CHAPTER NINE

VONDEL'S DRAMAS: THEIR AFTERLIFE IN PERFORMANCE

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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 'Gijsbreght 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 Lairese (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 Muntschouwburg 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 Muntschouwburg 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 'Gysbreght van Aemstel'*, pp. 94, 96.

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

²³ Vondel, *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, ed. Simons; Albach, *Drie eeuwen 'Gysbreght 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 'Gysbreght 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 *Gysbrecht* 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 Volkstooneel (VVT) en de opvoeringen 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 schouders 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 *Jephta*. The outcome, however, was a fairly loose adaptation by Benno Barnard: *Jefta en de Semitische liefdes* (*Jephta 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 zonnewagen 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'.