ll. 43–44: 'The sixteen centuries and another fifty-six [sic] years / Have since then, feel free to boast, not passed fruitlessly.' ('De zestien eeuwen en noch zesenvijftigh [sic] jaeren / Zijn sedert, roemt vry, niet onvruchtbaer heengevaeren.') I owe all translations of Vondel's Dutch to Michiel Wielema, without whom this paper could not have been published in English.

² Fink, *Noe der Gerechte in der frühchristlichen Kunst*. For some early theological and scholarly assessments, see Garcia Martínez and Luttikhuisen, *Interpretations of the Flood*. In Allen, *The Legend of Noah*, pp. 151–53, Vondel is the only Dutch literary author (briefly) mentioned.

saved had vexed a host of biblical scholars attempting to hold on to a literal interpretation of Noah's achievements. The limited lack of interest in the literary potential offered by the Flood also stands in stark contrast to early modern genealogical efforts to establish the holy lineage of the royal dynasties ruling Europe, all of whom were supposed to have descended from Aeneas and/or Noah.³ A rare precursor to Vondel's play appears to have been staged by Karel van Mander, who in the early 1570s produced a *Noah*, the text of which is lost, however.⁴ Vondel's *Noah* does not seem to have inspired fellow Dutchmen to follow his lead either; the only major Dutch author who also turned to Noah was Willem Bilderdijk, who in 1820 published his own (uncompleted) *Ondergang der eerste wereld*.⁵

By the middle of the seventeenth century, wayward scholars such as Isaac La Peyrère and Isaac Vossius had started questioning the universality of the Flood as well as the chronological accuracy of the biblical account supplied in Genesis.⁶ Vondel, however, clearly did not want to be associated in any way with the harmful implications held by such scholarship regarding the infallibility of Scripture. An obvious clue as to Vondel's personal assessment of the relevance of Noah is to be found in its Dedication, in which the playwright declares it to be the final part of a trilogy; following *Lucifer* (1654) and *Adam in ballingschap* (1664), *Noah* (Vondel claims) completes the biblical account of the birth of evil and the outcome of its first encounter with man or, to put it another way, man's original response to the challenges presented to him by the lure of evil, only to be overcome by the making of a covenant, restoring God's confidence in man.⁷

Noah or the Downfall of the First World

The first act is set somewhere in the Caucasus, at the gates of 'Reuzenburgh', a castle inhabited by giants, the offspring of the upright sons of Seth and the mischievous daughters of Cain. These giants

³ Tanner, *The Last Descendants of Aeneas*.

⁴ Langvik-Johannessen, *Zwischen Himmel und Erde*, p. 261.

⁵ Bilderdijk, *Ondergang der eerste wereld*, ed. Bosch.

⁶ Allen, *The Legend of Noah*, Chapters 4, 5 and 7.

⁷ Vondel's sources are clear: besides Genesis, he relies mainly on Jacob Salianus, *Annales Ecclesiastici Veteris Testamenti, Tomus primus* (Paris, 1619). The plays have been presented as a trilogy in the edition by Schenkeveld-van der Dussen.

commit adultery on a gargantuan scale and revel in the practice of all sorts of other vicious crimes. In front of the castle we meet the antediluvian patriarch Noah, who is deeply concerned over the licentiousness of his contemporaries, and who is busy building a huge ship. Water is rising.

The next act introduces Achiman, ‘ruler of the East’, who is preparing his royal wedding to Urania and who is told by Noah’s ‘Bouwmeester’ (Architect) that he had better prepare for a swim. The Architect also informs Achiman of Noah’s precise plans and of his holy walk of life: he will ship his own family and had already stored pairs of all known animals. Soon he will sail away while the rest of the world will drown. Although his son Ham finds it difficult to obey his father, Noah’s righteousness has kept his family intact. For a moment even Achiman seems impressed, upon which Noah appears, delivering his final warning: he is now 500 years old and for the last century he has been predicting that the end was nigh and all this time he has been working on his ship. Over the next few years water will flood the earth and darkness will fall, he prophesies, because the offspring of Seth and Cain was doomed and is only interested in sensual pleasures and material gain, and because it holds only the sword in reverence.

In the third act Achiman is forced to swallow his original libertine response to Noah’s epiphany: as the water keeps rising and the first reports on drowning cattle reach him, he starts to recognise that Noah was, perhaps, right after all and he abandons the festivities at the Reuzenburgh. This leads to a violent reaction from Achiman’s wife-to-be, Urania. She is furious and forces Achiman to swallow his hesitations. Suddenly Noah enters the scene and a dialogue ensues between Noah and Urania on the subject of women. Was not Noah born from a woman, does he not have a wife and daughters-in-law of his own? Urania boldly reminds Noah of his own father who was anything but prudent himself, but Noah retorts by declaring that he is committed to cleanse his family name.

At the opening of the fourth act we meet Noah’s son Ham, who has apparently just been at the party and has spoken to Urania, and who now meets up with his father. Now that the Flood is about to wash away all living things, Ham questions the moral grounds on which God could possibly have decided to punish mankind in the way in which he is clearly about to. If you are right, Ham wonders, does that not turn God into a vengeful judge? His father tries to explain: firstly, Noah argues, we are simply unable to judge God’s ways, and secondly, man

has brought misery upon himself. Once Noah and his family have embarked, the Ark proves its worth and Noah turns his attention to Shem, continuing his argument that God cannot be blamed for the Flood: man is endowed with a free will, and has no one to blame but himself.

The fifth and final act brings us back to the court of Achiman. Lightning strikes, a giant flood is about to swallow the *Reuzenburgh*, and the archangel Uriel appears. Urania begs for mercy, and while it is certain that the entire court of Achiman will drown, the final words of Uriel proclaim that those who persevere in their repentance and are sincere in their remorse, will be saved and will receive God's grace after all. The chorus explains: they will have to wait until the coming of Christ, whose grace will allow them to leave purgatory for good.

Theologians and Philosophers on the Origins of Evil

Vondel was no theologian and no philosopher either, but as a playwright and a poet he did not back down from addressing major theological and philosophical issues. Arguably the most contested problem in seventeenth-century theology and moral philosophy concerned the nature of evil or, to be more precise, the assessment of man's part in what theologians used to refer to as 'sin'. By far the most important intellectual quarrel that was fought in the Dutch Republic during Vondel's lifetime was, of course, the dispute between Arminians or Remonstrants and Gomarists or Counter-Remonstrants. As will be only too familiar, the question of the responsibility for what is wrong with God's creation was at the heart of what started as an academic dispute between two Leiden professors of theology, but soon spilled over to the public domain, bringing the Republic to the brink of civil war.⁸

A former Remonstrant himself, Vondel's stance toward this famous episode in Dutch church history is clear enough: he completely rejected the 'orthodox' Calvinism triumphant at the Synod of Dordrecht, according to which a correct understanding of God's sovereign grace left man utterly impotent.⁹ According to 'Dordt', after the Fall man is

⁸ See most recently Goudriaan and Van Lieburg, *Re-examining the Synod of Dordt*.

⁹ See Brom, *Vondels geloof*, esp. Chapter 3; Molkenboer, *De jonge Vondel*; Calis, *Vondel*, Chapters 5 and 6.

sinful by nature and God's decision as to who will be saved cannot in any way be affected by the efforts of man. Any attempt to bring man's own achievements into the equation will inevitably harm the core of Reformed theology and lead to 'popish' speculations regarding a free will, or so Counter-Remonstrants argued. While the 'precise' wing of the Dutch Reformed church put all its cards on securing the sovereign nature of divine Grace, following from an essentially omnipotent God, their Remonstrant opponents continued to insist on the necessity to account for the origins as well as the reality of evil, that in view of God's essential benevolence could only be attributed to man.¹⁰

By the time Vondel wrote *Noah*, he had been a devout Roman-Catholic for at least a quarter of a century and according to Catholic doctrine, and to the Jesuit point of view in particular, man is free to accept Grace or not, and good deeds – the possibility of which is subject to Grace itself – must be performed by the individual because that individual wants to perform them. Salvation, therefore, is always possible, but has to be earned. It should be added, though, that in the heart of French Catholicism Jansenism would raise the same issue that was under contention in Dordt, for the Flemish priest Cornelius Jansenius had come close to Calvinism in stressing that after the Fall man is no longer capable of doing any good deeds and grace cannot be earned.¹¹ Although Jansenism made a considerable impact on Dutch Catholics, Vondel would have none of it.¹²

From a philosophical point of view, the question that split the Dutch Reformed Church during the 1610s and troubled French Catholicism until well into the eighteenth century revealed the difficulty of conceiving a Perfect Being that is omnipotent as well as perfectly benevolent. At the same time as Vondel was sitting down to complete his trilogy on the origins of human evil and its relationship to divine Grace, Spinoza, the greatest Dutch philosopher ever, was discussing the same subject in a remarkable bout of correspondence with Willem van Bleijenbergh, a grain merchant from Dordrecht, as is evident from Letters 18 to 24 in

¹⁰ In the decades following Dordt the Remonstrant tradition would be upheld most convincingly by Vondel's personal friend Hugo Grotius to whom he dedicated *Gysbrecht van Amstel* and by Simon Episcopius, to whom Vondel dedicated an epitaph: WB, 5, p. 242.

¹¹ Abercrombie, *The Origins of Jansenism*; Sedgwick, *Jansenism in Seventeenth-Century France*.

¹² Brom, *Vondels geloof*, pp. 324sq.; Spiertz, 'Jansenisme in en rond de Nederlanden'; Roegers, 'Jansenisme en katholieke hervorming in de Nederlanden'.

Spinoza's correspondence.¹³ In assessing this episode in Spinoza's intellectual biography, it should be borne in mind that, except for a small circle of friends, the reading public were only able to acquaint themselves with his philosophical intentions in 1670. Prior to the (anonymous) publication of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, only Spinoza's debut was available, and since these *Principia Philosophiae Cartesianae* (*Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, 1663) were supposed to serve as a general introduction to the metaphysics and the natural philosophy of Descartes, the wider public had to read between the lines in order to reconstruct the general thread of a budding 'Spinozism'.¹⁴ To his credit, Van Blijenbergh, a staunch Calvinist, had come across several passages that caught his attention and made him curious to find out more, so he addressed Spinoza on 12 December 1664, wondering how he felt about the freedom of the will and its part in the origins of evil. In his first reply, Spinoza summarises the issue as follows:

it seems clearly to follow, both from God's providence, which is identical with his will, and from God's concurrence and the continuous creation of things, either that there is no such thing as sin or evil, or that God brings about that sin and that evil.¹⁵

While Spinoza is plainly very careful in this encounter with a perfect stranger from Dordrecht, he is adamant that in reality there is no such thing as 'evil' or 'sin', neither for that matter in Adam's behaviour:

Neither can we say that Adam's will was at variance with God's law, and was evil because it was displeasing to God. It would argue great imperfection to God if anything happened against his will, or if he wanted something he could not possess, or if his nature were determined in such a manner that, just like his creatures, he felt sympathy with some things and antipathy to others.¹⁶

In the next letter, Spinoza tries to explain to Van Blijenbergh that there is nothing 'positive' about evil, since it has no reality of its own, and is merely 'a mode of thinking' (*ens rationis*), construed by man,

¹³ Spinoza, *The Letters*, transl. Shirley, pp. 128–72. See Deleuze, *Spinoza*, Chapter 3. On Van Blijenbergh, see my entry in Van Bunge et al, *The Dictionary of Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Dutch Philosophers*.

¹⁴ Officially, Spinoza's debut was entitled *Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae Pars I, et II, More Geometrico demonstratae. Accesserunt Ejusdem Cogitata Mataphysica generali, quam speciali occurrunt, quaestiones breviter explicantur* (Amsterdam, 1663). A Dutch translation appeared in 1664.

¹⁵ Spinoza, *The Letters*, p. 132.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 133–34.

‘comparing things with one another.’¹⁷ By this time, Spinoza must have felt that his philosophy, according to which ‘that which constitutes the specific reality of evil, error and villainy does not consist in anything that expresses essence’,¹⁸ could not possibly convince Van Blijenbergh, so he politely made an end to the correspondence. Of course, Spinoza’s extremely rationalist ‘solution’ was only one of many attempts to account for the essence of evil launched by seventeenth-century philosophers, of which Leibniz’s *Theodicée* (1710) would become the most famous example on account of its notoriously counterintuitive conclusion that we actually live in ‘the best of all possible worlds.’¹⁹ In view of the great effort invested by contemporary theologians and philosophers, what, we might ask, did Vondel contribute to the ongoing debate concerning the nature of evil?

Noah: *God and Nature*

W.A.P. Smit was the first expert to draw attention to the merits of the remarkable fourth act of *Noah*, which according to earlier critics was a failure in that it slowed down the pace of the play.²⁰ Smit readily admits that it does, but the reason for this, he argued, was a good one: by showing the effect Urania has on Ham, Noah’s world becomes a far more dynamic one than might be expected from the dominant principle of the duality or dichotomy between Urania’s domain and Noah’s. The fourth act keeps the tension intact, Smit argues, but the conflict between the two acquires new depth once Urania proves to be able to strike at the heart of Noah’s family, who are just about to embark, i.e. about to close the doors of the Ark. Furthermore, once Urania is told that ultimately she will not be lost forever either if her repentance is sincere, it could even be argued that a common future emerges.

Frans-Willem Korsten has pursued this observation as part of a highly ambitious interpretation of Vondel’s entire legacy, according to which the latter’s plays contain a sustained analysis of the sovereignty of *potentia* embodied in the desire to realise autonomy.²¹ Korsten similarly takes as his point of departure an analysis of Ham’s questioning

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹⁹ Nadler, *The Best of All Possible Worlds*, Chapter 4.

²⁰ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 3, pp. 554–60.

²¹ Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, Chapter 2; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, Chapter 2.

God's impending punishment. As we saw in the fourth act, Ham is complaining about the injustice of God's punishment: what did we do to deserve the complete destruction of the world? Does not God himself show signs of 'female' fickleness by reacting in this way? Korsten, however, draws our attention to Noah's reply, in which it is revealed to Ham that Urania even attempted to cause a rift in his own family, by separating brothers and daughters in law from each other, and even father from mother: no other conclusion seems warranted than that Noah himself has come under the spell of Urania.

Riet Schenkeveld-van der Dussen has observed that Vondel repeatedly refers to events following the Flood, and more specifically to the famous passage in Genesis 9:18–26 in which Noah will be found naked and drunk after he tasted the wine he made from the grapes planted once the Ark has touched land again. Korsten has further explored the ambiguities simmering beneath the surface of Noah's encounter with Urania.²² To begin with, Noah's future behaviour clearly demonstrates that God failed to cleanse the world: even his most loyal servant succumbs to temptation at the first occasion that presents itself once the Ark has reached dry land. Is God ultimately unable to control Nature?

Consider the remarkable opening speech of the play, delivered by Apollion, who is supposed to represent Evil: it pictures the world after the Fall – a world in which all of nature enjoys a wide variety of the most lurid pleasures. Clearly, this situation was far from perfect, yet Genesis 6:5 carries little information on the matter: men have become evil, but what exactly does this evil amount to? According to *Noah*, antediluvian man was living lawlessly (ll. 389–400) and in sexual anarchy (ll. 431–506). It should be added, though, that Vondel appears to depict this sorry state of affairs with considerable relish:

Here sensual desire finds everything that human lust yearns for,
 Beautiful gardens, meadows, brooks and springs all around.
 Fruits drop from the branches right into your mouth
 And melt on your tongue. Birds warble.
 Dancing, playing, endless feasting
 And wedding celebrations are the custom here throughout the year.
 Men's souls are not constrained by laws or subject to coercion.²³

²² Vondel, *Lucifer, Adam in ballingschap en Noah*, ed. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, pp. 318–19.

²³ 'Hier vint de snoeplust al wat 's menschen lust loopt zoeken, / Lusthoven, beemen, beek en bronnen in het ront. / De vruchten druppen van de takken in den mont, / En smilten op de tong. de vogels quinkeleeren. / Het danssen, speelen, het gedurigh

What is more, the real chaos pictured in *Noah* results from God's decision to make an end to this lawless life of pleasure, this abundance of *potentia*, and it is only natural that the violence with which God will destroy the First World provokes indignation with Noah's sons Ham, Shem and Japheth (ll.1032–54; 1289–1301; 1505–34): by what right does God decide to end the existing order of nature? Consider also Achiman's remarkable eloquence, where he points out how natural it is for a man to seek the company of beautiful women:

Freed of discipline and severe constraints, we find joy
 In passing the time that is now fully ours to dispose of.
 It pleases us to exercise these limbs, now full of youth and health,
 And not, tortured by rigid shackles, with a melancholy mind
 And our heads hanging low, to lament, to weep.
 Pour out wine. Bring balsam. Rejoice. This is our moment.
 Make garlands of roses. Put a bride on each knee
 Before our time runs out and death closes the door.
 If father likes, let him play the tune to which we dance.
 A youthful heart should miss neither feast nor a chance to wed.²⁴

By the same token, there's something undeniably splendid about Urania's reaction to the first account of impending doom:

If due to this teaching men start to live woman-less
 Then for sure things have gone far enough.
 There is no need to drown the world in a flood of water:
 For it cannot persist without women. (ll. 766–70)²⁵

And then there is Urania's violent reaction to Achiman's refusal, in Act III, to continue with the wedding. Indeed, her indignation is perfectly natural and seems even justified: what nonsense to keep women responsible for what might be wrong with the world if men and women enjoyed themselves together, and what is more, is Achiman really about to break his promise to her?

banketteeren, / En bruiloften gaet hier het gansche jaer in zwang. / Men bint de zielen aen geen wetten, en bedwang' (ll. 68–74).

²⁴ 'Het luste ons 's levens tijt, nu tijdigh en voorhanden, / Te bezigen, ontboeit van tucht en strenge banden. / Het luste ons deze leën, nu jeugdigh en gezont, / Te bezigen, en niet, geprangt door naeu verbont, / Zwaermoedigh, hangends hoofts, te jammeren, te treuren. / Schenkt wijn. brengt balssem. juicht. het magh ons nu gebeuren. / Vlecht roozekranssen. zet op elke knie een bruit, / Eer 's levens tijt verloopt, de doot den draeiboom sluit. / Belieft het vader, hy magh speelen, daer wy danssen. / Een jeugdigh hart verzuim' noch feest noch bruiloftskanssen.' (ll. 493–502).

²⁵ 'Begint het mansdom door dees leering vrouweloos / Te leven, zeker 't is dan ver genoegh gekomen. / Men hoeft de weerelt in geen zee en waterstroomen / Te smoooren: want zy kan niet vrouweloos bestaen.' (ll. 766–70)

We reclined, our mouths touching, our arms locked in embrace,
 Two souls fused and merged into one.
 How did you not swear that you would rather see the sun
 Robbed of its light than love's flame quenched in your bosom.²⁶

But there is more to come, for Urania's ensuing cross-examination of Noah is surely one of the highlights of the entire play, delivering a perfectly self-confident declaration of independence:

And is this foolishness going to continue? Old man,
 You are fretting yourself to death. What have you gained
 All your life other than strife, nothing of value!
 How can you think so badly of women?
 A woman has borne you, her love in childbearing obliges you
 To be faithful: and your sons, devoted to women,
 Rather behold her face than the most beautiful thing,
 That is the face of the all-warming sun,
 The joy of the living and source of every light:
 Or has old age withered away your desire for women,
 Then your senility and not any woman is to blame.²⁷

And listen to the song Urania and her friends sing when they return to the wedding party, celebrating the swan, a noble symbol of love, a beautiful animal *that cannot drown*. It would seem, then, that these women refuse to be intimidated by Noah's bleak message of repentance:

If all things sunk and perished
 Where would the swan be?
 Where would the swan be,
 The swan, that joyful water creature,
 Never tired of kissing?
 No waters put out
 Her burning passion.
 She likes to nest midstream.

²⁶ 'Wy hingen, mont aen mont, en arm in arm gestrengelt, / Twee zielen beide in een gesmolten en gemengelt. / Wat zwoertge niet! de zon van stralen eer berooft / Te zien dan 't minnevier in uwe borst gedooft.' (ll. 875-79)

²⁷ 'En blijft dees sufferij noch duuren? oude knecht, / Gy suft u selven doot. wat hebtge toch gewonnen / Uw leven lang, als twist gerokkent, niet gesponnen! / Hoe staen de vrouwen u zoo byster in het licht? / Een vrou heeft u gebaert, haer liefde uw trou verplicht / Door kinderbaeren: en uw zoons, verknocht aen vrouwen, / Haer aenschijn liever dan het allerschoonste aenschouwen, / Dat is het aenschijn van d'alkoesterende zon, / Der levendigen vreught, en aller lichten bron: / Of is door ouderdom uw vrouwezucht gesleeten, / Dat werde uw' ouderdom, en geene vrou geweeten.' (ll. 962-73)

She nurtures passion,
 She nurtures passion
 With her merry mate,
 And sits on her eggs,
 And neither cares for weepers,
 Nor fears any harm.
 Her flying young swim along,
 Over river and sea,
 Over river and sea.
 She lives in the element full of motion,
 And cleans her feathers,
 And glides with striding gait
 Till the end of her life.
 Dying she sings a merry song
 Among the reeds,
 Among the reeds.
 She defies spiteful death out of lust for life,
 With her song
 And triumphant air,
 And dies calmly.
 Dying, her fading eyes
 Seek again the light,
 Seek again the light,
 The dowry, nature's loan
 Given to each,
 To live in joy.
 Thus she departs.²⁸

Surely this passage, packed with melancholy, reveals a wisdom of its own, which reaches well beyond the blind pursuit of physical pleasure. If Urania and her companions are to be deemed 'hedonists', there is an undeniable dignity in the way they face their end. Ham's anger, as expressed in the fourth act, is just as well put, and even manages to make fun of God's motives: has He turned into a woman?

²⁸ 'Zou het al zinken en vergaen, / Waer bleef de zwaen? / Waer bleef de zwaen, / De zwaen, dat vrolijke waterdier, / Noit zat van kussen? / Geen watre blussen / Haer minnevier. / 't Lust haer te nestlen op den vloet. / Zy queekt den gloet, / Zy queekt den gloet / Met haere vrolijke wederga, / En kipt haere eiers, / En acht geen schreiers, / Noch vreest geen scha. / Vliegende jongen zwemmen me, / Door stroom en zee, / Door stroom en zee. / Zy groeit in 't levendigh element, / En wast de veëren, / En vaert spansseeren / Tot 's levens endt. / Stervende zingtze een vrolijk liet / In 't suikerriet, / In 't suikerriet. / Zy tart de nijdige doot uit lust, / Met quinkeleeren, / En triomfeeren, / En sterft gerust. / Stervende zoekt haer flaeu gezicht / Noch eens het licht, / Noch eens het licht, / Den bruitschat, van de natuur te leen / Aen elk gegeven, / Om bly te leven. / Zoo vaertze heen.' (ll. 1059–93)

You do not install a father but an executioner,
 Who counts every fault, scrupulously weighs each crime,
 And threatens people's lives with a bare sword.
 You portray the deity as a wild bear.
 A bear, a wild boar uproots some bushes,
 A tyrant an empire, the divinity all empires,
 Nay the whole world. Whoever saw greater injustice!
 Such an accumulation of waters and clouds,
 Gradually and powerfully building up in the air,
 When it bursts nations and mountains together will drown,
 And we shall hear the world expire in one last gasp.
 Does God become angry and infuriated, like a woman?
 Is God's providence affected by remorse?
 That's not providence but a disorder, inconstant,
 And fickle. Have mercy on yourself first.²⁹

Noah's response to Urania's proud defiance and to Ham's probing questions seems feeble. In reply to his sons, Noah claims that God *could* have forgiven man before the Flood, but that God's essence is incomprehensible. All we can do is guess:

I know, God be praised, that we lack the powers
 To speak without stammering about God's nature,
 Something incomprehensible, subject to no alteration.
 One must grasp God's attributes by way of human speech.³⁰

God's revenge, however, is justified since man has sinned out of free will (l. 1355) and because God's sovereignty, that is his *potestas*, enables him to take revenge:

When lately heaven's judge sternly opened court,
 Where God's justice and God's mercy pleaded their cause,
 His offended majesties could not be reconciled:
 They stood in each other's light.
 No verdict was spoken as long as the scales were balanced.

²⁹ 'Gy zet geen' vader, maer scherprechter op den troon, / Die elke struikling telt, de misdaet naeu wil weegen, / En dreigen 's menschen hals met eenen blooten deegen. / Gy beelt de godtheit uit, gelijk een' wilden beer. / Een beer, een everzwijn rukt een bosschaedje neêr, / De dwingelant een rijk; de godtheit alle rijken, / Ja al de weerelt. wie zagh grooter ongelijken! / Zoo veele wateren en wolken aengezakt, / En aen de lucht allengs met kracht op een gepakt, / Aen 't scheuren, zullen volk en bergen teffens smooren, / Wy 's weerelts jongsten snik, in eenen dootsnik hooren. / Wort Godt verbolgen en oploopende, als een vrou? / Wort Godts voorzienigheid geraekt van nabrou? / Dat 's geen voorzienigheid, maer krankheit, ongestadigh, / En wispeluur. ay zijt u zelve eerst genadigh.' (ll. 1211-25)

³⁰ 'Ik weete, Godt zy lof, dat krachten ons ontbreken / Om zonder stameren van Gods natuur te spreken, / Een onbegrijpzaemheit, geen steurnis onderdaen. / Men moet door 's menschen spraek Godts eigenschap verstaen.' (ll. 1232-35)

Finally anger proved weightier.
 The curse prevailed after blessing's downfall,
 And humankind, seeking in vain to extenuate its atrocities,
 Was harshly punished and sent to its doom.³¹

Apparently this suffices to convince Noah's sons to embark: God is capable of destroying nature, and therefore he is entitled to do so.

As a consequence, we are left with a view of human history that is marked by the continuing movement between two opposing forces of Nature and Grace, which are not mutually exclusive, however, for while nature does not appear to be evil by itself, God's benevolence is not obvious either. In the end, God's *potestas* overrules nature's *potentia*. And while nature will not be overcome by God's decision to cleanse Noah's world from 'sin', God's interference with the natural order of things does not end with the Flood, which will only turn out to be a first step toward the coming of Christ, at which point even Urania will be saved. Let us see how far a more thorough exploration of the ambiguities contained in this conclusion may bring us, for it just so happens that Vondel's mature meditations on the dialectics of Nature and Grace originated at the dawn of the Radical Enlightenment. In 1665, when Spinoza started writing the *Tractatus* (and was trying to escape from Van Blijenbergh's prying eyes), half of his *Ethics* had been completed.

Vondel versus the Radical Enlightenment

Vondel was definitively no Spinozist. As Fokke Akkerman put it: 'One might ask whether a concept of tragedy is at all conceivable in the rigid deterministic system of Spinoza. He does not acknowledge a personal God as the ultimate foundation of morality, he does not believe in fate or chance. Everything that is or happens results from causes with inevitable necessity.'³² On the other hand, Vondel's thought is in no way 'part of' the Radical Enlightenment, but in a play such as *Noah*, Korsten argues, Vondel 'thinks by acting', for literature is always part of a universe in which words, ideas and concepts constantly evolve and acquire

³¹ 'Toen 's hemels rechter streng ter jongste vierschaer ging, / Daer Godts rechtvaardigheid en Godts genade pleitten, / Kon geen verzoening by gequetste majesteiten / Verworven worden. d'een stont d'andere in het licht. / De tong der weeghschael zweegh, zoo langze in tegenwicht / Bleef twijnen. entlijk quam de boosheit t'overweegen. / De vloek stont boven, na het zwichten van den zegen, / En 't menschdom, dat vergeefs zijn gruwelen verbloemt, / Wert door het vonnis streng der straffe toegedoemt.' (ll. 1367–75)

³² Akkerman, 'A Spinozistic Perspective', p. 174.

meaning in the continuing interaction between the text, its surroundings, and its readers.³³ As soon as Vondel turns to the language of theology and philosophy, he rejects the Radical Enlightenment emphatically, as is evident from his *Bespiegelingen van Godt en Godtsdienst* (*Reflections upon God and Religion*), a long five-part poem, packed with arguments against the 'ongodisten' (the irreligious) and first published in 1662. It was probably completed as early as 1659.³⁴ From the nineteenth century onwards experts have discussed the issue of whether this text was indeed, as its editor Molkenboer argued, a reply to the budding thought of the young Spinoza.³⁵ I see three reasons for subscribing to Molkenboer's suggestion: (a) the specificity of the equation of God and Nature as criticised by Vondel; (b) our present, increased awareness of the part Franciscus van den Enden played in Spinoza's circle of friends – Vondel knew Van den Enden well; (c) Filippo Mignini's reconstruction of Spinoza's early career as a philosopher – by 1660, it would seem, Spinoza had composed both the (unfinished) *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* (*Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*) and the *Korte Verhandeling* (*Short Treatise*). For now we are, I feel, best advised to consider the *Bespiegelingen* as indeed being a first refutation not so much of Spinoza but of his 'circle' – if the *Bespiegelingen* were indeed completed before the 1660s, it is simply impossible to identify any single author as the leader of the Amsterdam circle of freethinkers that must have been active from the late 1650s onwards and of which both the young Spinoza, banned from the Jewish community of Amsterdam in 1656, as well as his teacher Franciscus van den Enden, were prominent members.³⁶

³³ Korsten, *Vondel belicht*, p. 58; *Sovereignty as Inviolability*, p. 59, and more in general Chapter 1.

³⁴ WB, 9, pp. 406–653.

³⁵ Molkenboer's claims were prepared by De Valk, 'Vondel en Spinoza', and rejected simultaneously by Leemans, 'Vondel en Spinoza' and Zijderveld, 'Heeft Vondel Spinoza bestreden?'. Molkenboer replied in: 'Heeft Vondel Spinoza niet bestreden?', which provoked a final reply by Zijderveld: 'Kanteekeningen bij Prof. Molkenboer's verweer'.

³⁶ Mignini, 'Données et problèmes de la chronologie spinozienne entre 1656 et 1665'. Remarkably, Vondel's intervention is ignored by Gullan-Whurr, *Within Reason: A Life of Spinoza*, as well as by Nadler, *Spinoza*. Besides Van den Enden, one other member of the Amsterdam group of freethinkers active around 1660 also deserves to be mentioned in this context, although he probably did not belong to Spinoza's and Van den Enden's 'inner circle' and is (again) ignored by Gullan-Whurr and Nadler: Jan Pietersz. Beelthouwer. For as early as 1661 he published the crudely pantheist *De Hoogste en Laetste bedenckingen over Godt, en Goddelicke Saken*, and in 1664 he also wrote a pamphlet against Vondel, entitled *Adams Antwoort tegen Joost van den Vondel over Adam in Ballingschap*. See Meinsma, *Spinoza en zijn kring*, p. 243; Zilverberg, 'Jan

Akkerman even feels that Vondel and Spinoza simply must have known each other.³⁷

Since man is by nature endowed with reason, Vondel argues, denying God's existence is as irrational as it is unnatural, although the traditional *a priori* arguments in favour of God's existence fail to convince, since God's essence is beyond our grasp (I, 348). As a consequence, God's existence has to be demonstrated *a posteriori*, that is from His 'work' (I, 367). This, of course, is perfectly in tune with Aquinas, whom Vondel appears to follow closely, for instance where he arrives at the conclusion that God must be considered the 'unmoved mover' of the created universe:

But reason does not permit an infinite regress;
It comes to a halt before the omnipotence of the Mover
Who is never moved: for in the concatenation of things
No thing can set in motion another thing
Except through the agency of a first power, as a staff
Moves a stone through someone's hand: thus we meet
With a Mover who is himself at rest.³⁸

Once God's existence has been established, Vondel feels free to launch his attack on the atheists, who call nature God (I, 521 ff.). Still in line with Thomist tradition, Vondel analyses the various meanings of 'nature'. Firstly, it refers to the essence of substances, secondly to the 'body' of the universe as whole, thirdly to its 'order', and finally to its laws. If God is called Nature insofar as He is considered the first cause of Nature, i.e. '*natura naturans*', no problems need arise. However, as soon as God's natural effects or products are identified with His essence, atheism becomes inevitable (I, 603). God is infinite, Nature is not:

The creator and his work are two, not one and the same:
So the difference between both remains infinite.³⁹

Pieterszoon Beelthouwer (c. 1630–c. 1669) en de joden'; Van Bunge, *Johannes Bredenburg*, pp. 184–87; Bordoli, *Ragione e Scrittura tra Descartes e Spinoza*, pp. 245–56. Beelthouwer also makes a brief appearance in Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, p. 204.

³⁷ Akkerman, 'A Spinozistic Perspective', p. 174.

³⁸ 'Doch reden laet niet toe onendigh voort te gaen; / Zoo blijft men voor de maght des albewegers staen, / Die noit bewogen wiert: want in het ommevoeren / Der dingen kan geen tweede iet anders ommevoeren / Dan door een eerste maght; gelijk de staf een' steen / Beweeght door iemants hant: dus stuit men dan op een' / Beweger, die zelf rust.' (I, 395–401)

³⁹ 'De schepper en het werck zijn twee, niet eenerley: / Dus blijft het onderscheyt oneindich tussen bey' (I, 931–32).

Vondel frequently rebukes classical authors such as Democritus, Epicurus and Lucretius, and some of his arguments hit ancient and modern 'atheists' alike (see the lines in which he criticises the denial of divine providence, III, 43 ff.), but in particular his insistence on the need to distinguish God from his 'effects' (see also II, 234–36) clearly suggest concern about contemporary atheism, especially once he sets out to argue that being an 'unmoved mover' God cannot be understood to have *any* cause, so neither can God be conceived of as *causa sui* (II, 946). The same holds for his explicit defence of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (V, 94). And although there are some passages in which echoes of Descartes can be heard,⁴⁰ Vondel's remarks concerning the impossibility of defining the essence of the soul and of arguing 'mathematically' concerning its immortality do not suggest great sympathy for Cartesianism:

But to show the immortality of the soul merely by the light
 Of reason and nature, as in a view from afar,
 To the understanding, since people's eyes
 Cannot see the soul's essence:
 The gracious reader will forgive me for being
 Brief in my demonstration, so as not to cover this soul-paper
 With sounds that weakly vanish
 And seem more clever than profound.
 The reasoning that is down-to-earth is too crude,
 The proof that slips through your fingers too poor:
 The middle way is sound. In affirming a truth
 So necessary one should observe brevity and clarity
 As far as the nature of the matter permits: for if
 Mathematics were demanded here to make demonstrable,
 Through measurement and number, the nature of the souls,
 Which never, like the body, befell the fate of mortality:
 That would be an error. Let no-one demand from reason
 A clearer day than the matter can naturally give.
 And this satisfies a heart that does not, like those too blind to see,
 Demand tangible evidence, which cannot here be found.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Van Otegem, 'Vondels bespiegelingen over de nieuwe filosofie'.

⁴¹ 'Maer om d'onsterflijckheit der ziele alleen door 't licht / Van reden en natuure, als in een veergezicht, / Te toonen aen 't verstant; dewijl des menschen oogen / Het wezen van de ziel geensins aenschouwen mogen; / Zoo zal een heusche my verschoonen, dat ick hier / Beknopt ben in 't bewijs, om niet dit zielpapier / Met klancken te beslaen, die krachteloos verdwijnen, / En meer scherpzinnigheên dan grontbewijzen schijnen. / De reden is te grof, die laegh langs d'aerde kruipt, / Het grontbewijs te dun, dat door de vingers druipet: / De middelmaet houdt stant. in 't stercken van een waerheit / Zoo noodig, dient gelet op bondigheid, en klaerheit; / Behoudens naer den aert der stoffe:

It is also in the *Bespiegelingen*, and more in particular in the analysis provided in this scholarly poem of the freedom of the will, that Vondel comes closest to answering the question as to how an omnipotent God can allow the existence of evil (II, 1113–22; 1219–36 and IV, 317–27).⁴²

Noah: *Conclusion*

Once Vondel abandons the vocabulary of Scholasticism, however, and starts to reconnoitre the polyphony of possibilities offered by a play, he is able to explore a wider variety of perspectives than the conceptual logic Scholasticism allows for. The outcome of the clash between Nature and Grace is never in doubt. Vondel lived long enough to see the publication, in 1678, of Adriaan Beverland's *Peccatum Originale* (*Original Sin*), in which a rare, explicitly libertine reading of Spinoza inspired the author to propose an interpretation of the Fall, glorifying man's natural desire to have sex.⁴³ We don't know how Vondel reacted to this book; perhaps he never saw a copy. But while he was fully entitled to feel that in his biblical tragedies he had already provided a wholesome reply to this 'Spinozist eroticism', *Noah*, on the other hand, and the character of Urania in particular also suggest that Beverland's views may well have put a smile on his face, if only fleetingly. Being a *great* playwright, Vondel did not shy away from articulating perspectives that he himself was supposed to condemn with such rhetorical panache that until the end of the play, the tension between Nature and Grace remains intact.

In the Dedication to *Noah*, Vondel naturally reinforces the necessity to combat the atheists, including their denial of the historical accuracy of Moses's account of the Flood. Vondel does not merely want to convince them of the error of their ways, he claims, for how could a play

want indien / Men hier de wiskunst eischt, om toonbaer te bediën, / Door maeten en getal, den eigen aert der zielen, / Die noit, als 't lijf, in 't lot der sterflijckheit vervielen; / Dat waer een onbescheit. men eisch' geen' klaerder dagh / Van reden dan de zaeck natuurlijck geven magh, / En dit vernoeght een hart, dat niet, als ziende blinden, / Een tastbre reden eischt, die hier niet is te vinden' (III, 999–1018).

⁴² Konst, ' "Het goet of quaet te kiezen" '.

⁴³ See Elias, 'Het spinozistisch erotisme van Adriaan Beverland'; De Smet, *Hadrianus Beverland (1650–1718)*; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp. 87–88; Leemans, *Het woord is aan de onderkant*, pp. 250–56.

decide a dispute on the early history of the world? He also states it to have been his purpose to picture God's *justice* (Dedication, 73–76.). As it is precisely the justice of God's 'revenge' that is so severely being called into question in *Noah*, it remains to be seen what *Noah* is actually telling us. Perhaps the *Bespiegelingen* offer a clue to the theatrical logic ruling *Noah*, for Vondel's essay in Scholasticism reveals a particular emphasis on the female character of nature. Vondel repeatedly calls Nature 'a woman' (I, 143 and 910) and 'God's daughter' (I, 625). God's power, Vondel continues, produces 'everything' from the 'womb' ['schoot'] (I, 439–41) of nature, which remains passive until 'touched' by God. This is not to say that Vondel employed this scheme consistently in all of his work – in *Adam in ballingschap* (ll. 894–96), for instance, Adam compares Eve to the Moon, following him, the Sun – but both in the *Bespiegelingen* and in *Noah* he does. In *Noah*, there is talk of 'vrou natuure' (l. 214) as well, and Nature is said to have a woman at its helm (l. 793). But it also has, I should like to suggest, a *spokesperson*. For in *Noah*, it is Urania who most consistently speaks out on behalf of Nature's lawlessness, its abundance and the pleasures it procures. It seems no accident, that out of all of *Noah*'s characters, Urania has invariably drawn most attention. In 1864, A.S. Kok felt compelled to call her the most hideous female character ever drawn by Vondel, a 'crude improbability', a 'monstrous exception'.⁴⁴ More recently, Jan Konst called her 'nymphomaniac'.⁴⁵ Schenkeveld-van der Dussen has warned against a misogynous reading of this play, although she too, emphasised the role that Vondel's female characters play as temptresses.⁴⁶

It is true that we are told again and again that Cain's daughters are at the root of the destruction of the first world (ll. 56sq.; 390), and Achiman cries out that 'vrouwenmin' (love of women) lies at the origins of all evil, once he recognises the end is nigh (l. 845). On the other hand, if Nature itself is female, shouldn't we perhaps conclude that in *Noah*'s ultimate shame, it also triumphs in that it proves to be indomitable? This much seems clear: that if human reason, evidently male in its conception, is ultimately unable to account for the reasons God may

⁴⁴ Kok, *Vondel in eenige van zijn vrouwenkarakters*, p. 17: 'een grove onwaarschijnlijkheid; 'een monsterachtige uitzondering', 'de afzichtelijkste vrouwenfiguur [...] die Vondel ooit getekend heeft.'

⁴⁵ Konst, *Determinatie en vrije wil*, p. 20.

⁴⁶ Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, *Vondel en 't vrouwelijk dier*, pp. 16–23.

have had – firstly to allow for the rise of evil, and finally for administering Grace – it remains to be seen who in *Noah* should be deemed the weaker sex. Only if we compare Urania to Noah himself, who is a man of God and therefore not entirely ‘of this world’, she has found her match. Compared to Achiman, who turns out to be a coward and cannot make up his mind for himself, Urania seems definitely superior. At the very end of the play, of course, she begs for mercy as well, for being human; even she has to succumb to the authority of her Maker, but to her credit, she is the *last* of the play’s characters to do so.

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF VONDEL'S DRAMAS (1850–2010)

Jan Bloemendal

Abbreviations

dbnl: De bibliotheek der Nederlandse letterkunde (www.dbnl.org)

KLP: Klassiek letterkundig pantheon

Ntg: *Nieuwe taalgids*

SpL: *Spiegel der letteren*

TNTL: *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse taal- en letterkunde*

WB: Vondel, Joost van den, *De werken: Volledige en geïllustreerde tekstuitgave*, ed. by J.F.M. Sterck et al., 10 vols. (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1927–1940).

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B.1 Studies

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Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 1, pp. 144–53.

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INDEX OF NAMES, INCLUDING CHARACTERS

- Aarssen, François van 245
 Abel 402
 Abiathar 128, 129, 132
 Abishag 40–42
 Abraham 348, 443
 Absalom 5, 130, 132, 434–43
 Achiman 511, 512, 517, 526, 527
 Adam 5, 6, 8, 11, 152, 163, 168–69, 265,
 388, 389, 390, 396, 399, 402, 489, 526
 Adelaert 364–71, 373, 374
 Adonijah 5, 40, 41
 Aeneas 66, 218, 275, 277, 281, 356,
 469, 510
 Aeschylus 236
 African 33–35
 Agamemnon 132, 133, 134, 236, 237,
 238, 241, 245
 Ahinoam 435
 Alexander the Great 149
 Alexander Polyhistor 255n
 Alphen, Hieronymus van 13, 14
 Alva, Duke of 101, 468, 471
 Ammon 131
 Ammonites 130, 411
 Amnon 435, 436, 437, 439
 Amorites 179, 181
 Amsterdam Maidens (chorus in
 Gysbreght) 145, 290, 291n, 296, 305
 Andromache 279, 280, 281–82, 283, 483
 Angel (in *Gysbrecht*) 2, 4, 38, 68, 106,
 159, 169, 275, 294, 300, 310
 Angels (Guardian) (chorus in *Adam*
 Exiled) 152, 153
 Anslo, Reyer 112
 Anslo, Cornelis 214
 Antigone 482, 483
 Apollion 388–90, 394, 516
 Apollo 113
 Aristotle 3, 4, 19, 74, 78, 79, 117, 118,
 142, 249n, 258n, 261n, 267, 345, 351,
 352, 354, 355, 356, 357n, 407–09, 411,
 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 426, 449, 478,
 482, 483
 Poetics 74, 117, 122, 142, 261n
 Politics 258n
 Arminius, Jacobus 58, 59, 88, 228
 Artapanus 255n
 Astyanax 279, 281, 283
 Augustine, St. 38, 94, 95, 220, 355n, 509
 De natura et gratia 355n
 Augustus 249, 473n
 Aurelius, Cornelius 467
 Divisiekroniek 467
 Badeloch 14, 38, 125, 159, 274, 275,
 277–84, 286, 294–98, 300n, 303,
 305–07
 Badings, Hendrik 146n, 167
 Baeck, Laurens 61
 Baeck, daughters of 61, 62
 Baerle, Caspar van *see* Barlaeus, Caspar
 Balde, Jacob 196
 Jephtias 196
 Barlaeus, Caspar 65, 72, 99, 110, 114,
 171, 494
 Barnard, Benno 170
 Bartas, Guillaume Du 55, 56, 81, 253
 La Magnificence de Salomon 55, 253
 Les semaines 56, 81
 Bartjens, Willem 51, 103
 Cijfferinghe 51n
 Batavian women (chorus in *Batavische*
 gebroeders) 470, 473, 474, 482
 Bathsheba 40, 41, 178, 179n, 438, 439,
 440, 443, 444
 Bato 383, 465n, 469, 472n
 Beale 346n, 347
 Becket, Andrew 173
 Trip to Holland 173n
 Beelthouwer, Jan Pietersz. 490,
 522n, 523
 Adams Antwoort tegen Joost van den
 Vondel 522n
 De Hoogste en Laetste bedenkingen
 over Godt 522n
 Beelzebub 403
 Benjamin 257, 258, 262, 264, 324,
 326, 327
 Beremond 127
 Berlage, H.P. 165, 166
 Bethulians (chorus *Hebreeusche*
 heldinnen) 150
 Beverland, Adriaan 525
 Peccatum Originali 525
 Beza, Theodorus, *see* Bèze, Theodore de
 Bèze, Theodore de 95

- Bidloo, Govert 153, 160, 161, 162, 164
 Bijl, Theo van der 167
 Bilderdijk, Willem 510
 Ondergang der eerste wereld 510
 Bilha 324
 Blackwood, Adam 347, 353
 Martyre de la royne d'Escosse 347
 Blaeu, Willem Jansz. 44, 59, 62, 67, 70,
 288n, 491
 Atlas 44
 Zeespiegel 59
 Blijenbergh, Willem van 514, 515, 521
Bloem-Hof van de Nederlantsche
Ieught 176
 Blon, Michiel le 74, 365, 372, 462
 Boom, Dirk 492n
 Botticelli 166
 Primavera 166
 Brahman 439
 Brandt, Geeraardt 10, 57, 59, 61,
 70n, 72, 78, 80, 83, 88, 91–94, 97, 98,
 101n, 227n, 230, 231, 232, 233, 491,
 494n, 499
 Bredero, Gerbrand, 102, 140, 168
 De Spaansche Brabander, 168
 Broer Peter (Brother Peter) 290, 294,
 295n, 300, 305, 307, 308, 310
 Bruyn, Kornelis de 492
 Buchanan, George 78, 117n, 196, 407n,
 411, 422
 Jephthes 78, 117n, 196, 407n, 422
 Buckhurst 346n, 347
 Burgerhart, Nikolaes 465–67, 471–73,
 475, 478, 480–84
 Burgh, Albert 230–31
 Burgon 135
 Busiris 34

 Caesar, Julius 58, 473n
 Cain 402, 511
 daughters of Cain 510, 526
 Calchas 133, 243, 244
 Calderón de la Barca, Pedro 172
 Calom, Jacob Aertsz. 61, 63, 491
 Calvin, Johannes 424
 Camden, William 343
 Annales rerum Anglicarum et
 Hibernicarum regnante
 Elizabeth 343
 Cammaert, Jan Frans 5, 163, 164, 490n
 Campen, Jacob van 2, 68, 69, 76
 Carrion, Louis 216n
 Antiquarum lectionum commentarii
 tres 216n

 Casparius, Caspar 344
 Cats, Jacob 177, 197
 Catullus 60
 Caussin S.J., Nicolas 343
 L'Histoire de l'incomparable Reyne
 Marie Stuart 343
 Charles I Stuart 3, 9, 177, 197, 341, 355,
 356, 357, 383, 394
 Charles II Stuart 80, 474
 Charles V 471
 Cheng Ho *see* Zheng He
 Chongzhen *see* Zungchin
 Christ 12, 21, 25, 40–41, 52–53, 82, 90,
 91, 135, 190, 210, 214–222, 259, 268,
 296, 305, 353n, 354, 355, 357, 358,
 401, 413, 415, 426, 441, 442, 443, 446,
 448, 512, 521
 Christina of Sweden 74
 Christopherson, John 407n
 Iεφθαε 407n
 Cicero 253, 485
 Claudius Civilis 5, 111, 160, 464, 465,
 466, 467, 468, 469
 Coligny, Gaspard de 278
 Coligny, Louise de 278, 279,
 280, 281
 Comines, Philip de 172n
 Constantine the Great 67, 260, 261
 Constantinus VII 349, 350
 Corneille 172
 Cornelison, Adriaen 491
 Coste d'Arnobat, Pierre 313
 Coster, Samuel 59, 105, 140, 145, 236,
 240, 422n
 Iphigenia 236, 422n
 Court, Priest (*Jeptha*) 418–20
 Craanen, Anna 93
 Craanen, Clementia 93, 94
 Craanen, Peter 92, 94
 Craanen, Sara 92, 93
 Creon 483
 Creusa 66, 281, 283
 Crocus, Cornelius 331
 Ioseph 331
 Croiset, Hans 21, 168, 170
 Cromwell, Oliver 3, 72, 341, 353,
 355, 356, 394, 395n
 Cuypers, Hubert 167
 Cuypers, Pierre 16

 Dagon 188, 453, 454, 455
 Dakkamude, Daniel 504
 Damme, Andries van 492n
 Darnley *see* Henry Stuart

- David 3, 5, 40, 41, 70, 118, 128,
129–30, 132, 149, 154, 178, 179,
180, 182, 183, 348, 427–44, 463
- Dedekind, Constantin Christian 177,
188, 190n, 191, 192, 193
Simson 177, 188, 190n,
191, 193n
- Demetrius 255n
- Democritus 524
- Denizens (chorus in *Gysbreght*) 145,
290, 297, 306
- Derkinderen, Antoon 165
- Descartes, René 253, 514, 524
- Diderot 337
- Diedrick van Haerlem 290, 303,
305, 310
- Diepenbrock, Alphons 145n, 167
- Diomedes 163, 237, 245
- Dousa, Janus 171
- Downing 474
- Dudley 347
- Duncan 382
- Dunton, John 172
- Duym, Jacob 344
- Edgar 382
- Edward of Bavaria 341, 354
- Edward 382
- Ephraimites 411
- Egmond (count) 290, 305
- Egmond, widow of J. van 501
- Elizabeth I 3, 71, 72, 135, 184, 185n,
341, 342, 343, 347, 348, 349–50,
354, 355, 356
- Elizabeth 354, 355
- Enoch 402
- Epicurus 524
- Erasmus, Desiderius 59
- Ethiopian women (chorus in
Sofompaneas) 259, 260, 268
- Euboeans and Ithacians (chorus in
Palamedes) 242
- Euripides 5, 6, 9, 69, 117, 236, 240,
244, 249n, 251, 279
Hecabe 279
Iphigenia 5, 117, 249n
Phoenissae / *Phoenician Women* 6,
117, 251
Troades / *Trojan Women* 279
- Eusebius 216n, 255n
Chronica 216n
Preparation of the Gospel 255n
- Eve 5, 8, 11, 15, 163, 166, 168, 170, 265,
396, 399, 490, 526
- Felt, Symon 152n
- Ferdinand III 4, 386, 387n
- Filmer, Robert 389
Patriarchia 389
- Filopaie 5, 407, 408, 409, 411,
414–21, 424
- Fletcher, John 230
*The Tragedy of Sir John van Olden
Barnavalt* 230
- Flinck, Govert 112
- Floris V, Count 125–26, 274, 278n,
290, 345
- Fonteius Kapito 466–67, 471, 472, 473,
474, 481, 482, 483, 484
- Fonteyn, Thomas 504
- Fornenberg, Jan Baptist van 162, 504
- Fracastoro, Girolamo 331
Josephus 331
- Francis II 342, 349
- Francis Xavier 138
- Francq van Berkhey, Le 13
- Frederick Henry 62, 63, 65, 66, 66, 73,
109, 110, 250, 463, 481n
- Fronto 466, 467, 473, 482
- Furies 163, 471
- Gabaonnens *see* Gibeonites
- Gabriel 5, 203, 214, 218, 219–22,
388, 390
- Ganymede 134
- Garnier, Robert 56
- Gaza, King of 453
- Geeraerd van Velsen 125
- Gibeah 149
- Gibeonites 128, 129, 178, 181
- Gijsbreght 14, 38, 125, 126, 137,
157, 159, 169, 274, 275, 277–83, 285,
286, 288, 291, 293, 294, 296–98, 300,
302–12, 314
- Giraldus 60
De re nautica libellus 60
- Gnapheus, Gulielmus 344
- Goliath 463
- Gomarus, Franciscus 58, 228
- Gozewijn 9, 159, 275, 293, 299, 303,
306, 307, 311
- Graeff, Cornelis de 110, 465n
- Graeff, Jacob de 64
- Groot, Gijsbert de 492n, 501
- Grotius, Hugo *or* de Groot 2, 3, 4, 19,
34n, 55, 56, 58, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72,
73, 78, 98, 99, 158, 171, 172, 197, 204,
207, 211–13, 214n, 215, 222, 249–69,
288n, 289, 447, 461, 468, 469, 472,

- 477, 478, 480, 481, 484, 485, 486, 489, 490, 500, 513n
Adamus exul 251, 265, 489
De iure belli ac pacis 250, 480, 481, 485
De veritate religionis Christianae 212
Inleidinghe tot de Hollantsche rechtsgeleertheyd 480
Liber de antiquitate reipublicae Batavae 55, 468, 469n, 472, 478
Remonstrantie 34n, 204, 211–13, 214n, 215, 222
Sophompaneas 2, 67, 249–69, 484
Tractaet van de Oudtheyt vande Batavische nu Hollandsche Republique 468, 472
 Grotius, Pieter 250
 Gryphius, Andreas 177, 178–80, 181, 185, 193, 194, 195, 197
Carolus Stuardus 185, 194
Die Sieben Brüder Oder Die Gibeoniter 177, 178–80
Gelibte Dornrose 194
Leo Armenius 194
Catharina von Georgien 194
Das Verlibte Gespenst 194
 Guarini, Giovanni Battista 74, 364
Il pastor fido 74, 364
 Hadley, Henry K. 167
 Haechtanus, Laurentius 54
Microkosmos: Parvus mundus 54
 Hageroos 74, 364–74
 Ham 511, 515, 516, 517, 519, 520
 Handel, George Frederick 143
 Hans Mathysz. 52
 Hector 279, 281, 283
 Hecuba 237, 241, 280, 483
 Heemskerck, Willem van 149, 150
Hebreusche Heldinne 149
 Heereman 371
 Hegesippus 216n
Verwoesting van Jerusalem 216n
 Heidenreich, David Elias 177, 180–83
Rache zu Gibeon 177, 180–83
 Heinsius, Daniel 4, 19, 52, 53, 60, 69, 78, 171, 176, 197, 239–40, 249n, 276, 279n, 344, 349, 350–51
Auriacus 276n, 279n, 344n, 349, 350–51
Emblemata amatoria 52
Nederduytsche Poemata 176
Quaeris quid sit amor? 52
 Henry VIII 347, 349
 Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley 342
 Hepburn, James 342
 Hera *see* Juno
 Hercules 246, 247, 417, 419
 Herod 37
 Herodias 135
 Hobbes, Thomas 98, 392, 393, 405, 477
De cive 392
Leviathan 392
 Hogendorp, Gijsbrecht van 276n, 278
Truerspel van de moordt 276n, 278
 Homer 235, 244, 272, 279, 483
Iliad 235, 279, 483
 Hooft, C.P. 109, 205–08
 Hooft, Pieter Cornelisz. 13, 53, 57, 59, 60, 72, 108, 109, 114, 125, 139, 140, 141, 172, 175, 202, 239, 240, 276, 281, 344, 382, 468
Baeto 382, 383n, 468
Geeraerd van Velsen 125, 141n, 276, 278n, 279n, 281, 283
Granida 141
 ‘Over de Waardigheid der Poëzy’ 175n
 Hooren, Anna van 421
 Hooren, Simon van 465
 Hoorn, Barend van 148
 Hoorne 471
 Horace 59, 73, 79, 319, 321, 322, 348, 356n
Ars poetica 73, 319, 321, 356n
 Huydecoper, Balthasar 12
 Huygens, Constantijn 72, 99n, 171
 Iëmpsar *see* Jempsar
 Iphigenia 133, 245
 Iphis (Ifis) 4, 130n, 131–32, 137, 407, 409–15, 417, 418, 420, 421, 423, 424, 426
 Isaac 413
 Isabella of Austria 241
 Isis 146
 Israelites (chorus in *Gebroeders*) 105, 129
 Israelites (chorus in *Het Pascha*) 147, 154
 Jacob 37, 249, 257, 258, 259, 324, 326, 327, 334
 James I 230
 James V 342
 James VI 342
 Jan Pietersz. 141
 Japheth 517

- Jebb, Samuel 343
De vita et rebus gestis Mariae Scotorum reginae 343
- Jempsar 322, 325, 328–39
- Jephtah 4, 77, 118, 128, 130–32, 137, 154, 407–26
- Jeremiah 37n
- Jerome, St. 256, 268
Vulgate 256, 268
- Jesus *see* Christ
- Jewish women (chorus in *Samson*) 188, 453, 455
- Jewish women (chorus in *Hierusalem Verwoest*) 202
- Joab 440, 442, 444, 504
- Jochebed 424
- John 82
- Jolles, André 165
- Jonathan 129
- Joseph (patriarch) 2, 37, 67, 158, 160, 194, 249, 250–52, 254, 255, 256
- Joseph (husband of Mary) 93
- Josephus 206, 208, 209, 214, 216, 217
- Josephus, Flavius 206, 209, 216, 217, 255n
Antiquitates Judaicae 206, 255n
Bellum Iudaicum / The Wars of the Jews 206, 216, 217
- Joshua 128–30
- Journal des Sçavans* 509
- Joyce, James 272
- Judah 257, 258, 262, 263
- Julius Paulus 465, 466, 468, 471–73, 480, 483
- Juno (Hera) 417
- Jupiter *see* Zeus
- Justinus 255n
- Keckermann, Bartholomäus 60
- Klaeris 126, 275, 297, 306, 307, 314
- Klaerissen (chorus in *Gysbreght*) 290, 296, 297, 306
- Koer, Arent Arentsz. 140
- Koläus 136
- Koninck, Philips de 83
- Koning, Abraham de 61, 147, 155, 407n, 411n, 412, 418
Achabs treurspel 147, 155
Jephtahs ende zijn Eenighe Dochters treur-spel 407n, 411n, 412n, 418, 426
- Kormart, Christoph 177, 183–87
Maria Stuart oder Gemarterte Majestät 177, 183–87
- Kranen *see* Craanen
- Krul, Jan Harmensz. 140, 153
- Laban 37
- Ladies in waiting (chorus in *Salomon*) 146
- Lairesse, Gerard de 159
- Lamveld, J. 492n
- Lamveld, W. 492n
- Langendijk, Pieter 162, 163, 164
- Langius, Carolus 216n
- Lastman, Pieter 317
- Leah 324
- Lantskroon 364, 366, 367, 371, 372, 375
- Leeuwendalers 364
- Leeuwenhoek, Anthonie 509
- Lensvelt, Frits 166
- Lescaille, Catharine 173
- Lescaille, J. 501n
- Levites 437
- Lieutenant-colonel (*Maeghden*) 127
- Locke, John 253
- Louis Napoleon 14
- Louis XIV 474
- Lucanus 58
Pharsalia 58
- Lucifer 163, 168, 170, 194, 378, 380, 381, 387–90, 392–94, 404, 405, 477
- Lucretius 524
- Luther, Martin 95
- Luyken, Jan 392
Jezus en de Ziel 392
- Lycus 417
- Lykungzus 136, 137
- Macropedius, Georgius 143, 344
- Machteld 274, 277, 279n, 281–83
- Malcolm 382
- Mander, Karel van 52, 53, 56n, 510
Noah 510
Olijfberg, ofte Poema van den laesten dagh 56n
Schilderboek 52
- Mann, Thomas 324, 331
- Maria / Mary 93, 135, 354, 357
- Maria Graeca 350
- Marius, Leonard 71, 96
- Mars 73
- Martinius, Martinus 44
De bello Tartarico Historia 44
Historie van den Tartarischen oorlog 44
- Mary Stuart 3, 9, 71, 134, 135, 183–87, 341–58

- Massinger, Philip 230
 The Tragedy of Sir Johan van Olden Barnavalt 230
 Matenes, Van 245
 Maurice, St. 35
 Maurits of Nassau 9, 32, 35, 58, 59, 62, 90, 108, 109, 133, 162, 206, 207, 208, 228–32, 235, 237, 238, 239, 241, 463, 464, 470, 472, 474
 McFedden, Claron 170
 Medea 416, 417
 Medici, Maria de 110
 Meersch, Israel van der 96
 Megaera 133, 240
 Melville, Herman 482, 483
 Billy Budd, Sailor 482, 483
 Mengelberg, Willem 167
 Menno Simonsz. 96
 Merob 179, 181
 Messenger (*Gysbreght*) 290, 293, 294n, 298, 303, 307–11, 314
 Messenger (*Samson*) 446, 455
 Meursius, Johannes 60
 Michael 163, 164, 390, 400, 401, 402, 403
 Michol 129, 178, 179n, 181, 348
 Milton, John 19, 81, 173, 195, 359, 377–405, 476, 477, 489
 Eikonoklastes 398
 Paradise Lost 19, 81, 173, 195, 377–405, 489
 The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates 398, 399n
 Moerman, Jan 54
 Molière 509
 Lamour médecin 509
 Moor 264n
 Moréri, Louis 171, 172n
 Grand dictionnaire historique 171, 172n
 Morhof, Daniel Georg 171
 Polyhistor literarius, philosophicus et practicus 171
 Unterricht von der Teutschen Sprache und Poesie 171
 Moses 11, 53, 154, 219–20, 221n, 249, 255n, 353n, 424, 463, 509, 525
 Mostert, Daniel 251n
 Muses 113, 486

 Napoleon 14
 Nassau *see* Maurits
 Nathan 438, 440, 441
 Nero 466n, 474, 484n

Den nieuwen verbeterden lust-hof 52, 60
 Neptune 134, 237, 241
 Newton, Isaac 509
 Nieuhoff, Johan 6
 Nieuwelandt, Guiliam van 344
 Nittert Obbesz. 90
 Noah 509–12, 515–18, 520–21, 526, 527
 Noblemen (chorus in *Gysbreght*) 145, 290, 295
 Nooseman, Jan 148
 Nooseman, Jelis 148
 Nozeman, Ariana 322

 Oeax 237, 241
 Oldenbarnevelt, Johan van 2, 9, 32, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 90, 106, 108, 109, 133, 162, 204–10, 225, 227–32, 236–38, 240–42, 245–46, 461, 463, 464, 469, 470, 472–74
 Oosterwyk, Johannes 13, 500
Op de Vereenighing van Apelles en Apollo 113
 Opitz, Martin 176
 Buch von der deutschen Poeterey 176
 Teutsche Poemata 176n
 Orange *see* Frederick Henry, Maurits, William of Orange
 Otten, Marcel 170
 Outshoren, Cornelis van 446, 448, 457
 Ovid 52, 59, 71, 80, 245
 Heroides 71
 Metamorphoses 52, 80, 245

 Padbrué, Cornelis Thymansz. 150, 152, 153, 154
 De tranen Petri ende Pauli 150
 Palamedes 2, 132, 133–34, 163, 225, 230, 231, 235–42, 244–46
 Palmen, Conny 30
 Lucifer 30
 Pao (princess) 137
 Paul, St. 3, 71, 95, 152, 213, 219, 221, 222, 227
 Paulet 346n, 347, 348, 440
 Paulus, Julius 465, 466, 468, 471, 472, 473n, 480, 483
 Pauw, Adriaen 211
 Pauw, Reynier 58, 63, 240, 241
 Peyrère, Isaac La 510
 Pels, Andries 10, 12
 Gebruik én misbruik des tooneels 10n
 Pers, Dirck Pietersz. 52, 54, 55, 61, 320, 491
 Peter, St. 3, 71, 152

- Petrarch 60
 Pisones 73
 Phaeton 161, 170
 Pharaoh (*Sofompaneas*) 67, 256, 258, 259, 267
 Philip II 101, 463, 467, 471
 Philistines 193, 445, 453, 455
Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society 509
 Philo 249, 255n
Life of Joseph 255n
 Plato 428
Gorgias 428
Republic 428
 Plautus 142
 Pliny the Elder 55, 263
Naturalis historia 55
 Pluimer, Jan 160
 Pompeius Trogus 255n
 Pontanus, Jacobus 60
 Potiphar 160, 258, 259, 325, 327–30, 333–35, 337, 338
 Priam 237, 241
 Priests (chorus in *Gebroeders*) 138, 149, 150, 154
 Propertius 60
 Prynne, William 10
Histriomastix 10
 Punt, Jan 159
 Pynas, Jan Simonsz. 317
Jacob being shown the cloak of Joseph 317

 Q.D.C.V. 227, 232

 Rachel 37, 249, 324
 Racine 172, 509
Alexandre le Grand 509
 Ramses 257
 Raphael 2, 68, 106, 159, 167, 169, 275, 283, 290, 294, 299, 300–01, 303, 308, 500
 Reael, Laurens 59, 60, 202n
 Rekers, Guus 21, 168
 Rembrandt ix, 23, 26, 46, 111, 112, 113, 214, 299, 322, 324, 325, 328, 330, 335, 336, 337n, 339, 465n, 493
Night Watch 112
The Oath of Claudius Civilis 465n
 Remond, Florimond 343
Opgang, Voortgang, en Nedergang der ketteryen dezer eeuwe 343
 Reuchlin, Johannes 143
 Riccoboni, Louis 312, 313n
 Ries, Hans de 90
 Ripa, Cesare 320
Iconologia 320
 Rochussen, Charles 165
 Roland Holst, R.N. 166
 Romoaldus Scotus 343, 346, 354n
Mariae Stuartae [...] supplicium et mors pro fide catholica constantissimae 346, 354
Summarium de morte Mariae Stuartae 343
 Roulerius, Adrianus 345–49, 350, 352, 353, 357
Stuarta tragoedia 345–49, 352, 353, 357
 Rooyaards, Willem C. 166
 Royer, Louis 16
 Ruarus, David 501
 Ruben 325, 326, 333
 Rubens, Peter Paul 15, 112
 Ruloffs, Bartholomeus 167
 Ruyter, Michiel de 493

 Salius, Panagius 344
 Salmeus 4
 Samson 5, 190, 445–58
 Sandberg, Jacqueline 166
 Sandrart, Joachim van 112
 Satan 378n, 380, 396–99, 401–03, 441
 Saul 3, 70, 123, 128, 129, 132, 180, 181, 182, 348, 463
 Saverij, Salomon 236, 247, 248
 Schagen 245
 Schall, Adam 6, 138
 Schonaeus, Cornelius 344
 Schuurman, Adriaan C. 146n
 Seneca 1, 2, 9, 19, 34, 56, 60, 69, 106, 122, 140n, 141, 142, 202n, 203, 240n, 242, 251, 265, 266, 279, 281, 283, 344, 347, 348, 408, 416, 417
Hercules furens 240, 417
Hippolytus 2, 19, 106, 117, 251, 265
Medea 417
Phaedra see *Hippolytus*
Thyestes 348
Troades 1, 19, 56, 60, 117, 202n, 203, 239, 240, 279, 281, 283
 Seth 510, 511
 Shakespeare, William ix, 7–8, 46, 172, 173, 222, 359, 382, 399, 450, 490, 491, 492n
Hamlet 450
King Lear 382, 399
Macbeth 382, 399

- The Merchant of Venice* 222
 Shem 512, 517
 Simeon (*Sofompaneas*) 258, 264, 266
 Simonides 321n, 331n
 Simonides, Simon 331
 Castus Joseph 331
 Sisyphus 133, 240
 Socrates 236, 240, 244, 256, 428
 Solomon 3, 5, 40, 41, 75, 440, 444
 Sophocles 2, 3, 5, 6, 19, 69, 70, 117, 146,
 158, 236, 249, 482
 Antigone 482
 Elektra 2, 19, 69, 70, 117, 158
 Oedipus Rex 5, 117, 146
 Trachiniae 6, 117
 Spiegel, Hendrik Laurensz. 103
 Spinoza, Baruch de 384, 429, 490, 509,
 513–15, 521, 522, 523, 525
 Ethica 521
 Korte Verhandeling 522
 Letters 514n
 Principia Philosophiae
 Cartesianae 514
 Tractatus de Intellectus
 Emendatione 522
 Tractatus Theologico-Politicus 429,
 509, 514, 521
 Steendam, Jacob 145n, 490
 Den Distelvink 145n
 Steward (*Jeptha*) 411, 414–20, 424
 Storgê 407
 Storm, Hendrik 58
 Stuart *see* Mary Stuart, Charles
 Stuart, House of 464
 Swaen, Michael de 196
 Sylvester, Joshua 331
 The Maidens Blush 331
 Szymonowicz, Szymon, *see* Simonides,
 Simon

 Tacitus 5, 465–66, 467, 471, 472
 Germania 467
 Historiae 466, 467
 Talmi 435
 Tamar 435, 436, 437, 439
 Tantalus 33, 34
 Tasso, Torquato 67, 81, 82, 364
 Aminta 364
 Gerusalemme liberata 81
 Tempesta, Antonio 464, 465, 473
 Batavorum cum Romanis bellum 464
 Terence 142, 344
 Tesselschade Roemers Visscher,
 Anna 57

 Tesselschade Roemers Visscher,
 Maria 57, 99
 Theocritus 60
 Theodora 350
 Thomas Aquinas 523
 Thomas Franz. 140–41
 Thou, Jacques-Auguste du 343
 Historiae sui temporis 343
Thronus Cupidinis 176
 Tigelinus 474
 Titus 202, 216, 217
 Trojan girls (chorus in *Palamedes*) 241
 Tyndal, Robert 141

 Ulysses 2, 133, 134, 163, 236, 237, 238,
 239, 240, 241, 242, 245, 281
 Urania 8, 511, 512, 515, 516, 517, 518,
 519, 520, 521, 525, 526, 527
 Uriaah 438, 439, 440
 Uriel 163, 393, 395, 403, 512
 Ursula, St. 2, 70, 126,
 Us (chancellor in *Zungchin*) 137

 Vechter 466, 467
 Veer, Pieter vande 491n, 500
 Velsen, Geeraerd van 125, 126, 281
 Velsen, Klaeris van 126, 275
 Velsen, Machtelt van 125, 274, 277, 278,
 279n, 281, 282, 283
 Verboom, Meynarda 11, 490
 Pleyt voor onse eerste Moeder Eva 11
 Vere, Captain 483
 Verhoeven, Robbert 317
 Verkade, Eduard 166, 167
 Verlaine, Paul 166
 Vermeer, Johannes 509
 Girl With a Pearl Earring 509
 Vernulaeus, Nicolaus 344
 Vespasian 217, 474
 Victorijn, Joan 251n
 Virgil 56, 59, 60, 66, 67, 72, 80, 81, 110,
 218n, 272, 275, 276, 302, 348, 356
 Aeneid 66, 72, 81, 218, 275, 276, 277,
 281, 283, 302, 356
 Eclogues 72
 Georgics 72
 Virgins (chorus in *Jeptha*) 146, 154,
 413, 424
 Visscher, Roemer 57, 59
 Vitellius 466n, 474
 Vlaming, Pieter de 64
 Vondel, Anna (aunt) 93
 Vondel, Anna (daughter) 80, 89, 96
 Vondel, Constantijn 66

- Vondel, Joost van den *passim*
Adam in ballingschap 5, 8, 11, 82,
 116n, 119n, 152, 153n, 158, 163,
 164, 166, 167, 168, 170, 175, 251,
 265, 489–508, 510, 526
Adonias 5, 40, 41, 81, 472
Aenleidinge ter Nederduitsche
dichtkunste 73, 103n, 171,
 255, 256n
Altaergeheimenissen 15, 94, 415
De Amsteldamsche Hecuba 2, 56n, 60,
 61, 117, 202n, 239n, 265
Amsteldams wellekost 63
Antidotum 61, 90
Batavische gebroeders 5, 81, 160, 162,
 175, 233, 378, 459–87
Bespiegelingen van Godt en
Godtsdienst 15, 383, 384, 387, 391,
 392, 522, 525, 526
Brieven der Heilige Maeghden 71
Constantinade 67, 82, 261
Decretum horribele 91, 424
Dedicatie aan de jonkvrouwen 52
 ‘Door Een is ‘t nu voldaan’ 55, 56
Faëton 5, 13, 81, 119, 146, 153, 156,
 161–62, 167, 170, 378
Gebroeders 3, 70, 74, 107, 112,
 117, 119, 128, 132, 148, 149,
 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 158,
 177, 178–83, 194, 351, 443, 499,
 502–04, 507
De getemde Mars 73
Geuze-vesper 58, 461
Den gulden winckel 54, 319
Gysbreght van Aemstel ix, 2, 3, 9, 12,
 13, 15, 16, 17, 36, 37, 38, 47, 68–69,
 70, 75, 77, 106, 107, 108, 112, 113,
 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 137, 140n,
 144, 145, 152, 154, 155, 157, 158,
 159, 160, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168,
 169, 170, 251, 271–315, 345, 444,
 491, 499–501, 507, 513n
De Heerlyckheit der Kercke 82
De heerlyckheyd van Salomon 55,
 222n, 253n
De helden Godes des Owden
Verbonds 55, 222n
Fenciaensche 6, 117, 491
Heldinnebrieven 71
Herkules in Trachin 6, 117, 491
Hierusalem verwoest 1, 55, 56, 177,
 201–24, 491
Hippolytus 2, 19, 106, 117, 147, 155,
 251, 265, 266, 491
Hymnus over de scheeps-vaert 54,
 55, 60
Ifigenie in Tauren 5, 117
Inwydinge van ‘t stadhuis t’
Amsterdam 75, 76, 110, 465
Inwyng van den Christen tempel
t’Amsterdam 64
Inwyng der doorluchtige schoole
t’Amsterdam 110
De jacht van Cupido 52
Jeptha 4, 5, 12, 77, 81, 117n, 118,
 131n, 132, 137, 144, 145, 146, 154,
 156, 158, 170, 196, 407–26
Joannes de Boetgezant 81, 82
Joseph in Dothan 3, 166, 167, 170,
 269, 317–40, 345, 494
Joseph in Egypten 3, 146, 155, 269,
 317–40
Jozef in ‘t hof 67, 269
Kinder-lyck 66
Koning David herstelt 5, 81, 119, 129,
 130, 132, 434, 443
Koning David in ballingschap 5, 81,
 119, 129, 130, 386, 434, 437, 438n,
 440, 442
Koning Edipus 5, 117, 147, 156
De Kruisbergh 150
Leeuwendalers 3, 43, 74, 75, 146,
 147n, 155, 164, 165, 170, 194,
 359–76, 462n
 ‘Liefde verwinnet al’ 51, 55
Het lof der zee-vaert 57, 59, 60, 108
Lucifer 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 13, 15, 18, 19n,
 21, 30, 76, 77, 78, 79, 113, 114, 119,
 123, 146, 156, 158, 161, 163, 164,
 166, 167, 168, 170, 172, 175, 195,
 377–405, 491, 510
Lyckklaght aen het Vrouwekoor 67
Maeghden 2, 13, 70, 71, 126, 127n,
 128, 137, 165, 345
Maria Stuart 3, 9, 10n, 71, 74,
 111, 132, 134, 135n, 167, 177,
 183–87, 194, 341–58, 378, 461,
 502, 507
Nieuw-jaars lied 52
Noah 6, 8, 146, 156, 168, 509–27
Oorlof-lied 52
Op den burgher-krijgh der
Roomeren 58
Palamedes 2, 9, 13, 32, 33n, 34, 35, 60,
 61, 62, 63, 106, 108, 132–34, 135,
 146, 155, 162–63, 175, 177, 205,
 209, 225–47, 264n, 461, 462, 464,
 470, 473n, 491, 498, 499

- Het Pascha* 1, 7, 53, 54, 56, 103, 105,
 120, 121n, 147, 154, 155, 177, 201,
 202, 206, 463, 491
Peter en Pauwels 3, 71, 150, 152, 153
Poëzy of verscheide gedichten 73, 155
Roskam 62, 109, 207
Salmoneus 4, 77, 79, 122n, 161
Salomon 3–4, 12, 75, 107, 146, 155,
 158, 163
Samson 5, 81, 163, 177, 188–93,
 445–58
De slapende Venus 83
Stedekroon van Frederick Henrick 66
*Stryd of Kamp Tusschen Kuyscheyd En
 Gelheyd* 61
*Tooneelschilt oft Pleitrede voor het
 toneelrecht* 10, 79
Uitvaart van mijn Dochterken 66
*Verghelijkinghe vande verlossinge der
 kinderen Israels...* 53
Verovering van Grol 63, 81, 82
Verscheide gedichten 72, 201
*Vertroostinghe aan Geeraerd
 Vossius* 66n
Vorsteliicke warande der dieren 55
Zeemagazijn 113
Zegezang 463
Zungchin 6, 28, 82, 136–38
 Vondel, Joost van den (father) 80, 92,
 93, 101, 102
 Vondel, Joost van den (son) 80, 96
 Vondel, Maaïke *see* Wolff, Maaïke de 66,
 67, 89, 90
 Vondel, Sara van den (daughter) 66
 Vondel, Sara van den (mother) 89, 93
 Vondel (sister) 89, 102
 Vooren, Lord 290, 294, 303, 307, 310
 Vorstius, Coenraad 59
 Vos, Jan 77, 140, 158, 423
 Vossius, Cornelia 351
 Vossius, Dionys 66, 69, 351
 Vossius, Gerardus Johannes 4, 65, 66,
 67, 70, 74, 75, 78, 79, 110, 112, 114,
 117, 142, 172, 214, 249, 351–52, 356,
 357, 384
De theologia gentili 384
Institutiones poeticae 74, 117n, 142,
 351–52, 356, 357n
 Vossius, Isaac 69, 510
 Vredegunt 364
 Vrerick 364
 Waerandier (god of the wood) 364
 Walcott, Derek 34, 42
Omeros 34, 42
 Wallenstein 377
 Wassenaar, Nicolaas van 59
 Wees, Abraham de 69, 83, 148, 151, 341,
 461, 491, 500, 502, 503, 504
 Wees, Jan de 492n, 505
 Westerbaen, Jacob 72, 97, 98n, 150
*Kracht des geloofs van ... Joost van
 Vondelen* 98n
 Wild Man 365, 371
 Willebrord 297, 304
 Willem *see* William
 Willem van Egmont 290
 Willems, Jacob, 148
 William of Orange 276, 277, 279, 281,
 283, 344, 351, 462–63, 468
 William II (stadtholder) 75, 383, 394,
 463, 464, 471, 472
 William III (stadtholder) 160, 162, 394,
 474, 478
 William III (king) 16
 Willem Frederik 463
 Willem Lodewijk 239, 245
 Witt, Johan de 464, 473n
 Witte van Haemstee 126, 290, 293n,
 306, 314
 Wittewrongel, Petrus 10, 79
Oeconomia Christiana 10
 Wives of David (*David Exiled*) 439
 Wolff, Maaïke de *see* Vondel, Maaïke van
 de (wife)
 Xuan Zong *see* Yongle
 Yongle 27
Zeeusche Nachtegael 176
 Zeus 4, 161
 Zevecotius, Jacobus 349–51,
 352, 357
Maria Stuarta / Maria Graeca
 349–51, 352, 357
 Zheng He 27, 28, 35
 Zoet, Jan 72, 149, 150, 492
Thimoklea 149
 Zuidam, Rob 170
 Zungchin 6, 28,
 136, 137
 Zweers, Bernard 145n, 167

INDEX OF NAMES OF SCHOLARS

- Abercrombie, Nigel 513n
 Abicht, Ludo 211n
 Adorno, Theodor W. 431
 Agamben, Giorgio 31, 362, 363
 Aikin, John 173n
 Akkerman, Fokke 521, 523
 Albach, Ben 140n, 149n, 157n, 159n,
 160n, 162n, 165n, 166n, 167n, 285,
 286, 287n, 290, 293n, 298, 299, 309n,
 312n, 313n, 500n, 501n, 502n, 504n
 Alberdingk Thijm, Jozef Albert 16,
 145n, 165, 198
 Allen, Don Cameron 509n, 510n
 Allen, Graham 271n,
 Alpers, Svetlana 465n
 Alphen, Ernst van 21, 37n
 Alt, Peter-André 124n
 Amir, Ton 162n
 Ankersmit, Frank R. 39, 40
 Arendt, Hannah 38
 Asperen, Bob van 150n
 Asselbergs, Willem *see* Duinkerken,
 Anton van
 Assmann, Aleida 125n
 Assmann, Jan 331n
 Astell, Ann W. 226n
 Auerbach, Erich 268n, 385
 Austin, John L. 128n

 Bakker, Boudewijn 110n, 384n
 Bal, Mieke 25, 29n, 32n, 42–43, 318,
 319n, 320n, 322n, 324, 325, 330–31,
 334, 336n, 337n, 427n, 432, 438n,
 478n
 Balkin, Jack M., 479, 480n
 Barnouw, A.J. 101n
 Barthes, Roland 271, 498n
 Bataille, George 445
 Baumgartner, Alexander 198
 Bax, M.M.H. 390n, 391
 Beardsworth, Richard 362
 Beckerman, Bernard 303n
 Beekman, Klaus 109n, 231n
 Beer, Taco H. de 198n
 Bekker, Hugo 380n
 Belsey, Catherine 24, 26
 Benjamin, Walter 26, 226, 227, 235, 327,
 332, 336, 337, 338, 339, 447, 455, 457

 Benoy, Peter 168n
 Berg, Willem van den 23n, 164n
 Bertram, Paul 501n
 Bhabha, Homi K. 259n
 Blakely, Allison 34n
 Bleeker, Maaïke 67n, 322n, 323, 324n,
 334n, 335n, 436, 437
 Blijstra, Reinder 493
 Bloemendal, Jan 71n, 74n, 82n, 117n,
 279n, 331n, 342n, 344n, 349n, 351n
 Blok, Marja 113n
 Bloom, Harold 272
 Blumenberg, Hans 26n
 Bolter, J. David 506n
 Bomhoff, J.G. 18, 20, 233
 Borch-Jacobson, Mikkel 357n
 Bordoli, Roberto 523n
 Bornemann, Ulrich 176n
 Bostoën, Karel 120n
 Bot, Jaap 109n
 Böttiger, Carl Wilhelm 197n
 Bouchard, Larry 30n
 Bourdieu, Pierre 273
 Bowring, John 173, 175, 469, 470
 Braak, Menno ter 7, 8
 Brachin, Pierre 326
 Bradford, Richard 398
 Brandt, George W. 107n, 108n
 Brannigan, John 205
 Brennan, Teresa 319
 Brom, Gerard 17, 85n, 96n, 383n, 385n,
 392n, 442n, 512n, 513n
 Bruch, Hettel 493
 Brugmans, H. 109n
 Bruinsma, Henry A. 147n
 Bunge, Wiep van 82n, 514n, 523n
 Burke, Peter 207n
 Busken Huet, Conrad 208, 309
 Butler, Judith 128n

 Calis, Piet 86, 89n, 98n, 101n, 114n,
 208n, 461n, 462, 463n, 512n
 Cardozo, Benjamin N. 460n
 Carlson, M. 286
 Carre, Meyrick H. 427n
 Cerquiglioni, Bernard 496
 Certeau, Michel de 25
 Cohen, Barbara 25n

- Cohen, Stephen 234n
 Cohen, Tom 25n
 Cordes, Rudolf 149n
 Cornelissen, J.D.M. 471, 472
 Cover, Robert 475, 483n
 Cowan, Bainard 336
 Cox, Roger Lindsay 30n
 Craik, Katherine 419, 420n
 Culler, Jonathan 361n, 427n, 429n, 432
- Davies, Gwendolyn 195n
 Davis, Robert Con 261n
 Davis, Tracey 323, 334
 Deleuze, Gilles 26, 40, 359, 360n, 514n
 Derrida, Jacques 269, 359, 361, 362, 363, 375, 428n, 429, 457
 Deursen, A.Th. van 87n, 91n
 Deuss, Bart 289n
 Dietz, Feike 411n
 Diferee, Hendrik C. 173, 174, 198n, 493
 Dijk, Hans van 142n
 Dijk, Harry S. van 175n
 Dijkhuizen, Jan Frans van 195n, 422n
 Dixhoorn, Arjan van 103n, 342n
 Dongelmans, Berry P.M. 492n, 493n
 Drabbe, G.F. 85n
 Dubrow, Heather 234
 Duinkerken, Anton van 15n, 364n, 366n, 372
 Duits, Henk 154n, 233n, 377, 378n, 465n, 472, 473, 474, 478, 479
 Dülmen, Richard van 132n
 Duyse, Florimond van 145n
 Dyk, Harry S. van 175n, 470n
- Eagleton, Terry 362, 492n
 Eco, Umberto 273, 328
 Edmundson, George 195n
 Eisenstein, Elizabeth 497n
 Elias, Johan E. 207n
 Elias, W. 525n
 Erenstein, Rob L. 149n
 Eversmann, Peter G.F. 68n, 293n
 Eyffinger, Arthur C. 478n, 485n
- Fallon, Stephen M. 402
 Ferguson, Robert A. 476
 Ferris, David S. 26n
 Filmer, Robert 389
 Findlen, Paula 45
 Fink, Josef 509n
 Finke, Laurie 261n
 Fischer-Lichte, Erika 115, 116n
 Fish, Stanley 273, 395, 396n
- Flemming, Willi 178n, 194n
 Fletcher, Angus 227n
 Foucault, Michel 27n, 271, 359, 363
 Fredriksen, Paula 94n
 Freud, Sigmund 319n, 433, 448, 449–52, 453, 456
 Führer, Heidrun 196n
- Gaakeer, Jeanne 233n, 460n, 499n
 Gadamer, Hans-Georg 428n, 429
 Garcia Martínez, Florentino 509n
 Geerts, A.M.F.B. 34
 Geertz, Clifford 479
 Geesink, Marja S. 106n, 107n, 158n, 502n
 Gelder, H.A. Enno van 207n, 208n
 Gelderblom, Arie 126n, 359n
 Gellrich, Jesse M. 385n
 Gemert, Guillaume van 176n, 177n, 183n, 194n, 198n
 Gemert, Lia (E.M.P.) van 11n, 20, 130n, 139n, 140n, 141n, 157n, 203n, 278n, 297n, 309n, 359n, 411n, 473, 474, 502
 Gemmette, Elizabeth Villiers 460n
 Genette, Gérard 272
 Gerbrandy, Piet 410, 411n
 Gerritsen, Johan 494n, 498n, 500n
 Girard, René 132, 133
 Goudriaan, Aza 512n
 Graft, C. Catharina van de 342n
 Graham, Joseph F. 254n
 Grant, Michael 213, 219n
 Green, André 449n
 Greenblatt, Stephen 24, 115
 Greg, W.W. 507n
 Gregory, Brad 94n
 Grijp, Louis Peter 139, 140n, 141n, 143n, 144, 145n, 149n, 152n, 153n, 297n
 Groen, Marisa 162n
 Grootes, Eddy K. x, 23, 113n, 117n, 118n, 235n, 317n, 344n
 Grüttemeier, Ralf 109n, 231n
 Gullan-Whurr, Margaret 522n
- Haas, Anna S. de 13n, 160n
 Habbema, Cox 170n
 Habermas, Jürgen 486
 Haerten, Heinz 194n
 Hasselbach, P.B. 301, 309
 Haven, Korneel van der 159n, 501n
 Hechtle, Martha 194n
 Heidegger, Martin 428n, 441n
 Heijer, Jac. 170n

- Hell, Maarten 109n
 Hellinga, Wytze Gs. 112, 113n, 494n, 495, 498n
 Helmers, Helmer J. 172n, 195n, 225n, 232n, 424n
 Hermans, Theo ix, 1n
 Hoekveld-Meijer, Gerda 474
 Hogendoorn, Wiebe 107n, 108n, 313n
 Holly, Michael Ann 323
 Hoogers, Gerard 441n
 Hoppenbrouwers, F.J. 15
 Horst, Carl 336
 Hsia, R. Po-Chia 87n, 211
 Hummelen, Wim M.H. 105, 107n, 292n
 Hunt, Barbara Joan 30n
 Huussen, Aarend H. 210n, 211n, 222, 223n
 Huyssen, Andreas 29n
- IJsewijn, Jozef 349n, 350n
 Ingen, Ferdinand van 178n, 181n, 183n, 188n
 Iser, Wolfgang 273, 478n
 Israel, Jonathan 206n, 211, 228n, 525n
- Jackson, Ken 379
 Jakobson, Roman 252n
 Jansen, Jeroen 255n
 Jardine, Lisa 24
 Jay, Martin 319n
 Jauss, Hans Robert 45
 Johannes, Wilhelm 183n
 Johnson, Barbara 362, 375
 Jonckbloet, W.J.A. 377n
 Jones, Ernest 449
 Junkers, Herbert 194n
- Kalff, Gerrit 202, 494n, 499n
 Kamps, Ivo 230n
 Kant, Immanuel 375
 Kantorowicz, Ernst H. 119n
 Kaplan, Benjamin J. 99n
 Kastan, David Scott 403n, 491, 492n, 506n
 Kemperink, R.M. 231n, 232n, 499n
 Kiedroń, Stefan 177n, 178n, 194n
 King, John 395n
 King, Peter 18, 377n, 379, 389n, 412n, 415n, 418
 Kipka, Karl 184n, 345n, 347n
 Kirkconnell, Watson 191n
 Klausnitzer, Ralf 120n
 Klerk, Cornelis R. de 206, 207, 208n, 209
- Kliman, Bernice W. 501n
 Knappen, Ben 228n, 229n
 Knuvelde, Gerard 202
 Koch, Elke 127n
 Kock, Petra de 170n
 Kok, A.S. 526
 Kollewijn, Roeland A. 194n
 Konst, Jan W.H. 20, 112n, 116n, 120n, 127n, 128n, 129n, 130n, 202n, 277n, 377n, 408, 410, 414n, 419n, 421, 424n, 440, 495n, 525n, 526
 Koppenol, Johan 225, 276n
 Korsten, Frans-Willem 21, 22, 35n, 67n, 86, 115n, 117n, 128n, 130n, 134n, 179n, 264n, 277n, 324n, 356n, 358n, 359n, 360, 366n, 369, 373, 375, 376, 378, 379, 385n, 390n, 391, 393, 409, 411n, 414, 415n, 421, 435, 440n, 444n, 447, 458, 465n, 474, 475n, 477, 484, 494n, 495n, 504n, 515, 516, 521, 522n
 Krispyn, Egbert 180n, 181n, 194n
 Kristeva, Julia 30, 271
 Kritzinger, M.S.B. 394n
 Kuijpers, Erika 102n
- Lachmann, Karl 496
 Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe 445, 452, 456
 Langvik-Johannessen, Kåre 18, 136n, 164n, 179n, 190n, 377n, 490n, 504n, 510n [+ -]
 Leemans, E.A. 522n
 Leemans, Inger 525n
 Leendertz, P. 86n, 91n, 491n, 494n
 Lennep, Jacob van 16–17, 161n, 162, 163n, 164, 201–02, 203, 377n, 490n, 492–93, 498n
 Leuvensteijn, Arjan van 420n
 Levinas, Emmanuel 375
 Levinson, Marjorie 234n
 Lieburg, Fred van 512n
 Littau, Karin 430n, 444
 Loewenstein, David 395n, 397, 401
 Lommel, A. van 89n, 96n
 Louvat-Molozay, Bénédicte 143n
 Luhmann, Niklas 460n
 Lulofs, B.H. 15, 470
 Luria, Keith 95n
 Lützel Schwab, Ralf 127n
 Lyotard, Jean-François 449, 451, 452
- Maljaars, Abraham 276n, 277n
 Man, Paul De 25, 360n, 362, 431
 Marcus, Leah S. 498n
 Markell, Pratchen 38n

- Marnef, Guido 101n
 Marotti, Arthur 115n, 379
 Martin, Henri-Jean 497n
 Mathijssen, Marita 495n, 496n
 McGann, Jerome 23n, 24
 Méchoulan, Henry 207n, 208n
 Meijer Drees, Marijke 133n, 225n, 229n,
 232n, 233n, 360
 Meijer, Fik 216n, 217n
 Meijer, Maaïke 210n, 211, 272
 Meinsma, K.O. 522n
 Melles, J. 86n
 Meulenbroek, B.L. 489n
 Michelfelder, Diane P. 429n
 Michels, L.C. 17
 Mignini, Filippo 522
 Miller, J. Hillis 362
 Mitchell, William J.T. 323, 361
 Mody, Jehangir R.P. 195n
 Molkenboer O.P., B.H. 13n, 17,
 85n, 202n, 209, 491n, 492n, 496,
 509n, 512n
 Moller, H.W.E. 17
 Mooij, Jan J.A. 479n
 Moolhuizen, Jan Jurrien 195
 Moréri, Louis 171, 172n
 Morrison, Toni 34
 Müller, August 195n
 Müller Hofstede, Justus 319n
- Nadler, Steven 212, 213n, 214, 216n,
 515, 522
 Nellen Henk J.M. 98n, 211n
 Nichols, Stephen G. 497
 Nierop, Henk F.K. van 87n
 Noak, Bettina 116n, 119n, 124n, 125n,
 128n, 134n, 184n, 377, 378n
 Noë, Joris 377, 383n
 Noske, Frits R. 150n
 Nyquist, Mary 489n
- Oey-de Vita, Elise 106n, 107n, 158n
 491n, 494n, 499n, 502n
 Opsomer, Geert 168n
 Orwell, George 23
 Osterkamp, Ernst 379n, 390n
 Otegem, Matthijs van 384n, 524n
- Palmer, Richard E. 429n
 Panofsky, Erwin 323
 Parente, Jr., James A. 18, 71n, 275n,
 341n, 343n, 348n, 353n, 355n,
 377n, 421n
 Parry, Graham 395n
- Peeters, Frank 168n
 Pelt, Joke M. van 167n
 Pensky, Max 26n
 Pether, Penelope J. 476n
 Phillips, James E. 345n, 346n, 347n,
 348n, 353n, 431n
 Pieters, Jürgen 24, 26, 46, 55n, 115n,
 205n, 359, 360n
 Plard, Henri 178n
 Plas, Michel van der 198n
 Poelhekke, Jan J. 472n
 Pollard, Tanya 420, 421n, 423
 Pollmann, Judith S. 71n, 88n, 89n, 93n,
 95n, 96n, 342n
 Poole, William 380, 396n
 Porteman, Karel 108n, 112n, 117n,
 158n, 167n, 203, 344n, 461n, 463n,
 465n, 504
 Posner, Richard A. 429n
 Postma, Hugo 113n
 Pott, Clarence C. 194n
 Potter, Lois 226n, 227n, 240
 Poulssen, J. 20
 Powell, John S. 143n
 Prak, Maarten 102n
 Prandoni, Marco 68n, 124n, 275n, 276n,
 288, 309n, 312n, 314n
 Pranger, M. Burcht 30n
- Rademaker ss.cc., Cor S.M. 117n,
 351n
 Ramakers, Bart A.M. 142n
 Rancière, Jacques 362, 363, 431, 432n
 Rappaport, Herman 456n
 Rasch, Rudolf A. 139n, 143n,
 153n, 161n
 Rasmussen, Mark David 234n
 Raymond, Joad 395n
 Rekers, Guus 21, 168, 170n
 Rener, Frederick M. 252, 253n
 Rens, Lieven 19, 194n, 471, 473
 Riccoboni, Louis 312, 313n
 Richards, I.A. 430
 Roegiers, Jan 513n
 Romein, Jan 86
 Romein-Verschoor, Annie 86
 Rooden, Peter van 211n
 Rose, Mary Beth 413
 Rowe, Katherine 410n
 Rowen, Herbert H. 206n
- Sabbe, Maurits 196n
 Savile, Anthony 23n
 Schaeffer, Jean-Mary 29, 226n, 432

- Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, Riet x,
10n, 11n, 21n, 31n, 344n, 360, 375,
376n, 409, 490n, 491n, 494n, 495n,
510n, 516, 526
- Schings, Hans-Jürgen 138n
- Schleiermacher, Friedrich 253, 254
- Schmitt, Carl 441n
- Schoenfeldt, Michael 420n
- Schöffler, Ivo 465n, 467n, 469n
- Scholz-Heerspink, Myra 280n, 386n
- Schöfler, Franziska 115n, 133n
- Schrant, J.M. 15
- Schravendeel, Rogier 164n
- Schuytplot, A.C. 10n, 490n, 492n, 496n,
500n, 501n, 502n, 504n, 505n
- Scott, Joan Wallach 409–10
- Sedgwick, Alexander 513n
- Sellin, Paul R. 462n
- Shapiro, James 222
- Sharpe, K. 226n, 234n
- Sierhuis, Freya 227n, 243n, 323n
- Simoni, Anna E.C. 470n
- Simons, L. 165, 422n
- Skinner, Quentin 45
- Smet, R. De 525n
- Smit, Wisse A.P. *passim*
- Smits-Veldt, Mieke B. x, 31n, 45n, 101n,
104n, 106n, 107n, 109n, 112n, 117n,
157n, 158n, 160n, 162n, 163n, 203,
232n, 235n, 236n, 240n, 274n, 276n,
278n, 292n, 293n, 299n, 312n, 344n,
394n, 461n, 463n, 465n, 495n,
500, 502n
- Sneller, A. Agnes 408, 409, 410, 414,
494n, 495n
- Spaans, Joke 87n, 96n
- Spiertz, M.G. 513n
- Spies, Marijke x, 13n, 18n, 57n, 60n,
76n, 85n, 101n, 104n, 108n, 109n,
117n, 235n, 325n, 359, 360, 463n,
467n, 482n, 493, 495n
- Starobinski, Jean 449
- Stein, Louise K. 143n
- Steiner, George 428, 429n
- Sterck, J.F.M. 17, 89n, 150n, 154n, 208,
209, 502n
- Sterne, Jill 377
- Sternfeld, Frederick W. 139n
- Stevens, Wallace 459n
- Stipriaan, René van 226n, 245, 277n
- Strengholt, Leendert 278n
- Stronks, Els 170n
- Szarota, Elida M. 277n
- Szyrocki, Marian 178n
- Tal, Kali 37n
- Tambling, Jeremy 226n, 227n
- Tanner, Marie 510n
- Tate, Jr, Charles Delmer 489n
- Tex, Jan den 228n, 229n, 238n
- Thomas, Brook 476, 485
- Thys, Walter 196n
- Tilmans, Karin 469n
- Todorov, Tzvetan 29n
- Toulmin, Stephen 480n
- Tracy, James D. 228n
- Uit den Bogaard, Max Th. 474n
- Unger, J.H.W. 232, 490n, 492n, 493n,
496n, 499n, 501n, 502n, 504n, 505n
- Vaeck, Marc Van 494n
- Valk, J. de 92n
- Valk, Th. De 522n
- Valkenburg, Jochem 167n
- Vandervelden, Jos 480, 481
- Väth, Alfons 138n
- Veldhorst, Natascha 139, 140n, 141n,
142n, 143n, 148n, 152n, 153,
154n, 297n
- Venuti, Lawrence 254, 256, 264
- Verheul, J.P. 483n
- Verhofstadt, Edward 194n
- Verwey, Albert 17, 206, 209, 265,
422n, 493
- Visconsi, Elliott 476, 477n
- Vloten, Johannes van 16, 493
- Vollenhoven, C. van 250n
- Vries, T. de 195n
- Waal, Henri van de 111n, 112n
- Walch, Johannes L. 499n
- Walcott, Derek 34
- Wattel, Evert 420n
- Weevers, Theodoor 194n, 445n
- West, Martin L. 496n
- Weststeijn, Thijs 110n
- White, Hayden 39
- Wigmore, John H. 460n
- Wijnman, H.F. 97n
- Winkel, Jan W. te 202, 377n
- Winnicot, David W. 433
- Wiskerke, Evert Matthijs 13n
- Witsen Geysbeek, Pieter G. 14, 15, 461n,
464n, 470, 486, 499n
- Witstein, Sonja F. 117n
- Woerner, Roman 345n, 346, 347n,
353n
- Wolfson, Susan 234n

Worden, Blair 395n, 477
Worp, Jacob A. 99n, 139n
Zalm, Rob van der 165n, 166n
Zijderveld, A. 522n

Zijlstra, S. 89n, 90n, 91n
Zilverberg, S.B.J. 522n
Žižek, Slavoj 433n
Zuckert, Catherine 428n
Zwicker, Steven N. 226, 234n

INDEX OF CONCEPTS, SUBJECTS, THEMES, GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

- abbeys 126, 275, 297, 312
 absolutism 393, 395, 399
 academy 23
 'Achilles' (company) 164, 164n
 act (agency) 45, 70, 118, 130–31, 137,
 184, 186, 188, 328, 329, 335, 378, 403,
 433, 438, 444, 482, 521
 acting (styles of) 78, 140, 143, 159,
 165–66, 183, 244–45, 287, 229, 298n,
 335, 433, 436, 451n
 action 441
 actor 7, 10, 47, 78, 112, 140, 158–59,
 161, 165–66, 286, 286n, 289–90,
 298–99, 309, 312, 327, 357, 412, 436,
 438, 454, 504
 all male cast 140, 289
 company of actors 105–06,
 166–68, 183
 dramatic 181, 298, 336, 337,
 339, 484
aemulatio 78, 203, 203n, 251
 aesthetics 13, 24, 203, 225–26, 226n,
 227, 233, 234n, 248, 303, 308, 321,
 338, 362n, 384, 430, 432, 432n, 470
 affect, *see* emotion
Africa 27, 33–35, 33n, 264, 430
 Africanism 34
agnitio 19, 118n, 249n, 483
 'Aktie Tomaat' 164, 168
 alienation 46, 66, 403, 431
 allegory 9, 32–33, 42, 76–77, 160,
 225–27, 226n, 227n, 230–47, 256,
 280n, 337, 363, 372, 377, 381, 384–85,
 395, 429, 448n, 461, 469, 471, 472n,
 474–79
 allegorical figures 104, 158, 161–62,
 188
 baroque 327, 337n, 338–39
 decoding of 225, 235–46, 385
 function of 32, 43, 204, 225, 226, 248,
 336, 372
 obscurity of 226n, 227
 allegoresis 41
 alliance 216n, 466–68, 483
 ambassador 67, 243, 250, 388n, 474
 ambiguity ix, 325, 329–30, 369, 372–73,
 386, 388n, 395, 428, 516, 521
Amsterdam ix, 1, 7, 16, 17, 51–52, 58,
 63, 75, 80, 101–03, 106, 114, 125, 132,
 224, 230, 280, 280, 292, 504
 artistic and scholarly milieu 8, 63,
 65, 68–69, 73, 75–76, 104–06,
 110–13, 118, 120, 123, 139,
 162, 164, 166, 168, 170, 171n,
 172n, 203, 274, 276, 279, 285,
 491, 492n, 522
 church 9, 64, 71, 87, 89–91, 96, 102,
 126, 41, 358, 437, 499
 citizens/people of 73, 87, 157, 203–06,
 273, 276, 279, 292, 297, 276, 297
 city hall 64, 75–76, 110, 145, 292, 290,
 296, 305, 290, 296, 305, 365, 465
 city virgin 64
 cosmopolitan 102
 downfall of (*Gysbreght*) 2, 124, 275,
 277–78, 302, 304, 309, 315
 elite 4, 9, 62, 110, 165
 immigrants 33, 101–02
 Jews 208–16, 522
 magistrates 63, 65, 68, 71, 77, 109
 mediaeval 106, 124, 157, 159, 274,
 292, 299
 mercantile 102, 103, 64, 65,
 politics 62–63, 65–66, 75, 109–10,
 160, 207–08, 210, 231, 240, 341,
 446, 463, 465n, 472, 499n, 502, 504
 prosperity 64, 76, 108, 208, 275, 308
 Theatre, *see* Schouwburg
 tolerance 2–3, 250
 university and schools 51, 56,
 65, 103–04, 110, 117, 351, 394,
 495, 502n
 Anabaptism 90, 101, 147
 anachronism 23, 25–26, 25n, 34, 42–45
anagnorosis 483
 analogy 202n, 210, 230, 317, 379, 402
 angel 4, 10–11, 15, 21, 38, 66, 76–77,
 146n, 152–53, 163, 219, 286, 300
 arch- 25, 68, 76, 106, 159n, 169, 203n,
 218n, 275, 283, 294, 512
 antagonism 367
 anthology 15, 52–53, 172, 469–70
 antinomy 18
 antropophagy *see* cannibalism

- Antwerp** 1, 44, 51, 54, 65, 92–93,
101–04, 241, 319, 481n
- apology 15, 79, 347, 352
- aporia 362, 376
- apostasy 311, 353
- apostrophe 180
- appropriation 42–45, 123, 252, 256
by Vondel 59, 237, 249, 266
- architect 68, 76, 165–66, 384, 462n,
511, 610
- argumentation
in text 3, 36, 129, 133, 158, 212, 227,
236, 242, 260, 282, 336, 390–92,
390n, 397, 435n, 440, 481
through text 98, 111, 116, 120, 330,
379, 381, 383, 384, 390, 395, 398,
404, 524
- Arminian, *see* Remonstrant
- art 5, 12, 23n, 24, 29, 31, 34–35, 42, 59,
69, 71, 78–79, 111, 113, 144, 166, 174,
236, 301, 317–19, 319n, 322–23, 330,
3337, 383, 386, 429–34, 431n, 433n,
442, 451n, 492
as skill 253–56, 265
- artificiality 433
- atheism 523–24
- audience 3, 11, 65, 69, 77, 107, 119, 122,
138, 140–41, 160, 166, 180, 188, 203,
216, 218, 222, 254, 256, 264, 273, 275,
279, 286, 300, 302–03, 309, 312, 314n,
326, 38–86, 408, 412, 414, 434, 446,
456, 462, 478, 501
experience of 118, 144, 157, 160,
166–68, 184, 284, 299, 302, 327,
357–58, 407, 409–10, 420, 422,
450–51
influence on 122, 142, 265, 276–77,
280, 286n, 424
modern 17–18, 46–47, 287, 289, 295,
300, 309,
participation of 116, 334–35, 349,
408, 411–12, 421n, 436–38
on stage 5, 77–78, 114, 218, 434
taste of 108, 158, 162–64, 181,
- auditorium* 285, 451, 107
- authority, -ies 4, 22, 71, 73, 75–76, 87,
88, 97, 99, 103, 109, 179n, 208, 211n,
227, 257, 283, 372–73, 379–83, 386,
388–89, 392–95, 399–404, 450, 463,
471, 473n, 478, 497, 527
as (municipal) magistrate 65, 76, 80,
101, 105–06, 108–10, 114, 465
- author(ship) 22, 29, 69, 86, 102, 116,
154, 164, 171, 171n, 172n, 177, 194,
198, 205, 216, 226, 232, 235, 250, 255,
260, 266, 271–72, 331, 353, 355n,
366n, 440n, 460, 462, 492n, 496, 509,
509n, 522, 524, 580
anonymity of 64, 227, 514
death of the 271
authorial intent 21, 252, 262, 272,
291, 318, 336n, 343, 360, 360n,
361n, 375, 387, 421n, 430, 436, 459,
465, 473n, 478–79, 494–97, 499,
502, 507, 514
- autonomy 124, 195, 399, 431, 431n,
459, 515
- Babel (tower of) 272n, 243n, 269
- ballet 140, 143, 161, 163–64
- banning 4, 9, 79, 110, 214n, 522
- baptism 52, 82, 91, 93, 96
adult 89–90
- baroque 15, 18, 42, 46–47, 165, 176–78,
226, 226n, 324, 327, 337, 337n, 339,
353, 357
- Batavian 5, 111, 160, 464–78, 466n,
480, 486
myth 463, 465n, 467–69, 467n, 469n,
475, 477
Republic 15, 468n, 470
- Belgium** 166
- berecht* *see* preface
- Bible 11, 22, 26, 41, 388n, 394, 438, 442
dramatization of 1, 3, 5–8, 11, 13, 15,
56, 75, 77–79, 80, 82, 158, 160, 177,
182–88, 338, 377–78, 384, 386,
407–08, 407n, 412, 525
Hebrew, *see* Tanakh
interpretation of 53–54, 61, 90, 213,
216, 252, 386n, 429
as source of faith 61, 71
subject matter/theme 2, 10, 13n, 37,
53, 56, 77, 79, 107, 110, 116,
158–60, 194–96, 209–10, 212, 249,
249n, 251, 260, 266–67, 325, 383,
421, 434n, 435, 510
typology 385–87, 403, 462
- binary opposition 359, 361, 362, 366,
369, 373, 410
- biography 10, 61, 82, 85, 91, 101n, 207n,
232, 486, 514
- body 57, 135, 137, 144, 193, 294,
298–99, 332, 348, 422–24, 435,
523–24
gendered 124, 124n, 418, 420, 444
inscribed/violated 124–25, 137,
369–74, 453

- and language 115–31, 420–21, 420n, 452
 representation of 33, 115–31, 327
 political 133, 182
 socio-cultural 28, 31, 44, 363, 431, 457, 481
- brother 2, 5, 69, 89, 129, 149, 160, 221, 237, 249, 256n. 263, 267, 269n, 275, 294, 435–37, 466–67, 469n, 471–73, 482
 half- 5, 41, 62, 109, 257–60, 324–26, 345
 -in-law 134, 516
- Brabant** 1, 64, 65, 93, 103, 104, 105–06
- Brazil** 463
- bucolic 365
- burgomaster ix, 58, 64, 69, 73, 75, 77, 80, 106, 109–11, 154, 158, 206–07, 223, 240, 465
- Calvinism 9–10, 58–59, 61, 64–65, 72, 79, 87, 91, 96, 108, 158, 206, 208, 210–11, 228, 230, 274, 358, 402, 421–25, 493, 512–14
- cannibalism 33, 134–35
- Catholicism, *see also* conversion 2–4, 6, 9–11, 12, 14–15, 16–18, 44, 65, 68, 70–72, 72–73, 74, 85, 87, 89, 92–97, 99, 100, 101, 111, 119, 134, 145, 145n, 150, 152, 153, 158–59, 165, 167, 184, 197–98, 275, 276n, 321, 341–43 341n, 342n, 344–45, 347, 347n, 349, 351n, 353, 356–57, 363, 363n, 378, 380n, 381, 407, 410, 421–23, 426, 493, 500, 513
- censorship 227, 230n, 231, 451
- Chamber of rhetoric, *see* rederijkers
- chaos 392, 398, 517
- chance, *see* fate
- character 9, 10, 13, 40, 70, 112, 128, 138, 161, 192, 235, 242, 265, 277, 278, 286, 291, 293, 322, 326–28, 339, 353, 365, 436, 440, 444, 445, 450, 471, 481, 489, 504
 attire, *see also* costume 26, 78, 107, 112, 162, 298–99
- critical responses to 118n, 130n, 202, 277, 277n, 357n, 372, 408–09, 411n, 526
- comparison between 134–35, 137
- exemplary/symbolic 5, 22, 32–33, 41–42, 118, 121, 144, 240–41, 278–79, 280–83, 325, 334, 356–57, 378, 394, 414, force field between 116, 124–25, 133–35, 303, 310–11, 408, 410, 418–18, 426, 443, 525
 group of 140–42, 202, 290, 297
 and historical figure 206, 216, 235, 239, 245–46, 260, 350–51, 474
 (inner) conflict of 18–19, 21, 75–76, 119, 122, 306, 310–11, 352, 357–58, 408, 450–51, 481–83
 number of 181–88, 286, 288n, 289–90, 312
 presence on/off stage 122, 293n, 298, 300–02, 304–08, 500
- child(ren) 8
 of Amsterdam 66, 157, 288
 of Bethlehem 37
 Christ child 52, 296, 305, 443
 of God 389, 390, 463
 grand- 416
 in plays 37, 130, 137, 181–82, 257–58, 267, 275, 280–82, 294, 308, 326, 355, 364, 415, 417, 422n, 424–25, 518
 in Vondel family 60, 89, 92, 96, 102, 107, 260
- China** 6, 27–28, 43–44, 44n, 136
- choice 96, 118, 119, 137, 168, 349, 467, 482, 483
 confessional 86–89, 89n, 96–99
 of reading 21, 226, 234
 scholarly 24, 40, 225–26, 334, 429, 459, 494–95, 499, 500, 506, 507
 of subject 69, 116–17, 209, 342, 372,
- Chorus 20–21, 33, 36–37, 138, 157, 159, 161, 167, 181, 188, 241–42, 247, 248, 259–60, 262, 264, 268, 280, 296, 297n, 305, 314, 348, 350–51, 353–55, 354n, 365–67, 371, 373–74, 389–91, 404, 413, 415, 416, 424, 426, 440, 453, 455, 470, 470n 473–74, 498, 512
 function of 20, 44, 149, 296, 346
 intervening in the action 424
 and music 140–54, 348, 389
- Christianity 31, 36, 38, 43, 44, 94, 98, 204, 223, 260, 267, 372, 373, 383
- Christmas 2, 36–38, 124–26, 144, 145n, 157, 274, 295–98, 302, 305
- chronicle 125, 404
- church 33, 67, 82, 89, 90, 94, 96, 105, 220, 293, 295, 354, 422
 -council 9, 10, 68, 77, 109, 236n
 (Roman) Catholic 9, 36, 38, 41, 44, 71, 89, 92, 97, 99, 261, 343, 344, 348

- (Dutch) Reformed 10, 51, 58, 87–88, 89, 145n, 154n, 207, 513, 228, 274, 514
intermediary role of 422, 512
New Church 120, 125, 126, 275, 280
public/state- 86–88, 207, 208
Remonstrant 64, 97
temple as allegory for 41
- city-council 51, 62–64, 101, 109–10, 114, 207–08, 210, 274
- classical antiquity 1, 2, 4, 43, 52, 56, 61, 69, 106, 107, 109, 110, 116, 146, 162, 172, 231, 236, 237, 239, 231, 242, 244, 249n, 254, 263, 264, 281, 373, 427, 485, 524
heritage 6, 14, 29, 31, 32, 33–34, 43, 44, 56, 59, 60, 63, 67, 69, 73, 117, 143, 164, 198, 237, 255, 260, 348, 373, 434, 466, 476
- classicism (*see also* poetics) 12, 14, 68, 159, 250, 277
neo-classical 18, 501
- close reading 11, 20, 325, 362, 427–44, (427–37, 443–44)
hermeneutics of 429
semiotics of 432
- code 21, 271, 273, 276, 346, 385, 433
decoding, *see* allegory
- collective 132, 138, 179, 318, 323, 327, 328, 330, 340, 431, 432
memory, *see* memory
- Cologne** 1, 51, 70, 86, 92–93, 101, 103, 111, 126–27, 319, 341, 502
- colonialism 32
- comedy 30, 43, 142n, 351, 361, 363, 366, 455
tragicomedy 74
- comic 344, 363, 374, 375
- commentary 15, 16, 138, 278, 285, 495
- community 38, 52, 55, 57, 61, 71, 87, 88–91, 100, 101, 104, 108, 132, 133, 134, 176, 211, 273, 439, 480, 522
- confession 86, 87, 95, 258, 273,
culture of 88, 91, 100
multi-confessional 99, 197
- conscience 91, 97, 100, 222, 257, 403, 422, 482–83
freedom of, *see* freedom
- constitution 36, 183, 318, 452, 475, 494–96
- context x, 2, 16, 24, 29, 30, 31, 35, 36, 38, 45, 82, 86, 142, 174, 179n, 180, 183, 197, 203, 205, 210, 223, 224, 253, 254, 256, 259n, 265, 273, 288, 318–19, 320, 323n, 359–60, 381, 393, 405, 407, 410, 421, 422, 424, 431, 436–37, 475, 483, 486, 494n, 495n, 496, 497,
- contingency *see* history
- contract(ual) 336, 378, 382, 397, 480, 481, 481n
- convention 21, 105, 147n, 233, 234, 239–44, 271, 273, 276–77, 280, 284, 287, 289–300, 314, 360n, 405, 457, 475
- conversation 67, 74, 92, 97, 98, 213, 217, 279, 281, 295, 297, 347
with the dead 24
- conversion 2, 9, 15, 24, 67, 71–74, 71n, 85–99, 86n, 111, 119, 153, 197, 204, 211, 213–14, 217, 220, 223, 260, 264, 279, 281, 287, 295, 297, 320, 322, 341–42, 324n, 347, 349, 353, 363n, 369, 374, 380, 397, 461, 499, 500
-narrative 94–95
- copyright 62, 460
- costumes 165–66, 105, 107, 159, 253, 158, 298–99, 68, 78, 287, 290–91, 312, 314, 454
- Covenant 510
Ark of 149, 504
Old 550
New 220–22, 268
- Creation 81, 163, 389, 403, 463, 512, 514
story of 56, 195
- culture 15, 46, 59, 60, 86, 87, 88, 264n, 273, 276, 278, 324, 327, 342n, 373, 384, 452, 479, 485
and nature 361
and politics 234, 486
of reading 103, 225, 226, 226n, 234, 248, 251, 254, 256
-text 272, 282, 283
- cultural analysis 317–40, 317, 319n, 323–24, 339, 434
- cultural studies 115, 462, 479
- daughter 4, 57, 61, 66, 77, 80, 89, 92, 93, 96, 126, 130–31, 133, 137, 154, 170, 202, 202n, 245, 278, 349, 351, 364, 365, 407–08, 407n, 412, 414, 417, 418–19, 422–23, 426, 435, 510, 526
grand- 365, 374
in-law 511, 516
Vondel's 66, 80, 89, 96
- deacon 55, 57, 88, 90
- debut 2, 68, 152, 158, 170, 274, 514, 514n
- deconstruction 22, 23n, 359n, 361–63, 366, 375, 395, 431–32, 498, 508

- décor 167n, 287, 292, 299
 cost of 4, 68, 299
- dedication 4, 70, 74, 76, 112, 137,
 206, 208, 251, 289, 317, 325, 365,
 365n, 372, 386, 386n, 387, 443n,
 446–47, 457, 462n, 465, 466, 505, 510,
 525–26
 letter of 341n, 354, 489, 494, 500, 501
- dénouement 12, 118, 158, 268
- destruction 1, 56, 194, 202, 202n, 218,
 241, 447, 455, 516, 526
 self- 115, 124, 128
- detail 5, 16, 20, 22, 53, 80, 85, 195, 196,
 216, 216n, 228n, 237, 238, 322, 327,
 346, 398, 431, 432, 434, 434n, 442,
 446, 469, 478, 500
- deus ex machine* 275, 283, 286, 300
- devil 82, 163, 378n, 380–81, 395–96,
 398–405, 441, 453, 482
- dialogism 31, 271, 360n
- dialogue 14, 28, 31, 157, 183, 188, 190,
 192, 202, 240, 241, 246, 277, 281,
 311, 330, 346n, 347, 351, 375, 399,
 453, 511,
- dichotomy 124, 135, 225, 366, 515
- didacticism 15, 19, 56, 79, 80, 82, 120,
 182, 184, 193n, 197, 353, 372n, 408
- différance* 361
- difference 89, 454, 507
- director, *see* performance
- discipline 87, 123, 517
 interdisciplinarity 459–60, 460, 475,
 477–78, 478n, 479–80, 485
 multidisciplinarity 460
 scholarly x, 252, 359–60, 459–61,
 478, 479
- disharmony *see* harmony
- distribution 40, 431, 493
- doctrine 88–89, 91, 134, 380, 424, 513
- dogma 18, 79, 86n, 347n, 426
- dominion 133, 136, 137, 389, 396, 468
- drama x, 1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11, 19, 20, 68, 76,
 78, 79, 86, 92, 107, 108, 110, 112, 113,
 114, 115, 116, 119, 120, 122, 125,
 125n, 126, 131, 132, 134, 136, 139,
 142, 152, 153, 154, 157, 162, 165, 166,
 171, 178, 188, 193n, 233, 238, 244,
 260, 269, 273, 276, 279, 285, 286, 287,
 289, 291, 292, 295, 300, 301, 309, 310,
 312, 315, 335, 336, 342n, 344, 358,
 382, 383, 384, 393, 396, 450, 451,
 472, 491
 biblical 5, 6, 11, 56, 75, 78, 158, 188n,
 349, 377–78, 384, 407
 Christian 2, 18, 30, 41, 70–71,
 178, 421n
 closet- 153–54, 187
 historical 7, 9, 276, 281, 344, 472
 Greek 1, 3, 106, 117, 142, 143, 144,
 281, 357
 Latin 56, 67, 78, 106, 140n, 142, 143,
 260, 281, 346, 348, 351, 356, 357,
 416, 423
 lyrical 160, 164
 liturgical 142
 melo- 159, 160
 psychopathic 450–51
 satirical 243, 243n,
 school (Neo-Latin) 10, 117n, 142,
 344, 356, 357
 theory of 4, 12, 21, 117, 118, 287,
 301, 302, 302n, 303, 303n, 309,
 335–36, 411
- dramatisation 2, 70, 77, 79, 205, 275,
 276, 353, 407, 445, 448, 455, 461, 476
- dramatist 6, 21, 70, 72, 118, 104, 105,
 115, 116, 122, 141, 162, 168, 175, 177,
 191n, 192, 240, 344, 352, 407n
- dramaturgy 163, 285, 287, 445
- dream 66, 74, 125, 190n, 257–58, 263,
 274, 277–78, 300n, 305, 321, 324, 325,
 328–30, 433
- Dutch
 Academy (Nederduitsche
 Academie) 105–07, 110
 East India Company 44, 58
 history 15, 55, 85, 101, 106, 227, 241,
 274, 275, 276, 282, 287, 319n, 352,
 382, 469, 470, 471, 472, 477
 language, 8, 12, 15, 18–19, 46, 55,
 102–03, 116, 173, 173n, 176,
 196–97, 202, 285–286, 301, 314,
 345, 468
 Provinces, 228, 344, 463, 467, 469, 484
 Republic, *see* republic
 Revolt 4, 54, 93–94, 104, 275, 377,
 381, 471
- ecumenical 343
- edition 2, 4, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17–20, 31n,
 52–55, 73, 78, 79, 103n, 106, 107, 139,
 162, 165, 172, 178, 183, 196n, 198,
 201, 201n, 206, 206n, 231, 236, 240,
 247, 249n, 288n, 343, 346, 346n, 347n,
 349n, 386, 396n, 407n, 426, 468n,
 490–508, 510n
 ‘Eglentier’ 104–05
 Eighty Years’ War *see* war

- elect 215, 216n, 398
 elocution 9, 344
 emblem(atic) 52, 54, 202, 212, 226n,
 261, 280, 319, 320n, 322–23, 325,
 325n, 331, 333, 338, 340, 385, 385n,
 386n, 468
 emotion 81, 160, 182, 185, 238, 239, 240,
 262, 327m 328, 340, 357, 407, 408,
 411, 415, 416, 421, 426
 control of 413, 417, 418, 419, 420,
 effect on audience 70, 123, 312–13,
 331, 407, 408, 410, 412
 empathy of audience 118, 334, 408,
 410, 412, 426, 477
 excessiveness/moderateness of 278,
 282, 283, 407, 408, 409, 410,
 412, 413, 414, 416, 417, 418, 422,
 423, 424
 and gender 407, 410, 413, 416, 417,
 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 424
 and language 13, 157, 420n, 499n
 purgation of 118, 122, 408 409–10,
 414, 418, 419, 422–23, 424
 emperor 471
 Chinese 6, 27–28, 44, 136–38
 Holy Roman Emperor 4, 386, 386n
 Roman 76, 202, 217, 249, 260–61, 349
 empress 137–38
 engagement 108, 461–62, 462n
 engraving 54, 107
 enemy 126–27, 133, 136–37, 150, 157,
 160, 207, 217, 239, 245, 274–77,
 280–81, 292, 294, 297–98, 305, 307,
 312–13, 393, 417, 461, 490
England 9, 71, 74, 79, 81, 134–35, 143,
 171–72, 174–76, 185n, 195, 226, 226n,
 230, 342, 346, 347n, 349, 353, 377,
 382–83, 394, 398, 405, 413, 461
 Enlightenment 521–22
 entr'act 141, 161
 epic 63, 81–82, 276, 283, 352n, 356, 402,
 475, 476
 classical 66, 110, 235, 279, 280
 Christian/biblical 67, 69, 80, 81,
 82, 260
 distancing 298
 poem 55–56, 82, 220n, 278, 301,
 352, 356
 epigram ix, 110, 112
 epistemology 430, 478
 eroticism 52–53, 60, 369, 374, 525
 ethic 53, 55, 104, 184, 240, 344, 385, 399,
 401, 424
 etymology 256, 258, 264, 456
 eulogy 259, 365, 470
Europe 43, 64, 117, 173–74, 196–97,
 210, 320n, 331, 344, 363, 381, 430, 510
 European culture ix, x, 14, 19, 31, 44,
 45, 60, 116, 143, 171, 250, 264n,
 320, 366, 421, 444, 462, 484–86
 and Other 27, 32, 34, 34n, 35
 Unity 485
 after Westphalia 405
 evangelism 53
 evil 3, 8, 19, 52, 75, 79, 82–83, 119, 121,
 123, 163, 220, 250, 257, 259, 261,
 352–56, 379, 398–99, 416, 456, 482,
 490, 510, 512–16
 exchange *see* trade
 execution 132–33, 145, 177, 181,
 183–87, 197, 236–37, 244–45, 313,
 342, 346, 348, 355, 371, 383, 394, 471,
 473n, 520
 exile 67–68, 88, 92, 94, 159, 193n, 250,
 274–75, 284, 302, 308, 313n, 348n, 383
 existentialism 18
 experience 26, 85, 90, 94–95, 118, 124,
 126, 132, 157, 175n, 213, 273, 278–80,
 284, 286, 320, 362, 376, 380, 384–85,
 496n, 402–03, 408–10, 422–23, 438,
 450–52, 456, 469, 471, 476
 expression 13, 29, 63, 64, 71, 76, 108,
 120, 128, 149, 172n, 173, 285, 311,
 476, 491
 of emotion 11, 410–11, 414, 417, 420,
 424, 499n
 faith 1, 9, 52, 54–55, 61, 70–71, 80, 87,
 89, 90, 93, 96–99, 120, 134, 145, 159,
 166, 184, 211–13, 222, 244, 252, 283,
 342n, 347, 348, 348n, 350–51, 402,
 405, 421n, 422, 424, 428, 443, 454,
 500, 518
 fall 161, 216, 218, 344
 of angels 4, 10, 27, 76, 163, 380, 397,
 489, 490
 of man 4–6, 11, 380–81, 389, 393,
 395–96, 399–405, 489–90,
 512–13, 516
 pre-/postlapsarian 381, 389, 393,
 395–404
 of Troy 56, 137, 278–79, 305
 fallacy
 affective 432
 intentional 430
 fanaticism 63, 77, 110
 family, *see also* Vondel 63, 126, 159, 166,
 169, 216, 217, 237, 239, 259, 265, 281,

- 282, 283, 284, 302, 304, 333, 415–16,
419, 454, 511–12, 515–16
- fate/fatum** 8, 20, 30, 32–33, 52, 66–67,
79, 83, 125, 137, 146, 190, 198, 239,
261, 277–78, 280–83, 326, 348, 353,
364, 369, 371, 374, 411, 414, 416, 418,
461, 471–72, 521, 550
- father** 132–33, 137, 153, 161, 170, 173n,
193, 257, 258, 263, 264, 267, 278, 283,
314n, 317, 324–26, 342, 349, 390, 410,
411, 418, 434, 511, 516, 517, 520
allegorical 73, 372, 383, 388, 389,
476, 492,
caring 179n, 181n, 217, 221, 238
father/son paradigm 81, 272, 327,
439–43
fore- 56, 295n, 394, 469n
foster 361–70
grand- 415–16
Vondel's 52, 80, 92–93
Vondel as 80, 81, 96, 102, 114
- fatherland** 1, 53, 73
- feeling**, *see* emotion
- feminism** 11, 21, 319n, 408–09, 431
- feudalism** 388
- Flanders** 6, 65, 103, 167, 490n
- fleeing** 38, 47, 275, 283, 439, 441
- Flood** 509–12, 516, 520–21, 525
- focalization** 332
- foreword** (*berecht*), *see* preface
- forgiveness**, *see* mercy
- formalism** 233
historical 234, 234n
- frame** 29, 31, 39, 40, 41, 42, 95, 273, 278,
283, 289, 325, 327, 330, 340, 375, 391,
396, 432, 437, 442–43, 458
- France** 60, 67, 81, 143, 171–72, 175–76,
195–96, 342, 349, 355, 481n
- freedom** 59, 65, 79, 101, 110–11, 160,
163–64, 175n, 205, 208n, 320, 372,
395, 398, 400, 4512n, 464–67, 471–75,
481n
academic 65
of conscience/religion 65, 87, 88n,
89n, 259, 463
poetic 244
of the will 119, 124, 348, 514, 525
of worship 64, 87, 91
- friendship** 367, 368
- Fronde** 381
- future** 2, 29, 36, 38, 73, 101, 106, 109,
118, 124, 127, 134, 137, 138, 149, 162,
174, 178, 210, 235–36, 237, 258–59,
267–68, 275, 278, 280, 281, 303, 308,
372, 383, 389, 402–03, 440, 444, 453,
457, 515, 516
- Galenic medicine** 419, 420n
- garden** 65, 388, 516
- Geist** 428
- gender**, *see also* power 99, 124, 124n,
273, 278, 282–84, 289, 324, 359, 367,
407–10, 413, 416–18, 421, 424, 425,
434, 444, 490
- Geneva** 97, 172n
- genre** 54, 69, 71, 74, 81, 95, 104, 112,
113, 234, 242, 243, 247–48, 249,
276, 278, 319, 351–52, 356–57, 363,
383, 424
- Germany** 143, 197, 198
- Ghent** 15, 176, 349, 407n
- God**, *see also* nature 130, 131, 411, 437,
443, 500
all mighty 8, 22, 70, 513–14, 525–26
atemporal/infinite 402–04, 523–24
causa sui 523–24
design/plan/providence 8, 54, 137,
138, 218, 260–61, 268, 441, 500,
514, 520, 524
excessive/violent 132
Father 257, 348, 348n, 350, 397, 443
and mankind 8, 95, 131, 149, 216n,
221, 421–22, 424, 443, 489, 511
incomprehensible 70, 216, 259, 520,
526–27
judge, punishing 56, 91, 203, 250,
400, 402, 511, 520
mercy, *see* mercy
's revenge 209, 215, 220–21, 257, 260
rhetorical use made of 238, 243, 438,
440
source of justice 19, 22, 70, 182, 213,
220, 390, 399, 402, 520–21, 526
sovereign 21–22, 71, 76, 82, 129, 131,
168, 180, 214, 220, 222, 348, 355,
381, 382, 388, 396, 399, 402, 521
- god**, *see also* pagan 33, 73, 77, 141, 146,
212, 397, 424, 441, 453–54, 516–17,
520–21
classical /mythological 43, 134, 153,
161–62, 243
- Gomarists** *see* Remonstrants
- Gouda** 344
- government** 2, 3, 47n, 62, 71, 76, 230,
257–58, 378, 380, 381, 383, 400, 405,
463, 467, 468, 467–69
municipal 62–64, 109–11, 231
- governance** 186, 191

- Grand Pensionary 2, 32, 58, 108,
461, 464
execution of 9, 62, 106, 109, 133, 162,
204–05, 209, 225–32, 228n, 229n,
238, 240–41, 245
guilt 5, 8, 11, 89, 121, 130, 132, 138, 180,
185n, 393, 437
- Haarlem** 104, 150, 157, 292
Habsburg Empire 88, 94, 363
The Hague 61, 72, 103, 164, 229, 231,
344, 461, 474, 506
hamartia 4, 118, 482
harmony 65, 132, 144, 163, 166, 173n,
351, 363, 366–68, 374
heaven 4, 18, 54, 66, 77, 81, 82, 106, 124,
136, 147, 348, 387–88, 397, 520
as décor 4, 10, 77, 79, 158, 159, 161,
162, 163, 167
as state 4, 168, 180, 182, 185n, 186n,
215, 216n, 219, 220, 379–80,
388–94, 397, 404
theatre of ‘heaven’ 293, 300
hendiadys 262
hermeneutics 85, 272, 360n, 429, 448,
476, 478, 479
’s-Hertogenbosch 65–66, 344
hero 3, 5, 15, 28, 35, 42, 66–67, 75, 97,
118, 125, 130, 145, 147, 159, 162, 192,
193, 210, 218, 230, 236, 240, 242, 275,
280, 286, 341, 352, 354–57, 364, 378n,
393, 413–14, 416, 417, 443, 445, 450,
450n, 453, 456, 497
heterogeneity 223
heuristics 22, 139, 144, 154, 478n
historicism 359
historism 39
New Historicism 24, 25, 31, 35, 115,
201, 204, 224, 234
Old Historicism 24, 359n
historiography 25, 27, 225, 227, 244,
255n, 478, 480
history x, 8, 56, 65, 67, 70, 71, 79, 93,
119, 123, 126, 174, 212, 234, 272, 327,
379, 387, 497, 499, 512
and anachrony, *see there*
Christian/sacred 41, 224, 249, 269,
385, 386, 393, 394, 395, 402, 403,
435
chronology 26
contingency 28, 35
human/secular 8, 70, 379, 385,
387, 393, 395, 402, 403, 404, 443,
521, 526
incoherence of 39, 45
as narrative/story 25, 29, 39–41, 434
making of 27–28, 32, 35, 37, 359
open/closed 36–38, 275, 385, 402,
403, 404, 440, 441, 443
and preposterousness 29, 42–44
present 25, 26, 28, 35, 38, 45
recorded 25, 27, 359
and relativism 27, 39, 359
subject of/ subjected to 278
tradition 32–35, 138, 320, 428
transcendence 28, 30–31
- Holland** 1, 5–6, 14, 55, 58, 65, 71, 75,
90, 102, 103, 109, 111, 125, 133, 159,
162, 172, 173, 173n, 204, 210, 211,
225, 229, 241, 250, 274–75, 285, 383,
394, 461, 463–65, 467, 468, 470, 490
home 4, 65, 80, 87, 101, 103, 130, 165,
240, 250, 309, 365, 465n
for the elderly 68
honor 442
house 52, 59, 96, 105, 130, 218n, 317,
325, 326, 333, 417, 418, 439, 466, 477
house of 129, 131, 180, 182, 186, 221,
438, 440, 441, 464, 472
household 62, 89, 267, 326
- Hulst** 167
humanity (mankind) 119, 129, 138, 179,
354, 446
humanism ix, 18, 58, 68, 69, 108, 110,
133, 143, 249, 249n, 269, 272, 341,
343–47, 351, 352–53, 356–57, 361,
375, 407n, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431,
459–61, 467, 478
hymn 145, 146, 147, 155, 159
hypocrisy 109, 215, 218, 243,
378, 454,
- iconography 322–23, 327, 340, 499n
iconology 320, 323, 323n
idealism 205, 323n
art as expression of 29
identity 20, 215, 218, 258, 339, 356, 369,
402, 462, 485
and difference 367–68
idolatry 75, 188, 220, 223, 470
illustration 16, 52, 159, 165, 169, 205,
223, 270, 433
image 121, 179n, 242–43, 243n, 256,
260, 280n, 301, 313, 313n, 327, 330,
337–38, 357, 385n, 393, 399n, 412,
414–17, 421, 424, 441, 448
of Christ/God 131, 389, 415n
-poem- 112

- and word 54–55, 315, 317, 319–23,
319n, 320n, 321n, 339, 386
- imitation (literary) 12, 70, 105, 116n,
252, 255, 272, 349, 350, 354n, 389
of Christ 52, 358
- immigrant 1, 53, 101–02, 104, 462
- inalienable 65, 388, 394
- independence 460, 468, 518
- infallibility 15, 97–98
- injustice, *see* justice
- innocence 238, 262, 335, 347, 347n, 352,
354–55, 396
- inscription, *see* body
- interest 6, 13, 17, 18, 21, 23–25, 27–28,
31–32, 34, 44–47, 62, 65, 85–86, 88,
94, 98, 106, 109–10, 112, 117, 122,
127, 174, 177, 186, 197–98, 208, 212,
234, 258, 272, 277, 321, 328, 360, 366,
370, 379, 385, 409, 431–33, 444,
461–62, 469–70, 477–78, 480–82, 490,
492, 498, 510–11
common 108
- interpretation, *see also* Bible 4, 11,
18–26, 42, 78, 82, 90, 153, 168, 212,
231, 242, 243n, 246–48, 250n, 252,
254, 271, 276–77, 286, 287, 300n, 303,
314, 318, 325, 328, 342n, 344, 359,
361, 366n, 375, 376, 378–79, 414n,
416, 419, 422, 422n, 424, 429, 459,
462, 464, 469, 469n, 471, 472, 475n,
476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 483, 495, 510,
515, 525
- intertextual(ity) 252, 271–84, 287–88
intertextual horizon 273
horizontal 30, 42, 204, 271, 280
as influence 42, 204, 272
paratext 206n, 288n, 387, 389, 392
- invention 45, 122, 124, 227, 232,
351, 497
- inviolability 4, 76
- irony 268, 278, 437, 460
tragic 268, 278
- Jansenism 513
- Jesuits 6, 10, 44, 60, 96, 138, 196, 198,
343, 355, 513
- Jews 1, 37, 41, 53, 98, 170, 188, 202,
204–06, 209–11, 212–18, 216n, 218n,
220–24, 255n, 267, 327, 353, 445,
453–55, 522
Sephardic 210–11, 216,
Jewish faith, *see* Judaism
- journal 17, 460
- Judaism 31, 213–14, 223
- judge/judgment, *see also* God 97, 130,
180, 237, 273, 335, 347n, 393, 415,
455, 461
Oldenbarnevelt's 58, 228–29, 231, 241
- justice 5, 57, 70, 76, 81, 88, 91, 153, 163,
203, 209n, 215, 257, 328, 336, 340,
342n, 352, 446–47, 455, 460, 470, 471,
473, 475, 481, 482, 483
- injustice 81, 88, 347, 350, 353, 357,
471, 516, 520
- katèchon* 440–41, 441n, 444
- katharsis* 118, 351, 357, 419
- king 75, 76, 101, 118, 127, 128, 129, 130,
132, 134, 149, 154, 161, 181n, 180,
185n, 220, 237, 265, 267, 341, 342,
348, 349, 355, 381, 382, 388, 396, 401,
435, 442, 453, 467, 474
representing god 187, 389
legitimate 396, 453, 454
representing god 187
- knowledge ix, 4, 56, 65, 69, 73, 74, 114,
115–16, 138, 197, 239, 255, 258, 292n,
383, 409, 481n
and art/drama/literature 29, 115–16,
120–23, 319, 321, 338, 428–34,
452, 521
disciplinary 15, 459–61, 479, 485
Tree of 399
- lament 66, 77, 141, 152, 262, 278–79,
280n, 296–97, 306, 350–51, 364, 399,
411n, 412, 421n, 466, 517
proleptic 279
- language 56, 116, 171, 319, 320n, 485
arbitrariness in 429, 429n
artificiality of 25–26, 321, 361, 375,
427, 428, 429
Dutch, *see there*
materiality of 25, 116, 131, 379,
428, 430
and power, *see there*
purification of 103, 232
and referentiality (*res & verba*) 253,
320, 427, 427n, 428, 429, 432
as rhetorical instrument 122–23, 129,
238, 239, 323, 344, 351, 362, 428,
428n, 433, 436,
style ix, 12, 13, 14, 18, 158, 173, 238,
242–43, 286, 303, 383, 420, 420n,
446, 459, 470, 494
translation 8, 18, 254–55, 345
- Latin, *see also* drama ix, 1, 2, 54, 56, 60,
63, 65, 69, 96, 103, 117, 196, 239,

- 294n, 251, 252, 255, 259n, 262–65, 263n, 269, 329, 331, 343–45, 353, 356, 506
 Neo-Latin, *see also* school drama 2, 63, 65, 67, 78, 173, 176, 196, 252, 255, 260, 276, 231, 345–46, 484, School 56, 103, 142–43
 law 8, 15, 121, 127, 211, 251n, 461
 divine/earthly 22, 67, 135, 163, 180, 183, 390, 394, 399, 401, 403, 439, 446, 448n, 455, 514, 523
 inside and outside of 395, 451, 475
 lawless 401, 441, 516–17, 526
 and literature 459–86
 Mosaic 213, 218, 219, 221, 222, 249, 447
 natural 21–22, 40, 186, 250, 392, 415, 481, 523, 526
 of poetry 289, 352, 357n, 457
 positive 459
 rule of 443, 446, 453–54, 457–59, 462–63, 474, 476, 483, 484
 source of 395, 447, 453, 457, 459, 485
 study of 460–61, 475–78, 480, 484–86
 and violence 447–49, 453, 455, 456, 457, 458
 legality 446–47, 453
 legend 2, 111, 127n, 285, 322
 legislation 223
 legitimacy 124, 128, 129, 184, 342, 356, 380, 387, 389, 394, 398, 400, 402, 446, 447, 458, 473n, 482
 illegitimacy 125, 128, 135, 349, 350n, 356, 394, 441, 516
Leiden 15, 17, 52, 55, 58, 60, 65, 110, 176, 178, 349, 493, 512
 'Leliebloem' 163
Leuven 55, 344
 liberation 1, 53, 296, 305, 463
 liberty, *see* freedom
 life world *see* world
 linguistic turn 25
 lineage 186n, 304, 368, 510
 literary epistle 71, 206, 208
 literature, *see also* law ix, 42, 226, 272, 404, 459–86
 European/Western 35, 196, 272,
 history of 15, 18, 19, 36, 56, 81, 96, 174, 202, 272, 276, 359, 359n, 360–61, 430, 470, 476–78, 480, 493
 and reality 115, 175, 176, 234, 244–45, 484
 renaissance 23, 34, 73, 81, 175–78, 195, 197, 226, 226n, 240, 244, 276, 360, 462, 468, 469, 476, 477
 secondary 86, 117n, 124n, 225n, 288, 395n, 427n, 445, 461
 world- 175, 197, 505
 love 13, 13n, 36, 47, 51, 60, 79, 127, 186, 190n, 218, 231, 448, 492, 518
 brother/sister 435
 child/parent 327, 407, 414–16, 424, 440, 440n, 443, 518
 God/mankind 52, 54, 348, 443
 woman/man 8, 15, 38–39 126, 296, 306, 324–25, 328, 330–35, 364–65, 370, 373, 438, 526
Low Countries 1, 24, 51, 101, 142, 143, 344, 359n, 424, 462, 468, 477
 Northern 3, 66, 102, 163, 363n, 364–65, 372
 Southern 1, 3, 53, 66, 93, 101, 102, 104, 163, 241, 349, 363n, 364–65, 372, 481n
 loyalty 100, 131, 265
 lyric(al) 60, 110, 155, 157, 160, 164–65, 174, 177, 188, 202, 242, 301, 309
Maastricht 65, 481n
 magistrate 2, 62–63, 65, 68, 71, 77, 90, 109, 111, 250, 398, 502, 504
 of Amsterdam, *see there*
 manipulation 27, 36, 428, 428n, 436
 martyrdom 3, 47, 70, 71, 93–94, 126–27, 165, 184, 275, 297, 347, 347n, 355
 mask (*persona*) 33, 132, 251, 326, 335, 428, 428n, 435
 mass 2, 9, 10, 68, 108, 154, 167, 172n, 173, 274, 295
 materialism 392
matière de Troy 278, 280
 melancholy 57, 59, 62, 66, 90, 133, 320, 517, 519
 melody 139n, 144–47, 152, 352n
 memory
 as act 29, 29n, 38, 330, 331
 collective 8, 38, 126, 285, 330, 331, 452
 communicative 331, 340
 Mennonite 1, 51–62, 78, 85, 87, 89–96, 100, 101–02, 108, 120, 222, 229n
 menorah 149
 merchant 65, 104, 206, 513
 mercy 137, 178, 181, 257, 437, 453, 473–74, 481, 512,
 God's 19, 55, 91, 119, 138, 212, 217, 259, 354–55, 391, 404, 422–23, 520, 527
 messenger 257, 290, 293, 294n, 298, 303, 307–08, 309–11, 326, 350, 388

- speech 257, 263, 293n, 310, 314, 314n,
 442, 446, 455
 messiah 213, 218, 448n
 metaphor 43, 125, 192, 245, 248, 332,
 365, 368, 374, 384, 387, 419, 435n,
 437, 439, 462
 metonymy 23, 263
 metre 141, 188, 297, 351
 alexandrine 63, 81, 183, 192,
 261–62, 420
 anaapestic 262
 iambic 261n
 Middle Ages 68, 102, 226n, 427,
 429, 447n
 millenarianism 214
 mise en scène 289, 293, 296, 298, 312,
 314, 324, 326, 332, 334–35, 339,
 436–39, 451–52, 454
 misogyny 526
 modern ix, 4, 16–22, 31, 34, 46–47,
 53, 56, 60, 63, 101, 139, 141n,
 376–77, 413, 431, 450, 494–96,
 506–07, 524
 early modern xi, 94–95, 98, 107, 115,
 119, 210n, 123, 126, 132, 139,
 142–43, 410, 415n, 419, 420n, 424,
 461, 477, 496, 497, 506, 507, 510
 post- 26–27, 31, 42, 427, 432, 498
 monarch, *see* king
 monastery 157, 291–92, 295, 303–05,
 310, 312, 500
 monologue 14, 133, 178, 183, 187,
 202–03, 206, 209, 214, 216, 217, 237,
 238, 242, 348, 360n, 375, 453, 500
 monotheism 372–73
 moral(ity) 3, 53, 54, 59, 87, 108, 118–19,
 123, 129, 140, 158, 184, 205, 208, 235,
 240, 242, 340, 344, 352, 382, 384,
 386–87, 386n, 469n, 473–76, 481–83,
 511–12, 521
 mother 40, 91, 179n, 181, 181n, 216,
 277, 281–82, 326, 354, 357, 407–15,
 407n, 424–25, 435, 440, 444, 467, 482,
 516
 -church 71
 foster- 179n
 grand- 342n
 -tongue 176
 Vondel's 52, 89–90, 92–93, 104
 motto 51, 55, 56, 302, 319, 320n,
 366, 504
 municipal orphanage 68, 105
 music/musicians 139–56, 160, 166, 167,
 188, 290, 297, 297n, 371, 504
 classical 46
 composer/composition 142–43, 145n,
 148–50, 152–54, 167, 188
 instrumental 140–41, 148, 150, 167,
 291, 297, 504
 as metaphor 173, 368
 on stage 77, 139–56
 vocal (chorus) 140, 144, 147–48, 150,
 167, 290, 297, 504,
 -al instruments 140–43, 148,
 313n, 504
 Muslim 28
Münster 74–75, 90, 164, 363, 363n, 372
 myth 4–5, 34, 52–54, 63, 76–77, 81–82,
 133, 160–62, 231, 235, 237, 263, 368,
 373–74, 380, 382, 404, 416–17, 447,
 457, 476, 478
 mythology 4, 34, 52–53, 63, 237
mythopoesis 476

 narrative 39, 63, 82, 98, 241, 277, 324,
 328, 352, 356, 374, 380, 395, 396, 403,
 435n, 446, 476, 478
 and arguments 36
 and dramatic action 303, 309–12
 foundational 463–67, 468, 469n,
 477–78
 narrativism 39
 natality 38, 38n
 Nativity 124, 126
 nation 14, 15, 67, 87, 369, 464
 cultural 85, 175, 211, 213, 222, 476
 political/state 175, 363, 374–75,
 409, 460
 nature 120, 123, 170, 192n, 193n, 361,
 368, 392, 438, 442–43, 524–25
 and art 73
 divine 372, 384, 415, 464, 481
 equivalent with God 522–23
 harmonious/instable 368, 375,
 515–22, 526
 'Nederlandse Comedie' 168
Netherlands, *see* Low Countries
 New Critics 430–31
New York 167
 nobility/noblemen 4, 125, 265, 274, 364
 nomadic 39–41
 nominalism/realism 427n

 objectivity 410, 459, 470
 obscenity 457, 460
 ode 51, 65, 75, 113, 161
 choral 147, 148, 354n
 ontology 339, 384, 428–30
 opera 143, 170, 331
 oracle 34, 161

- Orange, House of 9, 53, 62, 66, 133, 276, 344, 351, 394, 463–64, 468, 474, 477
 Orange plays 277–83
 Orangists 394, 474, 479
 oratory/oratorio 123, 150, 165
 order 22, 42, 89, 111, 369, 378, 383, 404, 475, 517, 521, 523
 divine/earthly 384–95
 symbolical 329
 legal 443, 446–47, 457–58, 463
 orthodox *see* religion
- pagan 217, 351, 372–73, 476–77, 453–56
 pain 4, 35–38, 47, 129, 179n, 181n, 214, 280, 282, 396, 418, 422–23, 450
 conversion- 85
 infliction of 37–38
 love- 328–65
 painter (schilder) 52, 59, 73, 76, 79, 111–13, 159, 165, 255, 255n, 317, 317n, 319, 322
 painting (*schilderij*) 26, 46, 52, 75, 83, 107, 107n, 111–13, 159, 191n, 317, 319–39, 321n, 365, 384, 393, 464, 465n, 507
 pamphlet 9, 11, 72, 97, 225–26, 229, 230, 232, 238, 243n, 346, 353, 377, 394, 499n, 522n
 panegyric 76, 110, 275, 352
 pantomime 77, 293, 294, 306–07, 311–12, 314, 314n, 423
 paradise 91, 153, 163, 168, 173, 397, 401, 489
 paradox 1, 2, 30, 383, 392, 401, 421n, 456, 460, 478, 483
 paralipsis 366
Paris 67, 168, 250, 347n, 559
 passion 3, 8, 20, 70, 79, 118–19, 191n, 238, 242–43, 248, 253, 259, 275, 279, 317, 321, 325, 328, 329, 333, 345, 364, 367, 376, 400–401, 407, 412–13, 417, 419–21, 424, 518–19
 of Christ 93, 353
 passion play 164
 pastoral 60, 74, 164, 361, 365, 366, 372
pathos 240, 314n
 patriarchy 42, 130, 272n, 330, 389, 405, 431, 443
 patriarch 249, 251, 268, 389, 415, 443, 511
 patriotism 14, 345, 468, 492
 peace 40–41, 54, 62, 76, 129, 217, 258, 359, 363, 365, 367, 378, 391
 desire for 57, 61, 65, 67, 73, 196, 108–09, 111, 365, 483
 negotiations 58, 66, 228
 versus war 365–75
 of Westphalia 3, 73–75, 164, 363, 372, 462n, 465n
 penance 54, 87, 422, 437
 performance/staging of play 103, 105–06, 107, 123, 132, 140, 144, 149, 152, 153, 157–70, 194, 269, 274, 285–86
 (role of) director 183–84, 289
 and music, *see there*
 opposition against 108, 159, 236n, 274
 in relation to printed version 230n, 231, 233
 production 165–68, 285
 performativity 115, 115n, 116, 125, 128
peripeteia 4–6, 19, 74, 118, 122, 249n, 483, 490
 philology 176, 498, 361, 375
 classical 496–97, 506–07
 material/new 496–97, 506–07
 philosophy 18, 25, 27, 29, 46, 57, 59, 65, 123, 193n, 240, 319n, 347n, 360n, 392, 417, 432–33, 487, 509–27
 play, *see* drama
 poetry 8, 12, 16, 51, 53, 56, 60, 63, 64, 66, 73, 98, 102–03, 108, 117, 142, 171, 175n, 231, 272n, 289, 319, 321n, 382, 384, 388n, 394, 453, 462, 492
 epic, *see there*
 epinicial/laudatory 63, 64, 110, 206, 492
 occasional 61, 75, 80, 82, 83, 110, 126, 160
 poetics 19, 25, 117n, 118, 142, 171, 351–52, 407–09, 414, 419, 421–25, 421n, 434
 polemics 2, 110, 229, 341, 466
 politics 38, 51, 61, 69, 108, 109, 124, 197, 208, 228, 235, 239, 244, 250, 286, 344, 430, 432, 471
 and aesthetics 225–26, 226n, 234, 234n, 248
 and religion 45, 115n, 365, 377–404
 polytheism 372–73
Portugal 34, 211
 positivism 204, 329n, 359, 360, 360n, 459, 496
 postcolonial 27, 259n, 431
 post-humanism 431
 postmodern 26–27, 31, 42, 226, 376, 427, 432, 498
 poststructuralism 271, 272n, 279, 359, 361, 363,

- potentia* 515, 517, 521
potestas *see* power
 power 9, 11, 28, 40, 58, 62, 76, 109,
 115–16, 123–24, 126–36, 168–69, 177,
 186–87, 207–08, 218, 237, 243, 258,
 259, 277, 348, 348n, 373–75, 378–404,
 388n, 468, 470, 485–86, 523, 526
 of art 46–47, 70, 122, 128, 152, 165,
 201, 315, 339, 412, 421, 423
 economic 65, 76, 77, 114, 176
 and gender, 128–37, 409–10
 and language 116, 128–37, 128n,
 399, 423
 military 463–64
 to record 27, 32, 38
 struggle 3, 40–42, 109, 133, 441
 predestination/*preordinatio* 88, 209, 228,
 421, 424
 double 91, 424
 preface 12, 22, 40, 73, 77–79, 106, 112,
 117, 118, 120, 141, 144, 146, 185,
 216n, 235, 244–46, 251, 253, 255,
 352–53, 387, 411, 414n, 415, 420, 423,
 440, 443, 446–48, 455, 457–58,
 492–93, 501n
 prefiguration 40–41, 385–86
 figure 385
 pre-/postlapsarian, *see* fall
 priest 19, 33, 41, 70, 92–93, 96–97,
 127–28, 132, 138, 148–50, 154, 202,
 214, 216, 220, 237, 243, 264, 278,
 345–46, 364, 416, 418, 419–20, 422,
 504, 513
 prince 77, 125, 127, 190, 383, 388–89,
 388n, 412
 of chamber of rhetoric 64, 104
 of Orange, *see* *there*
 of poets 7
 printed text 1, 4, 6, 12, 13, 58, 59, 61, 62,
 69, 77, 78, 95, 105, 106, 111, 141, 142,
 142n, 143, 145, 146n, 147n, 159, 162,
 173, 178, 210, 221, 341, 342n, 343,
 343n, 345, 357, 434, 491, 494n, 496,
 500, 500n, 301, 504, 505
 and performance 491–92, 498,
 501, 504
 reprints 8, 13, 77, 150, 231, 319, 320n,
 492, 493, 501, 505
 privilege 87, 100, 259, 389, 399n, 471
 procession 103–04, 150, 164, 190
 prologue 161, 180, 274, 279n,
 310, 414
 property 182, 186n
 prophecy 2, 37, 53, 106, 134, 149, 216,
 218, 242, 257, 259, 263, 266, 268, 277,
 303, 305, 387, 393, 395, 402, 438,
 440–43, 511
 propaganda 1, 3, 51, 71, 95, 115,
 347n, 353
 protagonist 4, 18, 19, 35, 41, 74, 117,
 118, 249, 250, 258, 260, 266, 275, 277,
 280, 348, 349–57, 408, 422, 428, 446,
 450, 460, 482
 prosperity 14, 41, 68, 101, 107, 108, 208,
 212, 268
 Protestant 2, 10, 14, 56, 60, 77, 85, 88,
 93, 95, 98–99, 134, 321, 341, 341n,
 343, 344–45, 348–49, 351n, 352, 356,
 363, 380n, 381, 404, 423–25
 providence, *see* God
 Provinces, *see* Dutch
prudentia 344
Prussia 275
 psalm 145, 145n, 147, 147n, 155, 255n
 public opinion/debate 15, 68, 164, 342n,
 357, 462
 publisher/-ing house 2, 4, 10, 11, 13, 44,
 52, 54, 61, 62, 63, 70, 83, 111, 135, 236,
 319, 341, 461, 491–507
 punishment, *see also* God 5, 6, 9, 41, 81,
 121, 137, 180, 182, 214, 227, 257, 274,
 283, 398, 453, 454, 466n, 521
 purgation, *see* emotion
 psychoanalysis 319n, 431–33, 445–58
- Qur'an 325, 327–28, 338
- Raadspensionaris, *see* Grand Pensionary
 racial prejudice 34n
 Radical Enlightenment 521–22
 rape 38, 125–26, 274, 314, 343, 338, 371,
 373–75, 435–36, 439
 rational/reasonable 57, 63, 119, 133,
 181, 211, 238–40, 243, 362–63, 373,
 392, 400, 402, 413–20, 421n, 424, 467,
 469, 482, 515, 523–26
 irrational 133, 523, 373
 reader ix, x, 4, 11–12, 16–18, 20–21, 28,
 39–40, 51n, 95, 116, 119, 123–24, 138,
 202, 209, 211, 216n, 225–27, 235–42,
 245–46, 250–51, 254, 264, 271, 273,
 276, 278, 280, 282, 283, 318, 321–23,
 362, 376, 378, 386, 387, 393, 396–97,
 401, 403, 405, 424, 446, 448, 490,
 494–96, 505, 507, 522, 524
 -response 272, 274
Realpolitik 443
 rebellion, *see* revolt
 rebirth 54–55
 redemption 4

- reception of work, *see* Vondel
 rederijkers 142, 163, 201, 344
 -kamer (Chamber of Rhetoric) 1, 19,
 53, 64, 103, 103n, 104
 Reformation 381, 421–22
 Counter- 15, 347
 regent 62, 68, 71, 136, 208, 211, 230,
 231, 249
 relevance ix, 2, 18, 23, 24, 35, 45, 123,
 126, 132, 172, 177, 195–96, 210, 224,
 227, 230, 240, 248, 254, 255n, 318,
 321, 331, 337, 344, 363, 434, 441–42,
 461, 465n, 510
 religion, *see also* politics 10, 45–46,
 86–100, 109, 115n, 132, 134, 168, 207,
 214, 219, 223–24, 244, 259, 267, 353,
 353n, 365, 377–02, 422n, 501
 dogmatic/orthodox 9, 18, 79, 86n,
 108, 206, 228, 372, 375, 392,
 437, 512
 state-/public 87–88, 260
 Remonstrant 2, 10, 58, 64–65, 72, 85,
 87–89, 91, 96–97, 99–100, 108, 110,
 204, 206, 209n, 211, 228–29, 232, 240,
 242, 512–13, 513n
 Counter- 9–10, 58, 72, 88, 206–07,
 210, 228–29, 228n, 226n, 242–43,
 243n, 422n, 424, 512–13
 Renaissance 23, 45, 53, 56, 71, 101, 225,
 276–78, 281, 327, 331, 409, 415,
 427, 459
 repetition 272, 385, 393, 395, 445
 representation 13, 15, 115n, 121–22,
 158, 224, 242, 351, 352, 356–57, 372,
 389, 391
 and art/language 26–27, 39–40,
 335–38, 433–36, 445, 449, 456
 crisis of 427–32
 gender 273, 280, 407–14, 421–25
 representative 13–14, 58, 71, 79, 76, 129,
 175, 217, 222, 244, 334, 382, 388n,
 414–15, 416, 453, 473n
 repressed 274, 448–49, 451–52, 471
 republic 76, 233, 341, 381, 404, 463
 resignation 66
 of the world 355
 resistance 75, 125, 159–60, 165, 168,
 208, 216n, 274, 281, 283, 303, 360,
 372, 373–74, 383, 409, 443–44, 450,
 453, 482
 responsibility 15, 67, 69, 76, 119, 130,
 135n, 206, 212, 266, 274–75, 286, 374,
 378, 512, 517
 restoration 67, 214, 222, 391, 507
 Restoration, the 80, 382
 resurrection 124–25
 revelation 90, 384
 revenge 5, 125, 130, 131, 182, 209, 220,
 237, 241, 333, 414, 417, 446, 448, 454,
 455, 467, 473, 520, 526
 holy 191n, 193, 215–16, 218, 445, 446,
 454, 455, 456
 revolt 10, 21, 76, 130, 216, 257, 259, 356,
 377, 380–81, 389–91, 393, 398,
 400–01, 404–05, 434, 441, 450
 Dutch, *see there*
 Batavian 5, 345, 464–67, 465n, 466,
 467 471, 473, 478, 480
 revolution 168, 344, 353–54, 382, 457
 English 381
 rey, *see* chorus
 rhetoric 20, 22, 53, 120, 122, 219, 248,
 268, 277n, 323, 336, 343, 357, 357n,
 360, 365–66, 365n, 390, 396, 401, 403,
 421, 428, 430, 433, 435, 466, 476,
 494, 525
 rhetoricians *see* rederijkers
 rhythm 63, 261n, 303, 310–11,
 314, 351
 rite/ritual 132, 137, 371, 380, 397, 446,
 449, 452–56
 rights 65, 87, 91, 99, 102, 168, 180, 184,
 184, 186n, 192n, 212, 330, 373, 375,
 378, 383, 386, 389–99, 403, 471,
 473n, 517
 Romanticism 165, 273
Rome 3, 5, 59, 69, 76, 94, 96–99, 202n,
 216n, 218, 275
Rotterdam 58, 59, 162, 166, 233,
 491n, 499n
 Royalist 210, 381
 rule 19, 22, 58, 70, 73, 76, 94, 101, 104,
 121, 133, 161, 185n, 210, 289, 382,
 388n, 389, 395, 397, 398, 401, 405,
 457, 459, 462, 474–76, 481, 485
 ruler 31, 64, 67, 73, 79, 116, 128–29,
 131–32, 136, 137, 182–83, 187, 188,
 190, 241, 249, 256, 259, 261, 267,
 296, 305, 348, 349, 353, 356, 364,
 388, 388n, 389, 398–99, 511
 sacrifice 4, 33–34, 77, 100, 116, 130–31,
 132–37, 138, 141, 149, 154, 170, 219,
 245, 257, 281–82, 345, 364–65, 371,
 373, 375, 407–09, 413, 415, 418–19,
 422n, 424, 441, 443, 452, 453–54
 self- 137, 415, 446, 448, 452
 sacrificial lamb 132, 353

- salvation 6, 21, 54, 119, 124, 135, 257,
269–70, 407, 410, 422, 513
- satire 208, 232–33, 236n, 243, 504
- saviour 213, 217–18, 220, 256, 256n, 372
- scapegoat 132, 134, 136
- scholasticism 525–26
- Schouwburg (New Amsterdam Theatre)
ix, 2–3, 5, 9, 12, 68–69, 72, 74–75,
77–79, 106–07, 122, 124, 140, 143,
157–63, 165–66, 168, 169, 285–86,
289, 292, 293, 299–300, 341, 501
Koninklijke (Antwerp) 168
Munt- (Brussels) 163, 490n
- Scotland** 342, 349, 353, 355
- Scripture, *see* Bible
- semiotics 25, 252n, 271, 319n, 328, 330,
359n, 432, 455
- semitism
anti- 211
philo- 211, 214–15
- set, *see also* costumes; *see also* décor 141,
165, 166, 287, 290
-scene 153–54
props 108, 291, 298–99, 314, 327–28,
436, 439, 504
- sexuality 30, 188, 190, 371, 374, 409, 451
- sex of 409, 413, 415n, 527
- sexual assault/excess 127, 259, 278n,
325, 364, 369, 371, 398, 516
- sexual intercourse 223, 525
- sign 23, 25, 59, 61, 220, 254, 295,
327–28, 331, 355
- signifier/signified 43, 361
- sin 11, 53, 57, 13, 215, 219, 259, 347,
357, 398, 422, 448n, 512, 514, 521
original 355, 355n, 400, 525
- sincerity 10, 129, 145, 237, 240, 243,
375, 380, 393, 444, 467, 512, 515
- sister 34, 89, 102, 126, 134, 135, 179n,
181n, 186, 231, 300n, 437, 466, 482
- slaughter 37, 38, 185n, 219, 297, 313–14,
314n, 500
- slave(ery) 34, 53, 161, 237, 249, 257,
329, 333
trade 34
- Sluis** 167
- Socinians 87
- son 5, 9, 28, 40, 41, 66–67, 114, 126, 130,
132, 136, 153, 161, 207, 212, 217, 249,
250, 257, 258, 279, 325–27, 342, 351,
364, 417, 434–35, 439–41, 443–44,
463–64, 466, 471, 511
bastard- 290
as metaphor 136
- Vondel's 80–81, 96, 101–02, 114
- song ix, 53, 60, 63, 73, 104, 108, 110,
113, 139–54, 160–61, 167, 201, 463,
518–19
choral 296–97, 305–06, 348, 454, 504
contrafacta 141–55
- sovereign 128, 207, 342, 363, 373, 375,
376, 381–82, 387–90, 388n, 392, 440,
471, 478, 486, 512–13
- sovereignty 21, 30, 31, 45, 86, 128, 342,
353, 355–58, 360, 363, 380, 388, 391,
392, 394, 399, 400, 402, 409, 440,
441n, 447–48, 462, 471, 473–78, 480,
486, 515
cultural 373, 376
diffuse/mixed 175, 176, 468, 469
supreme 177, 183–84, 207, 373, 375,
378, 381–83, 387, 388n, 389–90,
396, 472, 512–13, 520
- space 486, 497
spoken 292n
and theatre 166, 296, 329, 385, 419,
436, 437, 439, 449, 456
- Spain** 1, 3, 4, 54, 58, 62, 65, 72, 73, 75,
101, 143, 143n, 157, 172, 206, 228,
363, 377, 381, 447, 461–63, 468, 481n
- speech act 115n, 116, 127, 129, 131,
319n, 424
- stadtholder 32, 35, 58–59, 62, 63, 66, 75,
90, 97, 98, 133, 160, 162, 206–08,
228–29, 232–33, 235, 237, 250, 388n,
463–65, 472–74, 473n, 484
- stage 2, 4, 7–23, 69, 75, 77, 78, 90,
103–05, 106–08, 112, 115–17, 120–23,
125, 128, 132, 136–37, 139, 140, 141,
142, 143, 148, 152, 153, 154, 157,
158–59, 161, 164, 166, 168, 178, 181,
183, 184, 188, 192n, 210, 218, 221,
225, 236, 244, 245, 260, 269, 277,
277n, 278–79, 286, 289, 291–92, 294,
295, 297, 297n, 298, 300, 301–03, 309,
310, 312–14, 314n, 327–28, 334, 336,
337, 343, 345, 357, 372, 384, 391, 410,
412, 420, 424, 436, 439, 440, 445n,
446, 449–52, 451n, 454–57, 468, 490,
491, 501,
polytopic 105, 289, 292, 294, 314
staging, *see* performance
- stanza 104, 139, 141, 142, 144–48 144n,
146n, 147n, 150, 153–54, 155–56, 297,
- state 79, 86, 129, 130, 133, 134, 135, 136,
179, 184, 186, 192, 207, 208, 228, 243,
344, 363, 363n, 379, 382, 383, 391,
397, 401, 457, 460, 468, 470, 481, 484

- dramatic change of 81–83
 States 32, 71, 175, 204, 207, 207n, 210,
 211, 228, 250, 368, 375, 394, 430, 469,
 473n
 General 32, 58, 65, 463
 Stoicism 66, 138, 238, 240, 242, 350,
 355, 411n, 417
 strophe 146–47, 146n, 150, 153
 style 53, 63, 83, 107, 111, 152, 158, 159,
 162, 165, 166, 196, 238, 242–43, 254,
 287, 298, 343, 344, 347–49, 351, 459,
 499n, 506
genus sublimelhumile 494
 sublime 173, 455, 494
 subject(ivity)
 subject of 4, 29, 35, 37–38, 41–42,
 101, 119, 129, 177, 184, 185n, 186,
 196, 207, 319, 322, 331, 341, 342,
 372, 389, 430, 432, 436, 438, 444,
 451, 460, 476, 479, 486, 516, 520
 subjectivity 18, 27, 240, 277, 318,
 319n, 323–24, 330, 332, 334, 360,
 428, 436, 438
 as topic 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 13n, 71, 74,
 77–79, 81–82, 85–86, 97, 117, 122,
 125, 159, 172n, 204–05, 221, 227,
 231, 235, 289, 341, 342, 345, 356,
 383, 410, 417, 421, 450, 465,
 466–68, 472, 475, 489, 502,
 511, 513
 subversion 376
 superstition 68, 154, 188
 symbol 18, 54, 76, 122, 124, 128,
 131–32, 135, 137, 165, 166, 209, 210,
 226, 285, 320, 327, 342, 353, 374, 415,
 448n, 455, 518
 symbolic order 329
 sympathy 9, 18, 334, 514, 524
 synod 88, 206–07, 512

tableau vivant (*vertoning*) 105, 159,
 306–07, 312, 504
Tachtigers 166
 Tanakh 41, 267–68, 321, 330, 427,
 434n, 441
 temple 33, 76, 90, 149, 154, 188, 214,
 215, 218, 218n, 219, 382, 441, 446,
 453, 455, 456, 457
 as metaphor for Church 41
 territory 28, 65, 134
 terror 74, 118, 122, 241, 282, 309
 text, *see also* edition; *see also* printed text
 electronic 505–06, 506n
 ‘ideal’ 495–96, 498, 506
Urtext 496, 507

 theatre 1. 3. 4. 7, 10, 12, 14, 46–47, 105,
 114, 115n, 116, 120, 122–23, 139–56,
 164, 168, 172, 177, 183, 190, 245–46,
 274–76, 277, 282, 301, 310, 312, 315,
 322–23, 324n, 334, 352, 357–58,
 383–84, 408, 410–12, 414, 419–21,
 423, 428, 437, 447–53, 455–58, 490,
 492, 501
 as critical vision machine 323–25, 338
 inner/outer 323–30, 332, 334–40
 -goers 286, 292, 309
 -makers 286n, 287–88, 292, 293, 300,
 301, 312, 314,
 prohibition of 79, 231, 461
 theatricality 115, 115n, 116, 122, 123,
 165, 181, 183, 244–46, 322–24, 325,
 327, 328–29, 331, 334–35, 337–40,
 430, 433, 435–39, 453, 455
theatrum mundi 244–45, 384
 teichoscopy 293n, 294, 305–07
 theory 3, 4, 34, 40, 78, 105, 254, 272,
 272n, 319n, 342n, 359, 360, 361, 378,
 386, 397, 419, 427, 427n, 429, 432–34,
 448, 452, 460, 477, 479
 literary 20, 35, 351, 360n, 361
 tolerance 197, 208, 208n, 228,
 229, 470
 religious 64, 204, 207, 461
 topos 24, 253
 trade 62, 76, 80, 102, 108, 366
 monopoly 58
 tradition 2, 7, 9, 17, 28, 32–35, 81,
 93–94, 103, 104, 127, 145, 165, 168,
 177, 190, 201, 203–05, 211, 223,
 239–43, 260, 268, 272, 274, 276,
 285–87, 285n, 300, 312, 314, 327, 334,
 359–61, 366, 373, 375, 378n, 409, 413,
 427, 442, 444, 450, 455, 459, 462,
 475–77, 498, 506–09, 513n, 523
 humanist 341–59
 tragedy, *see also* drama ix, 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9,
 11, 18, 20, 30, 41–42, 67, 69–71, 74,
 76–78, 81, 106, 111, 118, 122, 125,
 130–32, 124, 134n, 137–38, 144, 164,
 178, 184n, 185, 194, 201, 220, 221,
 225, 226n, 231, 233, 244, 245, 249,
 249n, 255n, 274, 276, 297n, 309, 314,
 317, 342n, 344, 346, 349, 350, 351–52,
 382, 393, 399, 407, 407n, 408, 409,
 414, 417, 423, 424, 450, 455, 461, 465,
 466, 470, 471, 467, 484, 489–91, 499,
 501, 521
 Aristotelian/classical 2, 3, 19, 74,
 78–79, 117n, 118, 146, 158, 164,
 345, 352n, 355–57, 449, 450

- consolatio* of 138, 261
 Senecan 140n, 143, 239–44, 345, 347,
 349, 417, 418, 419, 421n, 490
 transcendence, *see also* history 361, 372
 translation 19, 54, 55, 58, 60, 159, 163,
 172, 269, 274n, 319, 331, 341n, 343,
 345, 449, 484, 486, 491
 as appropriation 269
 translation of Vondel 172–75, 178,
 179–81, 181n, 193, 196, 198
 Vondel's 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 67, 69, 72, 80,
 106, 110, 116, 117, 145, 146, 158,
 202n, 245, 250–52
 word/image 319–20, 321
 trauma 28, 37, 38, 125, 126, 132,
 282, 382
 treason 58, 90, 133, 228, 236, 342,
 347n, 395
 tribe 170, 188, 467
 truce 62, 65, 204, 210, 368, 440
 trust/trustworthiness 36, 167, 258, 315,
 355, 364, 398, 428, 446, 464, 465,
 481n
 truth 8, 96, 99, 163, 191n, 193n, 232,
 244, 278, 452, 478, 483, 524
 divine 212–13, 215, 217, 219, 385,
 402, 433
 and knowledge 25, 338, 363,
 428, 429
 and representation 27, 320, 335–36,
 338, 385, 428–29
 typesetting 63, 497, 501n, 502
 typological 268, 278–79, 327, 371, 373,
 378, 385
 tyranny 5, 67, 97, 133, 163, 175, 182,
 350, 381, 382, 391, 395, 397–98,
 400–05

 unity of 281, 284, 476, 478
 time 13, 78, 295, 411
 place 291
 plot 408
 universality 248
 university 17, 110, 417n, 470n
 of Leiden x, 17, 65, 176, 178
utile dulci 351
 utopian 368
Utrecht 19, 51, 101, 143, 166, 195, 275,
 313, 320n, 344, 367, 493

 value 5, 13, 14, 22, 45, 69, 90, 98, 100,
 163, 175, 197, 232, 233, 256, 321, 368,
 410, 428, 459, 460, 507, 518
 vengeance 182, 215, 257
 play 445

 victim 3, 5, 71, 93, 100, 126, 136, 188,
 207, 278, 278n, 280, 282, 313, 333n,
 348, 378, 436, 443, 446
 victory 4, 63, 65, 127, 30, 163, 193, 203,
 393, 444
 violation 126, 127, 132, 347, 382,
 398, 473
 violence, *violentia* 185n, 305, 366–67,
 375, 399, 445, 446, 449–57, 517
 divine 73, 367, 373, 375, 447–48, 457,
 458
 and gender 125–26, 127, 137, 278n,
 371, 374, 413–14, 418–19, 511, 517
 as illegitimate power 76, 94, 124,
 127–32, 135, 138, 186, 363–64,
 368–69, 374, 400, 446, 447–48,
 457, 464
 and language 130–34
 and law 453–58
 and marterdom 47, 131
 virgin(ity) 96, 146, 154, 370, 411–13,
 420, 424, 426
 city virgin, *see* Amsterdam
 Mary 354
 as martyr 2, 70, 409
 virtue 55, 75, 120, 121, 163, 186, 186n,
 187, 191n, 193n, 207, 258, 260, 272,
 288, 299, 352, 354, 356, 366, 413, 453,
 454, 482
virtu 187, 187n
 visual analysis 319n, 322–23, 335
 'Vlaamse Volkstoneel' 167
 voice 62, 140, 149, 152, 164, 166, 168,
 181, 185n, 224, 254, 280, 283, 298,
 300, 300n, 335, 373, 375, 413, 415,
 427, 431, 432, 483, 484
 vulnerability 371, 409, 498

 war 47, 127, 202n, 286, 386, 390,
 392–93, 480–81
 Eighty/Thirty years 3, 6, 43, 54, 62,
 65–66, 72–73, 101, 344–45, 363,
 381, 405, 414, 462–63, 466, 468
 civil (strife) 9, 43–44, 125, 132, 216,
 228, 373, 383, 392–94, 396n,
 398, 512
 Dutch wars *see* English wars
 English wars 80, 509
 just 468
 versus peace, *see* peace
 poet's 12
 Trojan 231, 235
 widow 40, 42, 52, 83, 97–98, 129, 182,
 279, 279n, 280–83, 364, 491, 500,
 501, 504

- 'Wijngaard' 163
 'Wit Lavendel' 1, 53, 56, 64,
 104, 105
 Woman, *see also* widow 11, 327, 333,
 335, 348n, 349n, 511, 517, 518,
 519–520
 actress 322
 and body 124–25, 374, 526
 and emotions 277–79, 325, 325n, 330,
 373, 409–13, 414n, 421
 exchange of 371
 as *klop* 96
 malefactorix 347, 490
 as subject 11, 42–44, 99, 278,
 281–82, 330–32, 331n, 352, 374,
 409, 436, 474
 world 57, 76, 118, 121, 133, 170, 182,
 187, 191n, 193n, 253, 256, 256n, 267,
 351, 368–69, 388, 398, 402,
 435–37, 443, 472, 474–76, 489,
 515, 527
 creation/destruction of 81, 501,
 510–11, 517, 520, 526
 dream- 74
 historical nature of (world view) 21,
 32, 42, 266, 268, 371–72, 385, 393,
 399, 402–05, 516, 526
 literature, *see there*
 resignation of/engagement with 39,
 108, 350–55, 350n
 as stage, *see theatrum mundi*
- xenophobia 170
- Zeeland** 58, 103, 467