Babylonian Arrogance in Vondel's *Mars Tamed*: A Baroque Allegory Performing Contra-Diction

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In the 'Oegst maend', the harvest month, August 1647, Dutch poet and playwright Joost van den Vondel wrote a praise poem to the burgomasters of Amsterdam entitled 'De getemde Mars', or 'Mars Tamed'. The month in which he wrote it is mentioned explicitly for a reason: there were harvests and fruits to be reaped; in this case the fruits and harvests of peace – the so-called Peace of Westphalia. Negotiations between all European warring parties had been going on since 1641 in the German cities of Münster and Osnabrück. The first hosted the catholic powers, the second hosted the protestant powers, with messengers travelling between the two. On the Dutch side, representatives of the Lords States-General of the United Provinces negotiated with the Spanish, in Münster. Their talks had, in a sense, already been concluded in 1647, on January 8, when it was decided that there was to be peace. This is why Vondel could write his praise poem in the summer of that same year, before official agreement was reached on January 30th, 1648, and the treaty would be ratified May 15th of that same year.

The poem was published separately in 1648, in folio, by Abraham de Wees.[1] One year later, in 1649, it was taken up in a publication that gathered many of the praise poems and pieces written on the occasion, under the title *Olyfkrans der vreede*, or *Olive wreath of peace*.[2] Yet despite the fact that the poem sings the praise of peace, in considering the burgomasters of Amsterdam as the major architects of it, the text spends most of its attention on describing massive acts of violence. Rightly so, one could say. From all the wars, civil or otherwise, that have raged in and across Europe, the Thirty Years' war between 1618 and 1648 stands out as a particularly gruesome one. The estimated total of military and civilian deaths (4.5 to 8 million) only tells so much and if 60% of the population died in some areas of Germany, this surely suggests something. There are also detailed descriptions and depictions of the cruelties involved. The sack and taking of Magdeburg by Johann Tserclaes, Count of Tilly, and his rabble in 1631 is one of the paradigms. Out of 30.000 inhabitants, 5000 survived. Again, the numbers tend to leave out an explanation for what happened to the other 25.000, who were not just killed, but raped, slaughtered, or tortured to death.[3]

As for the Dutch Republic, the Thirty Years' war in a sense bypassed its core Provinces. To the Republic, the atrocities and cruelties experienced, or enacted, dated back rather to the last four decades of the 16th century, in the first decades of what came to be known as the Eighty Years war between 1568 and 1648. This was not an uninterrupted period of war. Thanks to the genius and skills of the political leader of the Republic, pensionary Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547-1619), the so-called Twelve Year Truce was signed on April 9th, 1609, in Antwerp. This happened to be on the very same day that Philips II signed the Royal Decree of the Expulsion of the Moriscos. If this was a coincidence, it was a telling one. The internal problems of the Habsburg empire and the immensity of conflicts it had engaged in, or was confronted with, had made Philip II give up his northern provinces for the moment. During and after the truce, this left the United Seven Provinces safe, as a

[1] This is also the copy in the John Hay Library.

[2] *Olyf-krans der vreede*, *door de doorluchtigste geesten*, *en geleerdste mannen*, *deezes tijds gevlochten* (Amsterdam: Gerrit van Goedesberg 1649). See Henk Duits, 1997.

[3] Quentin Outram, 2002, pp. 245–272.

result of which they could engage in enlarging their territories in the provinces of Brabant and Limburg.

The impulse that the truce gave to the Dutch Republic might make one forget that not that long ago, in the seventies of the 16th century, the revolting parties in the Low Countries had actually been defeated. At some point, there was nothing left but a small part of Holland, north of the river Y.[4] It was at least remarkable, then, that thirty years later the Dutch Republic was *de facto* acknowledged as an independent political entity with which a truce could be made. Due to a number of contingencies, including the invention of such a seemingly simple thing as the saw mill, the Republic then mushroomed as a political, economic, and aesthetic power. The period between 1609 and 1648 became a time of unprecedented growth of wealth, prosperity and a global expansion previously unseen in Europe. There was enough war that the Republic engaged in, in its vicinity, on the seas, or globally. Still, if there was enough violence used by the Republic or its agents, the United Provinces themselves were hardly touched. Many longed for peace, though, that would propel more expansion and wealth.

In this context, Vondel was not the only one to express a gratitude for a peace that had finally come. All major poets of the time rushed to sing the praises of the peace and those who had made it possible. Vondel did have a special position in the collective of 'singers', in that he emphasized the position of the Republic in an international context.[5] Moreover, as in almost all his work, Vondel's text was remarkable for its baroque twists and turns, or its baroque confusion or disproportionality. In fact, the poem testified of something that I will come to call a 'Babylonian arrogance', in its embodying a boast that was both expressed by, and hidden in an inverted allegory. This is to say: as an allegory the text expressed something by metaphorically hiding it, and as an inverted allegory it appeared to show itself as a familiar Christian allegorization of classical material, while the classical material in effect worked counter to some principles of Christianity, at least in its relation to political sovereignty. As I will come to argue, the text did not just show an admiration for a secular form of power – a distinctly Republican one – but in a sense it performed its pride by means of the inverted allegory.[6] If I consider the text as a 'performing object', it is so in two ways, then. It is not just about a republican pride but performs that pride, and it is internally, allegorically, a performing object in the sense that the allegory is set up against itself.

1. Allegory's edge: Amsterdam burgomasters versus quasi-royal stadholder

Vondel was Holland's, or rather Amsterdam's, most famous contemporary playwright. Living from 1587 to 1679 he was witness to, and a powerful voice in favor of, the incredible expansion of the Dutch Republic or of Amsterdam, with its wealth, trade, tolerance, wars, violence and peace. Vondel was even witness to the collapse of the Republic in 1672; a collapse not as a political entity but as a dominant one. Conceptually speaking, meanwhile, the political entity that had come to be a Republic with a desire to free all could not be reconciled with its having become an empire that presupposed subjection and would engage in slavery. Vondel's ambiguous, baroque dealing with the issue can be traced in letters, a wide generic variety of poems, from very short to extremely long, from highly personal to philosophically abstract; occasional, theological, political. He wrote more than thirty plays

[4] One fascinating study about this moment in the history of what was not yet a Republic is Henk van Nierop 1999.

[5] Nina Geerdink, 2012, pp. 181-186.

[6] As for the history of Dutch republicanism, see Wyger Velema 2000.

too, a few translations of classical pieces included. He was a deeply religious person, a son of Baptists, at some point turning more towards a tolerant version of Calvinism, the so-called Remonstrants. Then, seeing what the religious conflicts had done to his country and to Europe, he was inclined to follow Grotius in his argument that everything needed to be reunited into one faith again: Roman Catholicism. He officially turned to this religion in the forties of the 17th century, and became one of the most controversial authors of the Republic as a result.

Politically speaking, Vondel was controversial as well. Though he half-heartedly tried to become a favorite of stadholder Frederick-Henry (1584-1647), he was a decisive critic and fierce opponent of the previous stadholder Maurits (1567-1625), whom he never forgave his judicial execution of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt in 1619, nor his alliance with the orthodox protestants striving towards a fusion of state with religion.[7] He wrote an allegory on the issue in 1625, called *Palamedes oft vermoorde onnooselheyd* (*Palamedes or the Murder of Innocence*), which could have brought him to court (although the question was which one), in jail, or worse, but he went in hiding for a while and was sentenced with a fine of 300 guilders that was probably paid for by an Amsterdam magistrate.[8] He had an even more ambiguous, not so say adverse, relationship with William II (1626-1650), who took over from Frederick-Henry as stadholder at the age of 19 and would prove to be a brash and ambitious young man who was very much against a peace treaty with the Spanish because it would rob him of parts of his income and power. Politically and legally speaking, stadholders held a form of sovereignty over military affairs but not much more. In times of war, however, this gave them considerable clout. In the light of the Peace of Westphalia, William II was a tellingly lonely, sulking, and as a consequence also dangerous political factor.

If the Dutch Republic was not really a republic, it received its name due to a messy, complex system of mixed sovereignty. Next to the stadholder, with his own sovereign powers, the States that constituted the United Provinces were sovereign themselves. Their representatives in The Hague, who made up the States-General, held sovereignty over international affairs.[9] In this context, Vondel was decisively republican, opposed against any form of theocracy (something the Calvinist orthodox were striving for) and any form of royalty or quasi-royalty. This is why he distrusted Maurits and William II, and with good reason. Aesthetically speaking, Vondel's baroque works are at several points also marked by the fact that in the Dutch Republic two forms of baroque existed simultaneously: the princely one on behalf of the stadholders, and a Republican one on behalf of, especially, Amsterdam.[10]

'Mars Tamed' testifies of the ambiguities involved in its dealing with the color orange, a straightforward allusion to the house of Orange-Nassau to which the stadholders belonged. The poem consists, thematically, of three building blocks, with the one in the middle subdivided in two. The first block consists of a preface, praising the Amsterdam burgomasters as the true architects of the peace. The second block deals with Jupiter's being dissatisfied with human beings and sending Mars to punish them. With Mars more than willing and capable to perform this task, at some point a horrified Europe – personified in

[7] For Van Oldenbarnevelt's life, work and politics, see J. den Tex 1973. For a more general overview of the history of the Dutch Republic in relation to Oldenbarnevelt's case, see Jonathan Israel 1995. A more popular biography of Oldenbarnevelt is offered by Ben Knapen 2005.

[8] On the legal set-up of the affair, see Grüttemeier 2001, later in Beekman and Grüttemeier 2005.

[9] On this complex structure, see Leslie J. Price 1998.

[10] On a definition of the baroque as essentially a mixed aesthetic, see Alain Mérot, 2007.

the woman with the same name, who was charmed by the white bull and taken to Crete where she was raped by the re-morphed Jupiter – comes to lament what is happening to her. So, Jupiter calls Mars back. However, the latter refuses and now comes to revolt and fight against Jupiter and his entire circle of gods. Here as well, Mars appears to win. The third block, consequently, has yet another allegorical protagonist at its heart. A woman as well, she stands for both the peace goddess and the Dutch Republic, and comes to conquer Mars with her beauty. Stunned by her appearance, he drops his weapons, after which she binds him and brings things back to good order: peace.

Now, the color orange does not appear anywhere in the second building block, but it does in the first part, the preface, and in the final part of the poem. This is the first part in full:

To our fathers of peace,
fathers of the fatherland,
the lords burgomasters of Amsterdam

Now a source of happiness bursts from our veins
By the sound of the silver peace trumpet
On which you tune the world's peace
Oh, true fathers of the peace of Amsterdam.
Your wisdom helped braid the orange ribbons
And cords, that now have tamed the violence,
The bitter war, for so long lacking in rest,
On whose heart no wish of peace could be attached.
Europe, yes the entire globe, the four parts
Of the earth's ball, come rolling towards you, rejoicing,
Because you have stopped the well of civil blood
As you were the first to smother this Hydra of conflict.
Now the citizens in your borough crown you,
Because you willingly forfeit your own interests
And spend your care, your labor and your sweat
To the fatherland and the common wealth.
Ay, stick to the aim of wars
Which is FREEDOM, your heritage gained by fights,
So that all can take shelter under this custody.
Thus, your city will prosper in harmony and potency.[11]

[11] *Vs 1-20; In the original: 'Aen onze Vredevaders Vaders des Vaderlandts / De Heeren Burgemeesters van Amsterdam*. Nu berst een bron von blyschap uit onze aders, / Op 't klincken van de zilvre Vretrompet, / Daer ghy een wyze op 's weerelts Vrede zet, / O Amsterdamsche oprechte VREDEVADERS. / Uw wijsheit holp d'Oranje snoeren vlechten, / En banden, daer 't Gewelt aen leit getemt, / De barsse Krijgh, zoo lang van rust vervremt, / En op wiens hart geen vredewensch kon hechten. / Europe, ja al d'aertkloot met vier deelen / Des aertkloots, rolt u juichende te moet, / Naer dien ghy stopt de Wel van 't burgerbloet, / En d'eerste smoort dees Hydra van krackeelen. / Nu kroonen u de Burgers in uw veste, / Dewijl ghy gaerne uw eigen nut vergeet, / En hangt uw zorgh en arrebeit en zweet / Aen 't Vaderlant, en algemeene beste. / Ay hanthaef zoo het wit der oorelogen, / Den VRYDOM, uw bevochten errefgoet, / Dat ieder duicke in schaduw van dien Hoedt. / Zoo bloeie uw stadt in eendraght, en vermogen.' In all references to Vondel's work since the publication of the Collected Works, references are shortened to 'WB', an acronym for the publisher of the Collected Works: Werelbibliotheek'. This quote can be found at WB, p. 251.

If there is an edge to this, it is an edge that demands the good understander. In her dealing with irony's edge, Linda Hutcheon argued that 'the final responsibility for deciding whether irony actually happens in an utterance or not [...] rests, in the end, with the interpreter'.[12] That is, irony can only be operative for the ones who are 'in' on it. It can be operative, consequently, in a benign and a more painful version. The benign part seemingly takes someone along, while the ones who recognize what is going on know that this someone is actually 'out'. The more painful version makes others feel that they are indeed 'out' through derision or laughter.

The same dynamic holds for the genre of allegory, which also needs the good understander, and which also has a benign or an aggressive edge. In this case the benign effect of allegory is at work, when the poem states that the wisdom of the Amsterdam burgomasters, who are addressed as the true fathers of the peace and of the fatherland, 'helped braid the orange ribbons and cords' that tamed the violence. The 'braiding' is the opposite of 'unbridled' here, which might be an implied hint to William II, who would come to attack Amsterdam in 1650 in a *coup d'etat* that aimed to break the power of Holland. He failed, and Vondel would write: 'Not nobility but a scoundrel lusts to trample with his hoof the crown of cities; which was bitterly gained in a hundred years wars; one had battled all too long'.[13] That said, Vondel was also very much aware how much the Republic had needed the stadholders in their military endeavors. The allegory accepts this, then, but makes clear that the powers of the Orange-Nassaus their 'ribbons and cords', should be braided by civil powers in order to tame war's violence.

In the poem's third and final part, the Dutch Republican maiden comes to conquer Mars. It features an extensive description of her appearance, of how she rides a chariot drawn by two lions, how she is dressed in a white garment decorated with olives and how she wears a wreath of fresh olive leaves. Most importantly, she is called for by a divine power:

Then Jupiter called: 'Move on, move, you beauty
Now tame with an ogle of your face
This brutal God, who doesn't budge for lightnings:
No pearl more beautiful in the foliage of your wreath.'

The Dutch republican maiden then charms, or pleases, Mars so deeply that the weapons fall from his hands:

She rises up and down and quickly ties
And binds both his arms on his back,
Not with metal but with soft, orange cords.
Thus, she drives Mars before her wheels
And leads him in triumph through the Netherlands.
She is followed in this glorious path

[12] Linda Hutcheon, 1995, p. 45.

[13] The lines 'Geen adel, maar een schelm, heeft lust de Kroon der steden / te trappen met den hoef: zy wert te zuur gehaelt / Met hondert jaren krijghs: men heeft te lang gestreden' are taken from a poem from 1650 that praises two defense bulwarks that were built on the occasion of William II's attack: 'Aen de blokhuizen van Amsterdam', WB V, pp. 512.

By a thick mass and cloud of grateful souls
That sing: 'May the goddess of peace rule for long,
We longed for her so long: she made Mars meek
And placed his sword, that bloody sword, back in its sheath.
May neither jealousy or time overtake her scepter.'[14]

The call of Jupiter is remarkable in stating that the maiden's conquering Mars would be like the most beautiful pearl in her wreath of olive leaves. This, by implication, emphasizes that this wreath does not have pearls. That is to say: it is not a royal crown, a point that will be made explicit in l. 170 (see below). More importantly for now, after having been conquered and made defenseless by the maiden's beauty, Mars is bound with 'soft, orange cords'. Again, the passage suggests that military force is 'soft', when it serves the aim of taming brutal violence and making war unnecessary. Despite the softness of the metaphor, allegory's edge is clear once more. The text, in effect, states: let us avoid to have ambitious, war-mongering princes looking for glory.

This brings us to another edge of the poem, perhaps a more painful one: in what sense, and why, is this an inverted allegory?

2. Inverted allegory: Christianizing classical material or questioning theological sovereignty

In the very same year that Vondel wrote 'Mars tamed', he also wrote a comedy in praise of the peace, called *Leeuwendalers*. It is still unknown who commissioned it, though it would be highly unlikely that it was simply a play that had already been written and lay waiting for the occasion. The play is an allegory too. Vondel wrote other allegories besides *Leeuwendalers,* and as was the case for the other ones – *Palamedes* (1625), *Salmoneus* (1657) and *Faëton* (*Phaethon*, 1663) – the allegory needed to be defended in the preface. In *Leeuwendalers* the preface largely deals with defending Vondel's choice of using the classical god Pan as an allegory for the Christian God. Now, in the reception of Vondel's work, his allegories have never been fully accepted for their baroque quality. For instance, Hans van Dael argued that Vondel's use of Pan was a trifle, since it was clearly based on the commonly available iconographic material.[15] If this is so, why would Vondel have had to address the issue so extensively in the foreword? It surely remains strange that a wild, half man-half animal, minor god who loves to make music, is sexually aggressive or transgressive, and is often joined by a joyful and equally transgressive company, acts a metaphor for the supreme and sovereign Christian God. The issue has been explained away by considering the allegorical tension as a matter of substitution.[16] This reading would have us simply replace Pan with the

[14] Vs. 181-204; in the original: 'Toen riep Iupijn: ry aen, ry aen, ghy Schoone: / Betem nu met een' lonk van uw gezicht / Den barssen Godt, die voor geen blixems zwicht: / Geen schooner parle aen 't loof van uwe kroone. […] Zy stijght hier op om laegh, en vleugelt vlugh / En bint hem bey zijn armen op den rugh / Met geen metael, maer zachte Oranje banden. / Zoo drijftze Mars groothartigh voor haer wielen, / En voert hem in triomf heel Neêrlant door. / Haer volgen op dat zegenrijcke spoor / Een dicken drang en wolck van danckbre zielen: / Die zingen: lang regeer' de Vregodinne, / Zoo lang verwacht: zy maeckte Mars gedwee, /En stack zijn zwaert, dat bloedigh zwaert, in scheê. / Dat Nijdt noch Tijdt haer' scepter overwinne.' WB, pp. 256-257.

[15] See Hans van Dael 2005, p. 89. According to Van Dael, Vondel knew the 1664 Pers translation of Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* from 1593. This translation, *Iconologia of uytbeeldingen des verstands* (*Iconology or Depictions of Reason*), was dedicated to Michiel le Blon. Vondel's *Leeuwendalers* from three years later was too, which is why Van Dael's argues that Vondel's Pan was directly borrowed from Ripa. This still does not mean the choice is unproblematic.

[16] Jan Konst 2003 is a proponent of the substitution thesis.

Christian God. Aesthetically speaking, this does not make much sense. And the question is again: if it were that simple, why would Vondel have had to put such effort into defending his move? Without falling back on Vondel's explicit intentions, which may be troubled by their own complexities and ambiguities, we can consider the issue far better as a matter of baroque double-ness, or contra-diction, which has considerable consequences.

In the sparse reception of 'Mars tamed', something similar happened when Jupiter was automatically considered as the allegorical embodiment of God. Some interpretative unrest is evidenced, when the editors mention in their explanation of Jupiter's role: 'Vondel's imagination time and again, despite his Christian belief, adopts Renaissance forms'.[17] One would wish it had been nothing but a renaissance, intertextual affair – though even then the dynamic would have been troubling. In a baroque context, allusions such as this one bring us into a whirl of contradicting imaginations. Or a baroque dealing with allegory is never a matter of substitution, but of an aesthetic attraction that consists precisely in the fact that we appear to be seeing double.[18] Besides, an allegory contains a metaphorical relation that is systematically worked out. If Jupiter should be translated as the supreme Christian God, what does his circle of gods mean, then? The escape route here is to consider them as allegorical figurations of angels. Yet, as was the case with Pan, these would be rather peculiar angels.

To be sure, Mars's revolt against his father and all the other gods has been read as a parallel to Vondel's *Lucifer*, with God's major angel and his company revolting because God has made human beings, who appear to be the angels' equals. This play, *Lucifer*, would be worked out in the years to come, from 1648 to 1654.[19] Possible parallels between the characters of Lucifer and the character of Mars in this text have their own logic and suggestive force. Yet they escape the nastier or politically charged question of why a baroque playwright would be so fascinated by subjects rising against their sovereign lord, and why he would use the scenery of the Christian heaven to work this out. In fact this choice was one reason why the orthodox protestants were revolted by *Lucifer*. If I propose, in this context, that we read 'Mars tamed' as an inverted allegory, as a text that acts against itself, this is provoked by the fact that the text has an unexpected and seemingly unmotivated doubling in its middle part.

The text was written on the occasion of the Peace of Westphalia, and in this context it provides a description of the wars that had troubled Europe in the previous years, with Mars as the allegorical tormenter of people. Then, however, the scales are turned. Suddenly a war is introduced between the gods, and here Mars acquires another allegorical meaning – yet which one? On the one hand, it is surely to the point to read the text in the regular allegorical way, by considering the classical material as a metaphor for Christian material, as one of the many examples underpinning the *translation imperii* from Roman empire to Christianity or Roman Catholicism. Yet, the twist in the text rests in the fact that once Mars is called back by Jupiter he revolts, which leads to a decisive baroque derailment when the poem exults in describing in detail how the gods come to fight one another:

> …there saw the Majesty
> Of Gods, Mars prepared with all his armies,

[17] In the original: 'Vondels verbeelding neemt, ondanks zijn Christelik geloof, steeds weer Renaissance-vormen aan', WB, p. 252.
[18] On the baroque as a period of paradox, see, for instance, Christine Buci-Glucksmann 1986, 1990, 1996.
[19] See, for instance, Duits 1997, p. 186.

Ready and hot to storm forward at once.
A storm raged, from below and from above.
The heavens were nothing but glows and fires.
Gunpowder did not give in a bit to lightning.
The mountain kartaw wasn't stunned by thunder.
The heaven cracked and all the stars were shaking
Like the leaves in showers on a tree.
The heaven was a wagon without reins;
All the heavenly armies a flock without shepherd.
Neptune lost the trident, which shakes the beaches
And the rocks. The god of war wrenched Vulcan's
Hammer, while beating, from his wrists,
And clang the staff of steel from Pluto's hand.
He broke the spear of Pallas, ripped the weapon,
Medusa's head, from her left arm
And was afraid of no snakes, which still warm
And moist with poison, gaped for blood and veins.
Alcides had to lay down his hand bludgeon.
The wine god was looking for his panthers:
And Triton's shell, up against trumpet and drum was
Too hoarse and raucous to act against the enemy.
The entire fortress of heaven was stunned.
Saturn mowed down all that came upward,
Up until Mars took the bowed scythe
And came to use it instead of his sword.
Then Jupiter saw his rule in the balance
And the chances of heaven turn, blow after blow.
His enemy would not listen to treaty,
Nor would he accept laws from the authority.
What consult, Jupiter? Your court starts to burn.[20]

There is a certain enthusiasm in this description, as if the text itself has, thematically, become a wagon without reins, though aesthetically speaking it is extremely skilled and efficient. Content-wise, the important thing to note is that Mars and his armies are described in terms of human artifice. Human weapons and techniques – gunpowder against

[20] Vs. 114-145. In the original: '…daer zagh de Majesteit / Der Goden Mars met al zijn heir bereit, / Gereet, en heet om daetlijck storm te loopen. / Hier viel een storm van boven, en van onder. / De hemel stont in enckel vier en gloet. / Het buskruit weeck den blixem niet een' voet. / De berghkortouw versufte voor geen' donder. / De hemel kraeckte, en al 't gestarrent schudde. / Gelijck de blaên by buien aen een' boom. / De hemel scheen een wagen zonder toom; / Al 't hemelsch heir een herderlooze kudde. / Neptuin verloor den drietant, die de stranden / En rotsen schudt. De Krijghsgodt wrong Vulkaen / Den moker uit zijn vuisten, onder 't slaen, / En klonck den staf van stael uit Plutoos handen. / Hy brack de speer van Pallas, ruckte 't wapen, / Meduses hooft, van haren slincken arm, / En schrickte voor geen slangen, die noch warm / En klam van gift, naer bloet en aders gapen. / Alcides most zijn hantknots nederleggen. / De Wijngodt zagh vast naer zijn Panthers om: / En Tritons schulp was by trompet en trom / Te heesch, te schor om vyanden t'ontzeggen. / De gansche burgh des hemels stont verlegen. / Saturnus maeide al wat naer boven quam / Tot dat hem Mars de kromme zeissen nam, / En die gebruickte in plaets van zijnen degen. / Toen zagh Iupijn zijn Recht in twijfel hangen, / En 's hemels kans aen 't keeren, slagh op slagh. / Zijn vyant had geen ooren tot verdragh, / Noch wou geen wet van hooger hant ontfangen. / Wat raet Iupijn? uw hof begint te blaecken.' WB, pp. 254-255.

lightning, blunderbusses against thunder –empower Mars. Next to this, it is his robbing the gods of their weapons that makes the balance shift. Finally, the conflict in the heavens is not described in terms of a supreme being capable of simply restoring order, but of a political order threatened by someone who will not negotiate, and will not accept the rule of law. This brings us back not only to the secular reality of the Thirty Years' war, but to a more fundamental reconsideration of the relation between the gods, or God, in terms of political and legal sovereignty.[21]

If Jupiter is, in accordance with the regular allegorical reading, a metaphor for the Christian God, his sovereignty or supreme rule is, to say the least, questioned here. Or, to put it bluntly: he is described as impotent, which does not accord well with his being a supreme being. This is precisely what opens up the inverted allegory, according to which Mars becomes the leader of human armies and weapons that are capable of putting the heavens on fire and defeating the gods. The text is a performing object, here, in the sense that it works counter to itself in order to allegorically perform a fundamental contradiction in the political household of Europe. In general, God is called upon politically to underpin royal sovereignty, such as by stating that kings are kings 'by the grace of God'. In this text, however, God is incapable of forming the seal to a just order. This provokes the question: if the seal to a just order cannot be a divine, supreme being or entity, what *can* be that seal?

3. Babylonian arrogance: the challenge of a republican baroque

The problem of sovereignty and the rule of law, especially in relation to war, is explicitly addressed when Mars starts to gather his forces for what begins as a punishing expedition against humanity. This is how the text expresses it:

By his father's order, Mars climbed in his wagon
Pulled by two wolves, with cruel muzzles.
The earth took fright, it knew them by their howls
As a prediction of atrocious plagues.
Analogously, the sailor hears the thunderstorm at sea,
Which approaches and threatens him with his life,
And he'd better be prepared and see it in advance,
Before the waters seethe and loudly start to swirl.
In this attack, this storm, from Mars's place
And on the rolling and tumbling of its axle
Everything that exists came to boom:
The Scheldt, the Rhine, the Danube and their borders.
All the vermin of people, hidden deep
In mountains and woods, forests and wilderness
Everything disnatured, distorted, and haggard
Upon this smell comes storming from its caves
All the rabble marched together in armies
All the Plunder, Murder, Curse, Fomenter,
Violence, Treachery, and Megara covered the lands
With a flood of heinous misfortunes.[22]

[21] Walter Benjamin, 2003, pp. 62-76.

[22] Vs. 29- 48; in the original: 'Door 's Vaders last klom Mars op zijnen wagen, / Getrocken van twee wolven, wreet van muil. / Het aertrijck schrickte, en kendeze aen 't gehuil; / Een voorspoock van afgrijsselijcke plagen, /

The passage contains some ‘easy’ allegorical components and some complicated and complicating ones. One easy part is the metaphor of the sailor, used as an indication of those who see trouble coming, much like a sailor seeing a storm approach. For the seafaring populace of the Dutch Republic, this strikes an easy note. More complicated is the fact that the world is plunged into disorder by the very same entity that is supposed to safeguard its order, God. Moreover, the earth is not punished severely by, say, honorable armies of angels. Instead, the worst of the worst come out of their hiding holes: ‘the vermin of people’. This provokes the question of who is going to chase them back into their holes again.

What will be able to control both the revolting Mars and the ‘vermin of people’ becomes clear in the final, third part of the poem. And in line with my considering the text as an inverted allegory, or as an allegory performing a contra-diction, the goddess that appears as the ultimate savior is both the regular goddess of peace and a common, civil maiden.

Charged to the limit by his son Mars, the impotent Jupiter is looking around for aid, and the text then mentions in a grammatically ambiguous way:

The father saw for the sake of comfort in all directions
And from the skies of the Netherlands a goddess
Appear in a cloud, more or less
As Venus comes to rise in her wagon:
Like Pallas comes flying through the skies.
It had to be Pallas, or Venus herself, or none
Of both, or sculpted from their faces
As if to appear out of two mixed into one.[23]

The grammatical ambiguity consists in the fact that the text states ‘zagh’, or ‘saw’, which means ‘to look for’ and ‘to see’ at the same time. What it is that Jupiter is looking for, and what he sees, introduces another tension between a divine domain and a domain that is human, technical or artificial. This becomes clear when the text says that what might have been one of two goddesses, Venus or Pallas, is actually a fusion between the two as if, inspired by their two faces, one is ‘gesneên’, or ‘cut’. The latter verb is only comprehensible if we understand it in the sense of ‘cutting wood’, as in making a sculpture.

This artificial entity is embodied in a woman driving a wagon drawn by two ‘Dutch lions’, as a clear counterpart to the wolves that drew Mars’s wagon.[24] The lion had become

Zoo hoort in zee de zeeman ’t onweêr ruisschen, / Dat hem genaeckt, en dreight met dootsgevaer. / Hy neemt hier op by tijts dien veurbo waer, / Eer ’t water ziede, en luidt beginn’ te bruisschen. / Op dat gerit, dien storm, uit Mavors oorden, / Op ’t rollen en het hollen van zijn as, / Begon het al te dreunen wat ’er was, / Het Schelt, de Rijn, de Donauw, en zijn boorden. / Al ’t ongediert van menschen, diep gescholen / In bergh en bosch, in wout en wildernis; / Al wat veraert, verwoet, verwildert is / Komt naer dees lucht gestoven uit zijn holen. / Men zagh al ’t schuim tot heiren t’zamenrucken, / De Roof, de Moort, de Vloeck, de Stokebrant, / Gewelt, Verraet. Megeer bedeckte ’t lant / Met eenen vloet van gruwlijcke ongelucken.’ WB, p. 252.

[23] Vs. 149-157. In the original ‘De Vader zagh om troost uit aller wegen, / En uit de lucht van Neêrlant een Godin / In eene wolck verschijnen, meer noch min / Als Venus komt te wagen aengestegen: / Als Pallas door den hemel aen komt strijcken. / 't Most Pallas zijn, of Venus zelf, of geen / Van beide, of uit haer aengezicht gesneên, / Om twee in een gemengelt te gelijcken.’

[24] The comparison between a noble or benign lion and a cruel wolf would come back elsewhere in the work of Vondel, for instance in a poem from 1641 entitled ‘Aen den Leeuw van Hollant’, or ‘To the Lion of Holland’; see Arie Jan Gelderblom 1994.

the icon for the Dutch Republic, as a sign of power, to be sure, but also as a sign of restraint.[25] Accordingly, these lions 'listen meekly to her rod and discipline / and know of neither roaring or yelling' (Vs. 167-168).[26] As a matter of repetition, the poem then wonders whether this maiden could be Cibele, mother of the gods. But no, she cannot be, for she is not wearing a royal crown and she is too young. She isn't Juno either, or Ceres. She is simply a beautiful, young maiden; just as the Republic is a young political entity. All in all, the implication of the inverted allegory is that the peace has fairly little to do with God, although His praise should be sung. The war may have been ordered by God, or motivated by God, as he is embodied in the different religions, but peace is manmade by political actors – which brings us back to the preface with the burgomasters of Amsterdam as the true architects of the peace.

The political and aesthetic implications do not stop there, though. The poem is also, by implication, an argument against any attempt to underpin secular sovereignty with a divine one, since the poem has been showing that the heavens may be as unruly and untrustworthy as any political entity. The poem's attempt is part and parcel, here, of what I came to consider as a republican baroque; a form of baroque that worked counter to the baroque of the contra-reformation, or of the baroque of the royalty and princes, who were all trying to give themselves a divine aura by aesthetic means.[27] The republican baroque does not need, does not want, or should shun divine underpinning. A republic can only trust in and rest upon itself. This is a precarious matter, though not an impossible one. All it asks, so the poem suggests, is decent administration: people who give up their own interests for the sake of service to the commonwealth.

Still, in the international context, the Dutch Republic was an anomaly that also embodied a challenge. If the rest of Europe, whether papal or royal, princely or theocratic, opted for a divine underpinning of sovereign power, the Republic could not choose for this option. Rather, the Republic embodied a Babylonian challenge in this context. The newly built City Hall of Amsterdam would be described in its own times as a miracle of the world. The poet Constantijn Huygens, for instance, addressed the burgomasters of the city as 'Enlightened founders of the world's eighth wonder / of so many stones up high, and so much wood down under'.[28] Surely, there was a pride in this, one that implied a challenge to European royalty; a pride that could easily become a matter of boasting, which is why modern commentators could also suggest that the City Hall was perhaps a little 'too big'.[29] Vondel was very much involved, aesthetically, with the building of this new City Hall, that started in 1648 and would be finished in 1655. In this context, 'Mars tamed' performs a Babylonian challenge, brought forward with a certain arrogance or a felt pride in the

[25] Marijke Spies 1994 described how the image of the lion changed from as a fierce, wild and devouring animal into a powerful yet noble and restrained one in the course of the uprising.

[26] Vs. 166; in the original: 'Zy luistren mack naer heure roede en tucht, / En weten nu van brullen, noch van schreeuwen.'

[27] On a distinctly Dutch republican baroque, see Frans-Willem Korsten, 2017.

[28] In the original: 'Doorluchte stichteren van 's wereld achtste wonder, / van soo veel steens omhoogh, op soo veel Houts van onder', Constantijn Huygens, *Gedichten, deel 6: 1656-1661*, p. 108. Wooden poles were needed to make the building rest on the firmer soil underneath the weak and wet upper layer of the soil. The city hall is built on 13.659 wooden poles.

[29] Frijhoff and Spies 2004; in the original: 'te groot misschien…' p. 441.

achievements of the Republic.[30] Again, it had surely been remarkable that all the major negotiating parties in Münster and Osnabrück represented royalty or princes except the humble, though perhaps not that humble, representatives of the Lords States-General of the United Provinces.

In this context, the text's message that the rule of law, and the peace it should protect, cannot be based on a divine supreme being gains in importance. The seal to law and order should not be a sovereign king with a divine underpinning. Rather, the seal of law should be in the hand of people such as the Amsterdam burgomasters, who were capable of not putting their own interests up front, but being willing to care, labor and sweat for the common good.

Still, due to the inverted allegory, the poem's edge gets a peculiar and an uncomfortable quality here. In terms of what they stood for, Vondel had to reject Lucifer-like entities. Yet both the character of Lucifer in the play and Mars in this text are not just raving rascals. Lucifer is an intelligent, responsible actor who is willing to negotiate, up to a point, and whose motivations are understandable. And if we consider Mars, he might be motivated to revolt due to the fact that he is sent out to do the dirty work – to punish mankind – and is then called back because one of Jupiter's loves came to complain. In response, he refuses to be an instrument any longer, and attacks the supreme being who used him as such – and who has proven to be whimsical in doing so. In the inverted allegory, then, there is a prowess involved that needs to be rejected but that also fascinates. Translated to the Dutch republican context, there is an affective ambiguity at work between a prowess that rests on what has been achieved against the odds, and a prowess that is reckless, violent and rupturing. The combination of the two makes this a paradigmatic baroque text of contra-diction.[31] The Republic had become astoundingly successful due to its trade, yet its uprising against their rightful king had cost years of extremely violent struggles. And if the Republic gained in fame because of its internal tolerance, its imperial brutality was equally infamous. In several senses, the Dutch Republic was a peace goddess and a belligerent Mars in one. Vondel's text performs this duality.

[30] Mariët Westermann 1996 considered Dutch Republican art as an expression of secular power. René van Stipriaan 2007 focused on the Republic'ss wealth and its rich, or abundant life. See also Anna Tummers 2012, or Thijs Westeteijn 2012.

[31] For a definition of the baroque as sensibility, but more importantly here, for its revolutionary potential, see Robert Mandrou 1960.

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