

PART II

APPROACHES AND DRAMAS



CHAPTER ELEVEN

NEW HISTORICISM – *HIERUSALEM VERWOEST* (1620) AND THE JEWISH QUESTION*

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Hierusalem Verwoest and its Critics: 'A Mere Religious Play'?

Hierusalem verwoest (*Jerusalem Destroyed*) has never been a favourite among Vondel scholars, and that is putting things mildly. Despite the author's own enthusiasm for it,¹ Vondel's second play (1620) has definitely not been greeted with much critical acclaim throughout the past century and a half. The modern standard of the text's reception seems to have been set by Jacob Van Lennep. In his introduction to the play in his edition of *De Werken van Vondel* (1855), Van Lennep expressed his admiration for the poet's distinct linguistic virtuosity in *Hierusalem verwoest*. This clearly marked a welcome step forward, he thought, in comparison with *Het Pascha* (*Passover*), Vondel's first play which was published eight years earlier. But at the same time, Van Lennep seems to have been a bit disappointed by the new play's lack of dramatic power.² With respect to the latter, he considered the comparison with *Het Pascha* less advantageous. Although still clearly rooted in the Dutch late medieval tradition of 'het rederijkersspel' from which Vondel would soon break away, *Het Pascha* was much more of a real play than *Hierusalem verwoest*, Van Lennep felt. He concluded, therefore, that it would be better to characterize Vondel's second dramatic opus as a 'tragic song' (*treurzang*) rather than a 'tragedy' (*treurspel*).³

Both ingredients of Van Lennep's mixed feelings about the play return in the summary treatment that *Hierusalem verwoest* is given in

* The author wishes to thank Mike Keirsbilck for his invaluable bibliographical help in the preparation of this text and Lise Gosseye for her assistance with the English translations of Vondel's verse.

¹ Of his earliest writings, he only includes *Hierusalem verwoest* in the 1644 edition (*Verzamelt door B.D.L.B. t'Amsterdam, gedrukt bij Jacob Lescaille. Voor Joost Hartgers*) of his *Verscheide Gedichten*. Cf. Van Lennep, 'Kritisch overzicht', p. 757.

² Van Lennep, 'Kritisch overzicht', p. 752.

³ Van Lennep, 'Kritisch overzicht', p. 752.

most of the important histories of Dutch literature of the modern era. Kalff, Te Winkel and Knuvelde, to give only those three examples, all seem to agree with Van Lennep. Compared to *Het Pascha*, *Hierusalem verwoest* is indeed a step forward as far as the development of Vondel's budding mastery of the Dutch language is concerned, both Kalff and Te Winkel write,⁴ but the characters are lacking in personality, Kalff claims.⁵ According to Knuvelde, on the other hand, dramatically speaking the play as a whole, on account of its largely emblematic purposes, is not very gripping.⁶ Te Winkel concurs, by means of what any reader of *Hierusalem verwoest* will ultimately consider a serious understatement: 'there is more dialogue than action' in Vondel's second play.⁷

There is, to be frank, hardly any action at all in *Hierusalem verwoest*. The play opens *post medias res*, one could say, after the real action has taken place, the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the later Roman emperor Titus in 70 AD. The play's first four acts are almost entirely taken up by *post factum* descriptions of the town's bloody siege and by comments on the event by members of both the victorious party (the Roman leader, Titus, for instance, and his second in command, Librarius) and those who are left defeated (the daughter of Sion, for instance, a personification of the Jewish people, and the Jewish priest, Phineas, whose monologue opens the third act). In true Senecan fashion,⁸ each of the first four acts is rounded off by the lyrical ruminations of a group of characters: no action there either. There are five 'Reyen' in all in *Hierusalem verwoest*, representing the different parties in the military conflict: Roman soldiers, Jewish women, 'Jewesses in general',

⁴ Kalff, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandse Letterkunde*, 4, 267; Te Winkel, *Ontwikkelingsgang*, 3, pp. 270–71.

⁵ Kalff, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandse Letterkunde*, 4, p. 267.

⁶ Knuvelde, *Handboek*, 2, p. 323.

⁷ '[E]r [is] meer dialoog dan handeling': Te Winkel, *Ontwikkelingsgang*, 3, p. 271.

⁸ In the interlude between *Pascha* and *Hierusalem verwoest*, Vondel discovered Seneca, of whose *Troades* he made a prose-translation together with P.C. Hooft and Laurens Reael, probably in the winter of 1622–1623. Seneca's play deals with the destruction of Troy and its impact on the female population of the city: the analogy with *Hierusalem verwoest* is obvious, since most of the play's action is taken up by the attempt of the women of Jerusalem to prevent the daughter of Sion from being taken to Rome as part of the war booty. Vondel's *Amsteldamsche Hecuba* (1625) is a translation of the play in rhyming verse. I will not deal with the Senecan influence in *Hierusalem verwoest*, given the extensive treatment of the subject in Smit, *Van Pascha to Noah*, I, pp. 61–63. Smit's chapter on the play (*Van Pascha tot Noah*, I, pp. 61–96) is still the best general introduction to it. Other good introductions to the play can be found in Molkenboer, *De jonge Vondel*, pp. 627–57 and Konst, *Fortuna, Fatum & Providentia*, pp. 127–35.

'Courtly ladies in waiting' (Staet Jonffren) and Christians.⁹ The latter group, who on account of the Roman victory will be allowed to settle in Jerusalem, are addressed in the fifth act by the angel Gabriel. In his long monologue, which takes up most of the fifth act, he explains God's ways to both the Christian settlers and the Amsterdam audience of Vondel's play. I will come back to Gabriel's speech later in this chapter.

In the two most recent literary histories to date, the critical fortune of *Hierusalem verwoest* has not made a turn for the better. In *Nederlandse literatuur, een geschiedenis* (1993), the play does not even receive a separate mention at all, whereas in *Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen* (1560–1700), their contribution to the seven-volume *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Literatuur* (2008), Karel Porteman and Mieke Smits-Veldt grant *Hierusalem verwoest* one single sentence, a dismissive one at that: Vondel's second play, the authors believe, is 'nothing but a religious play about God's deliverance of vengeful justice to sinners, in a Christian *aemulatio* of Seneca's *Troades*.¹⁰ As the title of this chapter suggests, I intend to dispute this qualification as well as the slightly condescending judgment that it seems to entail. Of course, the play is religious to the bone, like most of Vondel's work, but as I hope to make clear, a closer look at the historical moment in which *Hierusalem verwoest* was written, may enable us to relate the Christian message that it tries to convey to the political actuality of Vondel's Amsterdam in a new and, hopefully, exciting way.

The Historical Method: From Old to New

While there is much to be said in favour of Van Lennep's general appreciation of Vondel's play, it is not the purpose of the present chapter to add to the aesthetic criticism of *Hierusalem verwoest* that he inaugurated. Rather, what I wish to do is to relate the play to a set of historical circumstances to which it can be read as a response. My aim is not to pin down the meaning of Vondel's entire text to what traditional historical scholars would have called its original context of production, but to indicate within it one specific discursive thread that enables us to see the text as participating in the complex historical moment to which

⁹ Cf. Van Gemert, *Tussen de bedrijven door?*, pp. 235–36.

¹⁰ Porteman and Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland*, p. 231: '[...] niet meer dan een religieus spel over Gods wrekende gerechtigheid over zondaren, in een christelijke *aemulatio* van Seneca's *Troades*.'

it belongs. At large, the text's historical moment is that of the closing years of the Twelve Years' Truce and the aftermath of the tragic execution of Van Oldenbarneveldt, a moment of great political and religious instability. As we will see shortly, Vondel's second play has been repeatedly connected to this historical background, but in my view not in a very satisfactory manner, or at least not on the basis of sufficient textual evidence.

My aim, obviously, is in line with the reading method this chapter is meant to exemplify, the New Historicism. A word of caution is in order, however. What I am here presenting is not a full-fledged New Historicist analysis of *Hierusalem verwoest*. Such an ambition would require more space and, admittedly, more archival study than I have been able to pursue so far. My ambition is more modest, but it does nevertheless tie in with the critical agenda of New Historicism, in the sense that, on the basis of a number of specific textual markers, I wish to situate Vondel's text in a dialogical framework of other texts whose presuppositions he borrows and elaborates upon. Instead of taking an allegorical approach as previous historicist readings of *Hierusalem verwoest* have done, I have opted for a more literal reading and taken the Jews in Vondel's play for what they represent: Jews. In doing so, the historicist bias behind my reading of the play has directed me towards the question of their actual treatment in Vondel's Amsterdam and to Hugo Grotius's *Remonstrance Concerning the Order that Needs to Be Imposed on the Jews in the States of Holland and Westvrieslandt* (*Remonstrantie nopende de ordre dije in de landen van Hollandt ende Westvrieslandt dijen gestelt op de Joden*, 1615). Without wanting to suggest an explicit intertextual relationship between Vondel's play and the text by Grotius, I want to argue that both texts participate in a shared ideology with respect to the Jewish Question, an ideology that I would describe in terms of a 'missionary tolerance': their presence is tolerated, for several reasons – primarily economic ones, but also ultimately anticipation of their long-awaited conversion to Christianity.

To be sure, a full-fledged New Historicist analysis of Vondel's play would require a more extensive reading of Vondel's text in connection with a broader corpus of co-texts. However, I hope that what follows may ultimately serve as the first step towards a more exhaustive treatment of the subject along the lines presented here. New Historicist analyses are generally meant as corrections of a number of presumably flawed characteristics of more traditional historicist readings: (a) their positivism (their tendency to anchor texts in a set of facts that are

treated as indisputable rather than historical representations that can be seen from different perspectives); (b) their 'monologism' (their tendency to take contexts as monoliths of which the literary text is subsequently seen as a simple illustration); (c) their idealism (their tendency to venerate literary authors as beings endowed with more historical insight than other living beings).¹¹ It would not be too hard, I think, to come up with examples of traditional historicist readings of texts by Vondel that fit this description. In what follows, I intend to counteract these three tendencies, by (a) construing historical facts (in this case, the presence of the Jews in Amsterdam anno 1618–1619) as a matter of dialogical dispute; (b) regarding the background of Vondel's play as an unstable and multifaceted artefact that contains a force field that cannot be reduced to a simple formula; (c) treating Vondel not as a straightforward champion of political correctness ('toleration', 'moral rectitude') but as a historical agent who like any other historical agent in his time did not have the freedom to transcend the discursive boundaries of his age.

*The Political Actuality of Hierusalem Verwoest: the Dedication
to C.P. Hooft*

From what I have said so far about the critical reception of *Hierusalem verwoest*, one might be led to conclude that there is very little about which critics tend to disagree with respect to Vondel's second play. However, such a conclusion stands in need of immediate qualification. The most important bone of contention among scholars who have written about *Hierusalem verwoest* seems to be that of the play's presumed 'topicality': the question, more specifically, of how Vondel's dramatization of what to him and his contemporaries was after all a story from a distant past, relates to the major political event of the year that precedes the play's composition, the execution of Johan Van Oldenbarneveldt on May 13th 1619. It is well known that the history of Van Oldenbarneveldt's final days is the subject of the play Vondel wrote after *Hierusalem verwoest*, *Palamedes* (1625). Yet according to some critics, Vondel's outrage at the scandalous 'murder' of the

¹¹ A good survey of the basic principles of the reading method can be found in Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*. See also Pieters, *Moments of Negotiation* and 'In denkbeeldige tegenwoordigheid'.

Raadpensionaris by Stadtholder Maurits (the term is Vondel's) can be distinctly felt in *Hierusalem verwoest*, especially in the play's opening monologue by Josephus (a character representing Flavius Josephus, the Jewish-Roman historian, writer of the *Antiquitates Judaicae* and of the *Bellum Iudaicum* from which Vondel took some of the historical materials for his play) and in the dedicatory epistle to C.P. Hooft, 'Councillor and former Burgomaster of the globally famous Merchant City of Amsterdam' (HV, p. 77).¹²

Albert Verwey, for one, felt quite sure that, much in the same way as *Het Pascha* could be read as a 'laudatory poem on the secession from Spain', *Hierusalem verwoest* had to be seen as 'Vondel's response to the beheading of the Pensionary'.¹³ Written in 1927, Verwey's comment can be taken as an echo of the lengthy exposition that C.R. De Klerk in the *Kultuurbeschouwende inleiding* to his edition of *Het Pascha* and *Hierusalem verwoest* (1911) devotes to what he considers to be the reasoning behind Vondel's dedication of the latter play to former burgomaster Hooft.¹⁴ The play in itself, De Klerk admits, scarcely contains any immediately visible traces of the politically turbulent moment of its composition. This is hardly coincidental, he feels, since the time was definitely not ripe for a direct attack against those Vondel would have considered responsible for Van Oldenbarneveldt's end: the Stadtholder and his political entourage, in the first place, as well as the orthodox Calvinist preachers whose party had prevailed at the Synod of Dordrecht of 1618–1619. It is a well-known fact that the impact of the Synod was not limited to religious issues. The theological dispute between Remonstrants and Contraremonstrants also involved differences of meaning with respect to the political organization of the Republic and foreign policy.¹⁵ The Contraremonstrants were generally

¹² 'Raed en ouwd Burgemeester der om des weerelds ommeloop wyd beroemde Koopstad Amsterdam.' In what follows, I will draw on the text as it appears in the second volume of *De werken van Vondel* in the ten-volume edition from the 'maatschappij voor goede en goedkoope lectuur te Amsterdam' ('company for well-written and well-priced reading material in Amsterdam'). References are given parenthetically as HV, followed by the page number (for the paratextual materials) or the line number (for the text of the play itself).

¹³ '[L]ofzang op de losmaking van Spanje' and 'Vondels antwoord op de onthoofding van de Advocaat': Verwey, *Vondels vers*, p. 37.

¹⁴ De Klerk, *Kultuurbeschouwende inleiding*, pp. lii–lxxxii.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Rowen, *The Princes of Orange*, p. 46. For a clear survey of the political and religious struggles of the moment see Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, pp. 399–477.

in favour of a heavily centralized state in whose organisation the Church would play a central role, more central at least than the one it had in the federation of semi-independent states that made up the young Dutch Republic.¹⁶ In the political force field that structured the first decades of the Republic, their position automatically seemed to entail the support for the Stadtholder, whose role, they believed, needed to become that of a quasi-monarch, whose absolute power it was to decide upon what was best for all his subjects, not just *including* their religion but even *predominantly* their religion. In his political struggle against Van Oldenbarneveltdt, spokesman for the States and staunch supporter of the federalist organization of the Union, Maurits will have been aware that the outcome of the Synod in favour of the Contraremonstrants would ultimately strengthen his own power and possibly even secure him the position of supreme sovereign.

The outcome of the political struggle between Van Oldenbarneveltdt and Maurits is well-known, as is the fact that it filled Vondel with pure rage, a rage which according to De Klerk he could not express in *Hierusalem verwoest*. However, by dedicating his play to former burgomaster Hooft, Vondel did make it perfectly clear whose side he was on. Both in his political ambitions and in his continued plea for religious tolerance, Hooft could be considered an ally of Van Oldenbarneveltdt and Grotius, the two most memorable victims of the political outcome of the Synod of Dordt. Between 1588 and 1610, C.P. Hooft, father of the famous poet, was several times elected as one of the burgomasters of Amsterdam, on whose 'city council' ('vroedschap') he served in different capacities from 1584 until his death in 1626.¹⁷ On the occasion of his death, Vondel composed a touching sonnet ('Klinckdicht') in which he urged his fellow citizens to always remember Hooft as an 'irreproachable' ('onbesproken') enemy of 'profit and thirst for power' ('baet en staetzucht'). In *Het Roskam* (*Currycumb*, 1630), one of his fiercest satirical poems, dedicated to Hooft's son, the famous poet and Sheriff ('Drost') of Muyden, Vondel addressed the former burgomaster as 'dear burgomaster' ('beste bestevaer') and 'Mirror of virtue' ('Spiegel van de

¹⁶ For a good survey of the political organization of the States making up the Republic, see Méchoulán, *Amsterdam en tijde van Spinoza*, pp. 58–59.

¹⁷ For an intellectual biography of Hooft see Van Gelder, *Levensbeschouwing*. For a brief survey of Hooft's activities on the 'Raedt' of the Amsterdam 'Vroedschap' see Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam*, I, p. 147. In the introduction to his book, Elias gives a succinct description of the city's political organization. See also Burke, *Venetie en Amsterdam*, passim and Méchoulán, *Amsterdam ten tijde van Spinoza*, p. 64.

deugd'), an avatar of moral rectitude and hence a true counterexample to those who were now in charge of the city and whose politics of blind self-interest, Vondel felt, might bring an end to Amsterdam's prosperity.

Throughout his career, Hooft had always taken a firm stance against those Vondel gradually came to consider his worst enemies, the Calvinist preachers whom the poet also targeted in other memorable satires.¹⁸ Hooft's resistance to the 'Predikanten' (preachers) was, unsurprisingly, based on a mixture of religious, moral and political considerations. He abhorred their intolerance of dissenters on the basis of the very principles that earned him the nickname of Cato, but his untiring resistance to the preachers was also a matter of political conviction. Their continued plea for more authority for the Church in State matters ultimately threatened to bring down the good fortune of Amsterdam, Hooft felt, the economic success of which he considered to be the result of the sound and pragmatic organization of the City and the fact that it was ruled by merchants and for merchants. His no doubt justly famed tolerance was equally grounded in an economic rationale, as Busken Huet already shrewdly noted in his trenchant portrait of Hooft in *Het Land van Rembrandt*.¹⁹ However, by the time of Vondel's dedication of *Hierusalem verwoest*, the man's power had already waned considerably. On 3 November 1618, two months after the imprisonment of Van Oldenbarneveldt, Hooft famously stood up to Stadtholder Maurits when the latter came to a meeting of the Amsterdam city council to sack those regents of the City of Amsterdam who were less supportive of his cause.²⁰ Maurits, however, seems not to have been duly impressed by Hooft's protest.

Vondel's Play and the Jewish Presence in Amsterdam

Apart from the dedicatory epistle, some critics have also perceived references to the Van Oldenbarneveldt case in the very text of Vondel's play. According to Sterck, some of the lines of Josephus's opening

¹⁸ Cf. Van Gelder, *Levensbeschouwing*, pp. 124–29.

¹⁹ Huet, *Het land van Rembrandt*, 3, pp. 161–66. As Méchoulan puts it: 'Vrijheid en tolerantie zijn commerciële imperatieven, dat wil zeggen categorische imperatieven voor het stadsbestuur.' ('Freedom and tolerance are commercial imperatives, i.e. categorical imperatives for local government', *Amsterdam ten tijde van Spinoza*, p. 57)

²⁰ Cf. De Klerk, *Kultuurbeschouwende inleiding*, pp. lxvii–lxx. See also: Calis, *Vondel*, pp. 118–19.

monologue of *Hierusalem verwoest* would not have been out of place in *Palamedes*.²¹ In his brief analysis of the play in *Vondels Vers*, Verwey quotes the first twelve lines of the play in which the theme of God's revenge on the Jews is immediately introduced and he feels sure that these lines could only have been provoked by the imprisonment and the execution of Van Oldenbarneveltdt.²² Molkenboer, in his famous study of the writings of *De jonge Vondel* (*The young Vondel*), even detects in Josephus's first speech 'allusions suggesting that the poet even thought of the overconfidence of those preaching predestination'.²³

However, as I suggested earlier, not every reader of *Hierusalem verwoest* agrees with De Klerk, Verwey, Sterck and Molkenboer. In his analysis of the play in the first volume of his classic *Van Pascha tot Noah*, W.A.P. Smit is quite emphatic: 'I am truly convinced that any political allusion to Oldenbarneveltdt is wholly foreign to *Hierusalem verwoest*', he writes, 'even in the Josephus monologue'.²⁴ The play, Smit goes on to write, contains no immediate references to the political actuality of its moment of production; it 'only contains Biblical-Christian symbolism'.²⁵ Having repeatedly and closely read the play's opening monologue, I tend to side with Smit on this specific issue. To be sure, Vondel will no doubt have been thinking about some kind of poetical means with which to call for revenge in the immediate aftermath of the horrendous events of May 1619, but it is hardly clear why he would want to choose this specific story about God's revenge on the Jews to air his dissatisfaction with the outcome of the political struggles in the Republic in general and in Amsterdam in particular. In 1625, it was clear to every reader that *Palamedes* was in fact about Van

²¹ Sterck, 'Het leven van Vondel', p. 3.

²² 'Door welke gebeurtenissen anders dan door de vervolging van de Remonstranten en de gevangenneming en dood van Baernevelt, kon hij gedreven zijn tot zulk een spanning, overspanning bijna, van gekrenkt rechtvaardigheidsgevoel.' ('What events, other than the persecution of the Remonstrants and the arrest and death of Barnevelt, could compel him to such a strain, overstraining almost, of aggrieved sense of justice?') Verwey, *Vondels Vers*, p. 38.

²³ Molkenboer, *De jonge Vondel*, p. 640: 'toespelingen die het vermoeden wekken dat de dichter zelfs aan de overmoed van de Praedestinatie-predikanten gedachten heeft (ll. 25–26)'.

²⁴ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 1, p. 94: 'Ik ben ervan overtuigd, dat in werkelijkheid iedere politieke allusie op Oldenbarneveltdt aan de *Hierusalem verwoest* ten enenmale vreemd is, ook in de Josephus-monoloog'.

²⁵ Smit, *Van Pascha tot Noah*, 1, p. 94: 'uitsluitend drager van een Bijbels-Christelijke symboliek'.

Oldenbarneveldt: the eponymous hero is the classical exemplum par excellence of a wise leader unjustly convicted, and that is precisely what Van Oldenbarneveldt was in Vondel's view. In the case of *Hierusalem verwoest*, any historical analogy between what could be seen on the theatrical stage or read on the page of a printed literary text and what happened on the political stage is much harder to determine, unless one takes the phenomenon of the analogy in a very flexible (and possibly even blasphemous) sense of the word and considers the killing of Christ by the Jews as a historical parallel to the murder of Van Oldenbarneveldt by the Contraremonstrants.

Still, this does not mean that *Hierusalem verwoest* 'only contains Biblical-Christian symbolism'. Vondel's use of this Biblical motif has an actual bearing on the moment of its production. In the remainder of this chapter, I want to follow a different 'contextual' trail that allows us to connect Vondel's text in a more direct manner to the historical circumstances in which it was produced. I want to relate *Hierusalem verwoest* to a question that seems immediately relevant to the historical materials that Vondel drew upon in his play and that was clearly in the air at the time when he wrote it, even if less spectacularly so than the Van Oldenbarneveldt case.

On 13 December 1619, the States of Holland decided that in future it would be left to the cities within the Assembly to decide upon their own regulations with respect to the treatment of their Jewish inhabitants. A 'national' policy with respect to the Jews turned out not to be feasible at the time, possibly also on account of the fact that the Jewish question kept dividing the Calvinist and more libertarian factions within the States. The only general rule that the States decreed was that Jews should not be compelled to wear any distinguishing mark, as was the case in different European states and regions.²⁶ As far as the city of Amsterdam was concerned, the decision of the States enabled the city council to continue the moderately liberal policy it had been adopting for some years. Given the steady rise of the number of Sephardic merchants in the Republic (and in Amsterdam, in particular), the Jewish Question seems to have been a not wholly unimportant one during the Twelve Years' Truce.²⁷ The Truce had resulted, among other things, in a major economic boom, to which the growing number of Jewish merchants had contributed significantly. In contrast to their Dutch

²⁶ Huussen, 'The legal position of the Jews', p. 34.

²⁷ Meijer, 'Inleiding', p. 47.

colleagues, the Sephardic Jews had an immediate access to the interesting markets related to the Spanish and Portuguese colonies.²⁸ If only on economic grounds, therefore, most Dutch policy-makers seem to have found it reasonable to welcome members of the 'Jewish Nation' in their midst, even if their presence was greeted with serious hostility by other groups within society, the reformed clergy in particular. 'Provocations and oppositions aside', Hsia notes in one of many surveys of the matter, 'the Jewish community flourished because of the protection of the regents, who ignored most of the complaints of the Reformed clergy'.²⁹

This should not lead us to conclude, however, that Amsterdam was a true heaven on earth for the Jews.³⁰ In 1614, five years before the decision to which I just referred, the question of the increasing number of Jews living in the Republic was already occupying the members of the States of Holland. According to Meijer, the direct occasion may have been one or two cases of apostasy, Christians suddenly converting to the Jewish faith.³¹ The States asked two prominent lawyers to draft a recommendation with respect to the Jewish question: the Calvinist Adriaen Pauw, Pensionary of Amsterdam, and the Arminian Hugo Grotius.³² Of their responses, only that of Grotius seems to have survived; his 'Remonstrance Concerning the Order Needing to be Imposed on the Jews in the States of Holland and Westvrieslandt for the Jews' (1615) has been taken by many historians of the period to be a typical product of the treatment of the Jews in the first two decades of the seventeenth-century Republic: 'liberal on some points, reactionary on others', to borrow the terms used by Jonathan Israel.³³ Indeed, Grotius's text strikes the contemporary reader as a bizarre mixture of philosemitism and antisemitism. The text opens with a number of historical arguments that are traditionally directed against the toleration of Jews.³⁴ In that context Grotius provides us with examples of 'the general

²⁸ Van Rooden, 'Jews and religious toleration in the Dutch Republic', p. 134.

²⁹ Hsia, 'Introduction', p. 3.

³⁰ For a survey of four different Christian perspectives on Jews in the seventeenth-century Republic see Abicht, *Geschiedenis van de Joden van de Lage Landen*, pp. 72–75.

³¹ Meijer, 'Inleiding', p. 48.

³² Huussen, 'The legal position of the Jews', pp. 32–33.

³³ Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism 1550–1750*, p. 64. Nellen (*Hugo de Groot*, p. 99) describes the text as 'tolerant'.

³⁴ They are characteristically (and backed by Biblical authority) described as 'stubborn, uncircumcised of heart, murderers of the prophets, scum' ('hardtneekinghe, onbesneden van harten, prophetenmoorders, addergebroet'), De Groot, *Remonstrantie*, p. 109.

irreconcilable hatred of the Jews towards the Christians,³⁵ taken from the Talmudic compilation 'Abodazara' and the Bible, but also from stories involving the supposed crucifixion of Christians by Jews. Over and against those stand two arguments in support of their presence, Grotius concludes, arguments 'that perhaps ought to outweigh the former':³⁶ one is economic (their presence is advantageous for the material prosperity of the common good), another religious. It is the latter that is of interest to my reading of *Hierusalem verwoest*, since the logic behind this part of Grotius's 'Remonstrance' ties in, I believe, with the emblematic message of Vondel's play.

Grotius's 'Remonstrance'

'It is obvious that God wants them to stay somewhere,' Grotius writes in his 'Remonstrance,' 'so why not here,' he wonders.³⁷ The logic behind the former sentence is clear: the history of the dispersal of the Jews shows that God remains willing to protect this people, despite the hideous fact that they are responsible for the killing of His Son. God's lasting protection seems to be accounted for in Grotius's text by means of a single axiom: 'habent primordium veritatis,' 'theirs is the origin of truth.'³⁸ This, Grotius feels, is what distinguishes the Jews from the heathens and from other heretics: 'The heathens have false Gods. The Muhammadans have a false Prophet. The Jews in a certain sense have the right God and the right Prophets. The bulk of their faith we share, and the rest of what we believe, we prove from the scriptures they believe in.'³⁹

As Stephen Nadler points out in his brief discussion of the 'Remonstrance' in *Rembrandt's Jews*, Grotius was later to return to the idea that the Jewish faith was not so completely different and contrary to that of the Christians; their faith, Grotius writes in *De veritate religionis Christianae* (*On the Truth of the Christian Religion*, 1627), is

³⁵ De Groot, *Remonstrantie*, p. 109: 'den generaelen onversoelijcken haet van de Joden tot de Christenen.'

³⁶ De Groot, *Remonstrantie*, p. 110: 'dije misschijen de voorgaende behooren te overweegen.'

³⁷ De Groot, *Remonstrantie*, p. 113: 'T' is kennelick dat Godt wilt dat zij ergens blijen,' 'Waerom dan hijer nijet.'

³⁸ De Groot, *Remonstrantie*, p. 112.

³⁹ De Groot, *Remonstrantie*, pp. 111–12: 'De Heijdenen hebben valsche Goden. De Mahumetisen een valsche Profeet. De Jooden hebben eenichsints den rechten Godt ende de rechte Propheten. De substantie van haer gelooff gelooven wij mede, ende t' gunt wij meer geloven, bewijzen wij vuijt de schriften dije zij geloven.'

'the stock onto which [the Christian faith] was grafted.'⁴⁰ In other words, Judaism contains the germ of a truth God intended to find fulfilment in the Christian faith. The iconic moment of that fulfilment is, obviously, the arrival of the New Jerusalem and its blessing at the Second Coming of the Saviour. In the 'Remonstrance', Grotius more than once calls upon Saint Paul to support the religious grounds of his plea for toleration of the Jews. Paul's conception of the Judaic Law, as Michael Grant has noted, is perfectly in line with the logic of prefiguration and fulfilment that sustains his influential reading of the Bible. The Mosaic Law does not suffice for those who are seeking God's justification, Paul writes in Romans, chapter 3: more is needed, and that more can be found in the true faith of the Christian.⁴¹

The same logic underlies Paul's conviction, referred to by Grotius, that the Second Coming will also entail the ultimate conversion of all Jews to the Christian Faith. As a Jew himself, Paul knew that the members of his former race were also anxiously awaiting the coming of the Messiah,⁴² but it was only by becoming a Christian that he felt he could see the true message of God. In line with his own personal experience, Paul therefore saw it as a duty of all Christians to facilitate the eventual conversion of the Jews. In his 'Remonstrance', Grotius refers to the Pauline ideal as follows:

Moreover, the apostle Paul has stated emphatically that a general conversion of the Jewish People is still to come, to which end God appears to be miraculously saving the Jewish nation in itself and apart from other people, to prove to them when the time has come the certainty of his promises. All Christians have to strive for this particular and general conversion, which cannot take place if the Jews are cut off from conversation with Christians, because how can they believe without hearing or hear without preaching?⁴³

In the 34th article of the regulation that Grotius proposes in his 'Remonstrance', the question of the conversion of the Jews returns as

⁴⁰ Quoted in Nadler, *Rembrandt's Jews*, p. 20.

⁴¹ Grant, *Saint Paul*, p. 50.

⁴² Grant, *Saint Paul*, p. 51.

⁴³ De Groot, *Remonstrantie*, p. 110: 'Hijerenboven seijt den Apostel Paulus uijt-druckelijck, dat noch eijndelijck een generaele bekinghe van het Joodtsche Volck is te verwachten, tot de welcken eijnde Godt oock schijnt de Joodtse natie wonderbaerlijck te bewaeren op haer zelve ende affgesondert van alle andere menschen, om daer aan t'sijnen tijde te bethoonen de seeckerheijt van zijne beloften. Tot dese particuliere ende generaele bekinghe moeten alle Christenen haer best doen, t' welck nijet en can geschijeden indijen men den Joden affsnijdt de conversatie van de Christenen: Want hoe sullen sij geloven zonder gehoor ofte hooren sonder predicatie?'

follows: 'If a Jew is converted to the Christian religion, he will not be troubled or harmed because of this by the Jews, upon pain of banishment from the land and confiscation, or also corporal punishment should the occasion call for it.'⁴⁴ In contrast to the inverse movement of conversion – Article 33 'A Christian that converses to Judaism will be banished from the land'⁴⁵ – the Christianization of Jews is a goal worth striving for.

At least part of the apparent philosemitism of the more liberal defenders of the Jewish presence in Amsterdam at the time seems to have been driven by the Pauline desire to convert. As Stephen Nadler among others has shown, the fascination of prominent intellectuals like Scaliger and Vossius, of preachers like Cornelis Anslo, and artists like Rembrandt was related to the idea that Amsterdam could be seen as the New Jerusalem to the millenarian belief that the Second Coming was nigh. The conversion of the Jews, Nadler writes, was supposed to facilitate the inauguration of God's kingdom of earth, and the concomitant restoration of the Temple of the New Jerusalem. The influence of millenarianism was 'nowhere more [influential] than in the Netherlands', Nadler claims.⁴⁶ Without wanting to assert that Vondel actually shared those beliefs, I would like to point out three loci around or in *Hierusalem verwoest* that can be connected to the discursive field I have sketched in the preceding paragraphs: the sonnet addressed 'Aende Ioodsche Rabbynen' ('To the Jewish rabbis') that immediately precedes the play, the speech by Josephus that opens Act I, and a passage from the monologue by Gabriel in Act V.

Vondel's Dream of a New Jerusalem

Let me start by quoting the first locus in full:

All your priests were drunk with happiness,
as Jesus hung suspended from the cross

⁴⁴ De Groot, *Remonstrantie*, p. 119: 'Indijen een Jode hem quaeme te bekeeren tot de Christelijcke religie, den selve sall ter saecke van dijen bij de Joden nijet mogen eenigh hinder ofte letsel aengedaen werden, op peijne van bannissement vuyt de landen ende confiscatie, ofte oock straffe aen den lijve, ingevallende de gelegentheijt van de saeck zulckx meriteerde.'

⁴⁵ 'De Groot, *Remonstrantie*, p. 119: 'Een Christen, dije hem tot het Jodendom zoude mogen begeven, zall werden gebannen vuyt de landen.'

⁴⁶ Nadler, *Rembrandt's Jews*, p. 92.

Crucified, flogged, spat at and mocked,
Because he was served the Cup of bitterness:

Little did they think that Justice, who above
In Heaven's golden lap, balances the scales,
values Innocent blood over fine Ophirian gold,
and counts the sighs of Truth cast aside

But when the day arrived that God had chosen
To avenge the crime of that God-forsaken City
And the people who thought they were safe on the holy threshold:

Then they plainly saw which plagues sin brought along,
And that for the wicked no walls or temple worshipped sanctimoniously
could be used for defence against the wrath of God.⁴⁷

The characterization of those addressed in the first line of the sonnet is typical and, therefore, anything but philosemitic: the Jews are explicitly marked as the murderers of Christ, 'the murderers of prophets', to borrow the term used by Grotius in his 'Remonstrance'.⁴⁸ However, this is not the only reason why God would want to inflict his vengeance on them, the poet seems to suggest. The wickedness of their ways also manifests itself in a number of other stereotypical characteristics of their race: their hunger for material wealth (l. 7), their hypocrisy (l. 14) and the stubborn conviction that they are the truly elect, and hence safe from God's wrath (l. 11). At the same time, the poet's abundant use of evaluative markers, causally connected with the divine revenge mentioned in lines 10 and 12, opens up the suggestion that if these people were to mend their ways, God would definitely not act towards them in the way that he has.

The title of Vondel's poem begs the straightforward question of the identity of its addressees. Whether or not 'Rabbynen' is taken as a generic noun for all Jewish rabbis, the Jews of the City of Amsterdam did in fact have different rabbis. As it happens, several sources stress the

⁴⁷ Vondel, *Hierusalem verwoest*, p. 100: 'De Rey uws Prieterschaps was als van blydschap droncken / Doen Iesus hingh aen 't hout met ermen uytgestreckt, / Gekruyst, gegeesselt, en bespogen, en begeckt, / Om dat hem was den Kelck der bitterheyd geschoncken: // Zy dachten luttel dat Rechtveerdigheyd, die boven / In 's Hemels gulden schoot de weeghschael recht op houd, / 'tOnschuldigh bloed meer schat als fijn Ophirisch goud, / En telt al 't zuchten vande Waerheyd hier verschoven. // Maer als de dagh aenbrack die God beschoren had / Tot wraeck van 't schelmstuk van die Godvergeten Stad / En 't volck dat veyligh dacht te staen op heyl'ge dremp'len: // Doen zaghen baer wat zonde al plagen met zich brocht, / En dat de Boosheyd tot geen brotweer strecken mocht / Geweld van muren nog schijnheyligheyd van Temp'len.'

⁴⁸ De Groot, *Remonstrantie*, p. 109.

fact that in the years 1618–1619 there was a great deal of commotion between three different congregations of the Amsterdam Sephardics, which ultimately even led to a trial.⁴⁹ The case will have been known to the original audience of *Hierusalem verwoest*, who will no doubt have been reminded of it by Vondel's insistence (both in the summary of the play that precedes the sonnet 'Aende Ioodsche Rabbynen' and in the play itself) that Titus's victorious siege of Jerusalem was in part caused by internecine strife among three different factions.⁵⁰ Vondel derived this detail, like so many others, from Flavius Josephus's *The Wars of the Jews or History of the Destruction of Jerusalem*. Though he also made use of other historical accounts of the event,⁵¹ it is clear that the work by Josephus was his main source, if only because the author figures as a character in the play.

This brings me to the second locus that I would like briefly to focus upon: the monologue by Josephus with which the play opens (HV, ll. 1–150). Being the first to speak in *Hierusalem verwoest*, Josephus sets the tone of the play. In the first part of his monologue (HV, ll. 1–38) he addresses the city of Jerusalem twice, accounting for its fall on the basis of the 'vanity' ('hooghmoed') and 'sins' ('zonden') of its inhabitants (HV, l. 36). In an effort to further legitimize the divine act of revenge, he also addresses Daniel, whose insight 'into the sea of God's mysteries' ('inde zee van Gods geheymenissen', HV, l. 26) had enabled him to prophesy the fall of the city. As of l. 39, Josephus moves on to his own personal history. Flavius Josephus was born Joseph Ben Matthias, a Jewish priest from a prominent family, who on his mother's side apparently descended from the Maccabeans. He was originally involved as a Jewish military leader in the Revolt that began in 66 A.D. and was

⁴⁹ Cf. Nadler, *Rembrandt's Jews*, pp. 150–51. See also Van Roorden, 'Jews and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Republic', p. 134.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, Vondel's own summary of the play: *Hierusalem verwoest*, p. 97, ll. 20–21. The detail returns in the opening speech of Josephus, *Hierusalem verwoest*, ll. 109–11, where he names the three 'traitors of the city / Whom Heaven had elected as his bride' (verraders van die stad / Dien d'Hemel als zyn bruyt zich uytgelezen had). This is in accordance with Josephus's own reading of the event. As Meijer and Wes put it, Josephus makes clear to his readers that the Jewish resistance to Rome was provoked by a number of blinded rebels who refused to see that God's alliance was with the Romans – a conclusion Josephus himself had reached earlier. (Meijer and Wes, 'Flavius Josephus en de Joodse geschiedenis', p. 39).

⁵¹ He mentions them at the end of his brief summary: *Hierusalem verwoest*, p. 99: Hegesippus's *Verwoesting van Jerusalem*, the *Chronica* by Eusebius, and Louis Carrion's *Antiquarum lectionum commentarii tres* (1576). In the preface 'To the reader who loves poems' (Aenden Gedichtlievendenden lezer) he also mentions, apart from Josephus and Hegesippus, Carolus Langius. (HV, p. 85).

captured by the Romans at the siege of the town of Jotapata in the summer of 67.⁵² In *Hierusalem verwoest*, Josephus refers to his miraculous survival at the hands of the Romans, and considers it due to the graciousness of the Roman emperor Vespasian, whose family name (Flavianus) he came to adopt (*HV*, ll. 55–56). As of 69, Josephus served under Vespasian's son Titus. He even seems to have negotiated with the Jews during the siege of Jerusalem, to no avail, as he puts it in Vondel's play. (*HV*, ll. 91–92)

In several historical accounts, Josephus is seen as a traitor to his people,⁵³ but in the logic of Vondel's play, he presents himself as a convert, one could say, one who gradually came to see the truth of God, whom he calls upon to show mercy for the people of Judea, now that He has delivered them into the hands of heathens:

O Father! have mercy on Judea: cast your eyes down,
you who tame the waves, the lightning and the storm,
Tame the enemy's rage, and cool and extinguish the fire
That burns within the ferocious warriors,
So that no other disaster may strike Isaac's descendants
who you have put to the mercy of the Heathens.⁵⁴

The final lines of the historian's opening speech can be read as an anticipation of the play's final act, which shows the fulfilment of Josephus's plea for mercy and hence confirms the correctness of his conversion. At the beginning of Act V, a group of Christian settlers strike up a conversation with a Roman soldier, representative of the 'Heydenen' ('pagans') to whom Josephus refers at the end of his opening monologue. Simeon, one of the Christians, identifies himself to the soldier as a member of

A peaceful people that always awaits Jesus Christ
the Saviour of the souls: who was villainously accused and heinously
murdered
by the Godless Jews.⁵⁵

⁵² Cf. Wes and Meijer, 'Flavius Josephus en de Joodse geschiedenis', p. 32.

⁵³ Cf. Wes and Meijer, 'Flavius Josephus en de Joodse geschiedenis', p. 33.

⁵⁴ Vondel, *Hierusalem verwoest*, ll. 145–50: 'O Vader! haers erbermt: slaet 't aengzicht eens neder, / Die ghy de baren temt, de blixems, en 't onweder, / Temt 's vyands razernye, en koelt, en lescht den brand / Die van 't woest kryghsvolck heeft geschroockt het ingewand, / Dat Isacx overschot geen ramp meer op zich lade, / Dewijl ghy 't nu beveelt der Heydenen genade.'

⁵⁵ Vondel, *Hierusalem verwoest*, ll. 2060–62: 'Een vreedzaam volck, dat steeds op Iesus Christus hoopt / Der zielen Heyland: dien de Goddeloze Ioden / Zoo schelm's betichten, en zoo schandelijcken dooden.'

The Roman soldier turns out to be no mere heathen, but an instrument of God's providential wisdom. He encourages the Christians to settle in Jerusalem and serve their Saviour under the protection of Rome:

Sow this land, plant a vineyard, build huts there,
and serve your Christ: we will guard you,
and all those who are not Godless followers of the Jews
we will welcome, and the land will be freely available to them.⁵⁶

The Roman soldier's words of welcome serve as a prelude to the coming of the angel Gabriel, who in a long speech that takes up most of Act V and that is addressed both to the Christian settlers onstage and to Vondel's audience, living in what many of them will have seen as the New Jerusalem, explains the place of Jerusalem's fall in God's larger providential design. Gabriel's speech – my third locus – contains a literal reference to 'the New Jerusalem'. The destruction of the city should cause no wonder, Gabriel points out from the beginning of his speech, since it was prophesied by Daniel (*HV*, ll. 2118–19). Gabriel also points to the First Coming of the Messiah and his prediction, written down in Matthew 23 (one of Vondel's two epigraphs⁵⁷) that the Temple would one day be destroyed (*HV*, 2126). In fact, that prediction is here invoked as a proof of the identity of the Saviour, 'the Hero and Saviour of all / the great Siloa',⁵⁸ whose killing by the Godless Jews can therefore be only taken as a just cause for divine revenge.

The relationship between the old and the new Jerusalem is a prefigurative one, Gabriel seems to suggest, a relationship of completion and fulfilment. In the central part of Gabriel's speech, Vondel structures that relationship around the contrast between the Mosaic Law and the Word of God. Deriding the inhabitants of the old Jerusalem for allowing themselves to be blinded by material riches and earthly power, he appeals to the New Christians to turn their eyes upward and bask in the special light of the New Jerusalem:

⁵⁶ Vondel, *Hierusalem verwoest*, ll. 2089–92: 'Bezaeyt dit ackerland, plant wijngaerd, bouwter hutten, / En uwen Christus dient: wy zullen u beschutten, / En al die 't Ioods geslacht niet godloos hangen aen / Ons zullen wilkom zijn, 't land zal haer open staen.'

⁵⁷ Matthew, 23:38: 'Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.' The verse is part of Jesus's speech against the hypocrisy of Jewish scribes and Pharisees ('Rabbis') who are scolded by Christ for their 'blind' love of outward splendour. The second epigraph is the famous 'sunt lacrimae rerum' passage in Book I of the *Aeneid* (l. 462). In Virgil's text Aeneas's tears are provoked by a mural that he sees in a Carthaginian temple, representing battle scenes from the Trojan wars.

⁵⁸ Vondel, *Hierusalem verwoest*, ll. 2130–31: 'den Held en Heyland aller menschen, / De groote Siloa.' Siloa means 'the One who has been sent'.

So let the fools brag and boast
 of things that are but wilted flowers:
 Fly away from the vanity, from earth to heaven:
 climb to where Jesus is worshipped by the Angels:
 where the host of Angels that never tires of cheering and jumping,
 dreams of nothing but to praise him:
 where the Elders skilfully strike their lyres:
 where all the torches, stars, Sun and Moon,
 are but darkness when compared to him
 who fills infinity and shines upon everything:
 where the New Jerusalem has a different glow:
 where all the streets are golden and all the gates pearly:
 where the Majesty of the Trinity is
 a Temple to those in heaven on all sides: where all the diamonds
 lose their splendour: where God is common to all,
 and a thousand years are like one of our days.
 Who will then doubt that the (Mosaic) Law with all its celebrations,
 burning incense, slaughtering and sacrificing of animals,
 cleansing, and whatever else the service involves:
 is but darkness, compared to that which has more splendour?
 Who will embrace the shadows as Truth?
 Or choose Moses's glow over Christ's golden rays?⁵⁹

Gabriel's rhetoric of contradiction will be clear: the law of Moses leads one into darkness, whereas the shining example of Christ will ultimately allow his followers to reach God's light. Furthermore, the law of Moses is concerned with the outward spectacle of religion, whereas the Word of God is directed towards the purely spiritual.

Criticism of this sort in fact rehearses Saint Paul's conviction that, rather than take away man's appetite for sin, the Mosaic Law provoked the very thing that it was supposed to curb or forbid.⁶⁰ Paul's

⁵⁹ Vondel, *Hierusalem verwoest*, ll. 2161–82: 'Laet dan de dwazen gaen brageren en hoogh roemen / In dingen, die slechts zyn verwelckelijcke bloemen: / Vliegt ghy uyt d'ydelyheid nae boven van beneden: / Klimt op daer Iesus word van d'Eng'len aengebeeden: / Daer 't heyschaer nimmer moe, met juychen, en met springen, / Droomt nergens anders af als van hem lof te zingen: / Daer d'Ouderlingen op haer herpen kunstigh slaen: / Daer alle tortzen, daer de sterren, Zon, en Maen, / Zijn enckel duysternis, ten opzien van den genen / Die 't end'loos Rond vervult, en niets laet onbeschenen: / Daer 't nieuw Ierusalem heeft gants een ander schijn: / Daer al de straten goud, de poorten peerlen zijn: / Daer 's Dryheyds Majesteit verstrekt aen alle kanten / Der Hemel-lieden Kerck: daer alle diamanten / Verliezen haren glans: daer God zich maeckt gemeen, / En duyzend jaren zyn als onzer dagen een. / Wie zal nu twijff'len dat de wet met al haer feesten, / 'Twieroocken, 't slachten, en 't opofferen der beesten, / De reynigingen, en wat dienst daer meer aen kleeft: / Is donckerheid, by 't geen dat schoonder luyster heeft? / Wie zal de schaduwen omhelzen voor de waerheid? / Of kiezen Moses glans voor Christus gulde klaerheid?'

⁶⁰ Cf. Grant, *Saint Paul*, pp. 46–48.

conversion, like that of Saint Augustine after him, involved the turning away from things earthly to things heavenly. The belief of the Jews, with its seeming obsession with materiality and outward splendour, is far too earthly, Gabriel seems to suggest, and it leads to idolatry, the wrongful attribution of divine characteristics to merely human beings or objects.

O Bride of my King, chosen Church,
 Turn your eyes freely away from the dazzling shield,
 which your high priest flaunted once a year,
 as if he were no longer human but deified completely:
 the glow that dazzled you is extinguished,
 those services are over: Look: the Jewish priests are plundered
 they are standing there naked without their robes and mourn the
 treasure
 and the gold, that Israel had devoted to its church.
 If you're looking for a Priest, leave behind this ephemeral land,
 go towards the stars, there you will find your Saviour,
 Not adorned with silk or silkworm's spinning, no,
 His robe is but light from top to bottom.
 Behold the halo of pure flames and radiance
 that circles his Majesty, and see the sweet Cherubs
 and Seraphs descend to
 gaze upon the beautiful countenance of the Heavenly Groom:
 they laugh sweetly and continue to gaze at him:
 follow them as they lead the way: let go of the dead Priests,
 and lay them to rest: do no longer lend your ear to Moses's mouth
 But to Christ's lips: embrace the New Covenant.
 Do not mix lead with gold. Have less appreciation for the sign [the Old
 Covenant]
 than for the life [the New Covenant] to which it points.
 This tragedy that has been played so bloodily and so long,
 and that has ended now with the Jews' demise,
 expresses the justice and severity
 of God who seeks revenge for evil and bad deeds,
 and displays this destroyed descent
 as a beacon to everyone.⁶¹

⁶¹ Vondel, *Hierusalem verwoest*, ll. 2193–2220: 'O Bruyt van mynen Vorst, verkorene Gemeente, / Keert vry uw aengezicht van 't vlamigh borstgesteente, / Daer uwen Phenix me' ginch brallen eens om 't jaer, / Als of hy niet meer mensch, maer gants vergodet waer: / Die glanssen zijn gebluscht waerom ghy stond verwondert, / Die diens-ten hebben uyt: ziet Levi eens geplondert / Zoo naeckt staen zonder kleed, en treuren om den schat, / En 't goud, dat Israël zijn Kerck geheylicht had. / Zoo ghy een Priester zoeckt versmaed dit driftigh Eyland, / Gaet nae de sterren toe, daer vindy uwen Heyland, / Niet opgesmuckt met zijde, of wormgespinsel, neen, / Zijn kleed is enckel

The last six lines of this quotation echo the subtitle of Vondel's play as printed on the title page of its first edition: 'Tragedy: Presented onstage for the Jews to consider, to admonish the Christians' ('Treurspel. Den Joden tot naedencken, den Christenen tot waerschouwing als op het tooneel voorgesteld'). The historical example of God's providential wrath should be taken as a warning to everybody, Gabriel stresses, and it should also be taken as an example of the right remedy for it: embracing the New Covenant that is the subject of the eighth verse of Paul's Letter to the Hebrews. Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant, Paul writes, whose necessity is clear. It is the breaking of the Old Covenant (the Mosaic Law as written down in the Torah) that provoked the necessity of a new, more perfect one, embodied in Christ:

7: For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

8: For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

9: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

10: For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

11: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

12: For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

13: In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

licht van boven tot beneën. / Ziet wat een ronde kringh van louter vlam, en stralen / Omzweeft zijn Majesteyt. ey ziet eens neder dalen / Die zoete Cherubijs, en Seraphynen om / 't Schoon aenschijn door te zien van's Hemels Bruydegom: / Zy loncken lodderlijck, en blyven op hem staren: / Volght haren voorgangh: laet de doode Priesters varen, / En rusten in het graf: leent niet meer Moses mond / Maer Christus lippen 't oor: omhelst het nieuw Verbond. / Vermengt geen goud met lood. waardeert het beeld geringer / Als 't leven daer 't op heeft gewezen met de vinger. / Dit treurspel dat hier is gespeelt zoo bloedigh langh, / En nu besloten met der Ioden ondergang, / U Gods rechtveerdigheyd en strengheyd uyt gaet drucken, / Die wraecke neemt van 't quaed, en alle booze stucken, / En tot waerschouwingh van een ygelijck persoon / Stelt als een baecken dit verdelght geslacht ten toon.'

Gabriel's Christian imperative ('embrace the new Covenant', 'omhelst het nieuw Verbond') is directed at all those attending or reading Vondel's play, members of the Jewish nation included, much in the same way that God's dictum that he will from now on be merciful to those who have not been righteous to him is also potentially directed at everybody. The plea in Gabriel's speech, like that underlying Paul's letter to the Hebrews, is a plea for conversion, the plea that would eventually facilitate the Second Coming of Christ and the restoration of God's lasting Kingdom on earth in the New Jerusalem which Amsterdam was taken to be, not only by the Mennonite denomination with which Vondel has often been associated, but by many of the reformed creed. As I hope to have made clear, *Hierusalem verwoest* contains distinct traces of the theological discourse that centres upon the idea of the New Jerusalem and the opposition between the Jewish Law and the Christian Faith.⁶²

But, as its subtitle suggests, the play is also meant as a warning to the good Christians among Vondel's audience, for all those who wanted Amsterdam really to become the New Jerusalem, for the author himself even. In a city so abundantly affluent, any warning on the blinding effects of material wealth will have sounded healthy to many Christian ears, some of Vondel's most self-declared enemies included. Seen in this light, the Jews in Vondel's play (not unlike those in his age) can be said to function like Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*: they serve, at least in part, as the bad conscience of the good Christians whose counterpart they are meant to represent and whose deepest anxieties (including those about themselves) they are supposed to ward off. The deepest of those fears, as James Shapiro has shown,⁶³ also runs through Hugo de Groot's *Remonstrance*: the idea that Christians would turn into Jews and become part – either willingly or not – of the circumcised race. 'On November 8, 1616', Arend Huussen writes, 'representatives of the "Jewish Nation" were warned and instructed as follows:

⁶² It would be worthwhile, I think, to consider the two other texts that Vondel collected in one volume together with *Hierusalem verwoest* in the light of these findings: the epic poem *Heerlyckheyd van Salomon* and the *Helden Godes des Ouwden Verbonds*, a series of illustrated poems on the Old Testament prophets.

⁶³ Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*.

- to refrain from any spoken or written attacks against the Christian religion;
- not to attempt to convert Christians to Judaism or to circumcise them;
- to have no sexual intercourse with either married or unmarried Christian women, including prostitutes;
- to live in conformity with the general legislation of province and city, especially the burgomasters' order of May 1612 forbidding the construction of a synagogue.⁶⁴

It is true that Vondel's play seems to show no immediate trace of the fear that is addressed in the second and third items of this set of regulations. But, as I hope to have made clear, it does participate in a discourse that propagates the best possible solution for the alleviation of this fear: the ultimate conversion of all Jews to Christianity, which would remove the necessity of this specific sort of policy in the first place.

Conclusion

What, then, makes this New Historicist reading of Vondel's play so different from traditional readings of the play? The difference, I would argue, lies primarily in the conceptual presuppositions on which it is based. An 'Old' Historicist could have come up with the exact same findings about the historical relationship between Vondel's text and the Jewish Question, but would, probably, have made use of them in a different way. A New Historicist analysis, like the above one, continues to seek the fundamental heterogeneity of every historical context. There is no single 'context' to which this play can be related univocally and hence no single historical 'reason' as to why the play is what it is. By teasing out the historical significance of a number of potential references to the ideology of the New Jerusalem, I have tried to make clear that Vondel's play participates in this specific discursive context and that a more concrete historical analysis of this context sheds interesting new light on *Hierusalem Verwoest*. This is not to suggest, of course, that the entire play can be reduced to a mere illustration of the historical

⁶⁴ Huussen, 'The Legal Position of the Jews in the Dutch Republic', p. 33.

discussion on the Jewish presence in seventeenth-century Amsterdam, nor that Vondel's is an important voice in that discussion. My analysis does suggest, though, that certain *loci* in Vondel's play gain in meaning when considered against this specific background. It also suggests that it is worthwhile to consider this text as more than a straightforward and somewhat boring reflection on questions of mere religion. By inserting Vondel's representation of this piece of 'mere' religious history in the concrete political and ideological context of its production – a strategy that has defined the reading method of New Historicism in more than one way – I hope to have made clear the text's broader cultural relevance, both in terms of its historical moment and of our analysis of that moment.