CHAPTER SIXTEEN

CULTURAL ANALYSIS – THE JOSEPH PLAYS

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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

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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 verkoopingse schoot ons in den zin, door het tafereel van Ian Pinas, hangende, neffens meer kunstige stucken van Peter Lastman, ten huise van den hoogheleerden 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 icono-graphy. 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 *subscriptio* 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 visuality. 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 Saphirach, 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 traveling 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 bekladt. / 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 vermagh, 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 bedrieghlyck 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'oogen 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 Jempsar’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 Jempсар 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 Jempсар'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 Jempсар'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 Jempсар 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.