

VONDEL'S TRAGIC CHINESE EMPEROR

For Joost van den Vondel, the poet of the Dutch Golden Age, and for many other European observers in the mid-sixteenth century, the Manchu conquest demonstrated that China was not the eternally stable empire. The proverb that political power never lasts had been relearned many times during the sectarian wars. The Manchu conquest was interpreted in similar terms and quickly assimilated into the rhetoric and theology of instability and violence that defined the European discourse from the Reformation to the baroque *Trauerspiel*. The admiration for China as an ancient and stable kingdom that David Porter identifies as a characteristic of the early eighteenth century emerged most strongly after European absolutism had become the norm following the religious wars. To celebrate the venerable age of Chinese civilization, requires one to perceive a continuity that extended across dynastic shifts—a perspective seventeenth-century Europeans did not share with the Enlightenment. For Christians witnessing the Thirty Years' War or the Dutch rebellion,

the Manchu conquest showed that China was subject to a familiar catastrophe. The invasion by northern barbarians and the infiltration of rebels into the Forbidden City constituted precisely the “state of emergency” that, according to seventeenth-century political theory, legitimated the monarch’s absolute power. The tragic aspect of Vondel’s 1667 drama, *Zungchin* (Chongzhen), centers on the Chinese emperor’s failure to use his authority to prevent the calamity.¹

Vondel’s *Trauerspiel* about the last Ming emperor, who executes his daughter and hangs himself just as the Forbidden City is about to be overrun by rebels, calls attention to the genre’s connections with Jesuit drama. The link between missionary’s letters and European theater becomes most intense in school plays, which often drew on biblical themes and Roman history but when they staged an Asian performance always relied on Jesuit reports and treatises for their plot. Jesuit school performances represent the mediating moment between princely Latin treatises and the laity. In tracing the reception of Jesuit writing on China and Japan, school dramas and independent plays such as Vondel’s *Zungchin* as well as Voltaire’s *Orphan* were important venues for distributing images and news of Asia to a less learned audience. As an important component in the Jesuit’s pedagogy, school plays allowed students to practice their rhetorical skills while spectators witnessed the character’s self-sacrifice. To be sure, Vondel’s *Zungchin*, set inside the imperial court, provides a more complex image of ruling elite than the polarized image of school dramas, in which absolute rulers in Asia viciously torture and execute foreigners, yet Vondel was clearly writing in conjunction with that tradition, which had a strong presence in Flanders.² While Matteo Ricci in China and Francis Xavier in Japan were admired for their diplomacy, the adaptation of Jesuit reports in school plays makes clear that the society operated at very different registers in representing its mission in Asia.

1. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1985), 65.

2. Goran Proot and Johan Verberckmoes, “Japonica in the Jesuit Drama of the Southern Netherlands,” *Bulletin of Portuguese-Japanese Studies* 5 (2002): 27–47.

Jesuit reports from Japan in the 1600s strongly emphasized martyr histories. Annual and individual letters recounted the hundreds of Japanese who were baptized only to include follow-up stories about their persecution.³ One of the popular martyr dramas in the school repertoire involved the story of a Japanese convert named Titus, who was forced to choose between his faith and his love for his family. The script is derived from Nicolas Trigault's *De Christianis apud Iaponios Triumphis* (The triumph of Christians in Japan, 1623).⁴ When this story was performed in 1724 at a school in Mindelheim, the program underscored the exemplary faith of Japanese martyrs in contrast to more distracted European youths. Addressing German rather than Japanese school children, the play made Asia out to be the scene of extraordinary faith, worthy of emulation. Distance here served as a strategy of conversion.⁵ The play shows Titus, a Japanese Christian convert, refusing to abandon his faith even in the face of a warlord's threat to kill his son. Faced with the plots of idol worshippers to wipe out Christianity in Japan, Titus hands over his son to death rather than deny his faith. After his two other sons have been handed over to be sacrificed, Titus himself stands ready to be executed, at which point the warlord is so impressed with his fortitude that he restores Titus and his three sons, who now appear alive and well. The tyrant then has the idol-worshippers thrown into a chasm where they remain buried. Having children on stage demonstrating their constancy was clearly part of the lesson, as it was in Flanders where similar performances were staged.⁶ Their steadfast willingness to die for their faith stood in sharp contrast to the powerful but unstable tyrant, who

3. A catalogue of European publications is available, often with summaries, in Robert Streit, *Bibliotheca Missionum*, vol. 5, *Asiatische Missionsliteratur 1600–1699* (Aachen: Franziskus Xaverius Missionsverein, 1929), 362–598.

4. Nicolas Trigault, *De Christianis apud Iaponios Triumphis* (Monachii: Sadeler, 1623), book 3, caput 11.

5. Harold Jantz, ed., *Fortitudo christiana in Tito Japone exhibita—Obsigende Glauben-Lieb Titi Eines Edlen Japonesers, Vorge stellt auf der Schau-Bühne von der Studierenden Jugend des Chur-Fürstlichen Gymnasii Societatis JESU zu Mindelheim, den 4. Und 6. Tag Herbstmonats 1724* (Middelheim: Adolph Joseph Ebel, 1724).

6. Proot and Verberckmoes "Japonica in Jesuit Drama," 35.

shifts from one position to the other in the face of the martyr's example.

Such spectacles attracted European audiences and drove young men to volunteer for mission work so that they too might find glory. The more graphic the violence against Christians, the more compelling the play. Thus, for example, a drama performed in September 1664 at the Academy in Ingolstadt, which in English would have been "The Glorious Martyrdom and Blessed Life of Jacobi Macaximi," opened by characterizing Japan as "the Empire of martyrs swimming not in water but blood, to which the Holy Father Francis Xavier brought the first light of faith and which has often shown the strength of martyrs."⁷ East Asia appears as a theater of violence. While the less devout may have been fascinated with the cruelty practiced upon victims, the pious were moved to follow the mission, so that they too could demonstrate the strength of their belief in the face of horrible torture. These performances stood at the tail end of a long sequence of communication. In her commentary on the Ingolstadt play, Elida Maria Szarota traces the drama's beginnings to the annual letters from Japan, *Litterae Annuae Japonenses* (1630), even as she underscores how carefully the dramaturge arranged the scenes, distributing displays of exquisite cruelty and unimaginable suffering evenly across the play's three acts.⁸

Martyr plays are clearly an important phase in the genealogy of the Asiatic despot trope. When members of the English Macartney embassy to the imperial court in 1794 recycled the image of the cruel tyrant who oppresses his free-thinking subjects, they were working with a figure that stretched back to the earliest heroes of the Christian Church. In describing *Fortitudo Japonica, Das ist Christliche Standhaftigkeit, Dreyer starckmütigen Blut-Zeugen Christi in Japonien* (The strength of the Japanese, this is Christian fortitude, three strong-willed blood witnesses to Christ in Japan), a play derived from Trigault's *De Christianis apud Japonios Triumphis* and performed in 1665 in Constance with the local bishop's approval,

7. Elida Maria Szarota, *Das Jesuitendrama im deutschen Sprachgebiet: Texte und Kommentare* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1983), 3.1:190.

8. Szarota, *Jesuitendrama*, 3.2:2069.

Szarota points out that the figure of the steadfast martyr and the vicious tyrant are as old as Christianity itself. "We have here before us a martyr drama of the classical type: the Christian defies the tyranny of the ruler, does not follow his commands, refuses to sacrifice to pagan gods, and joyfully accepts martyrdom as a knight of Christ. The entire family in *Fortitudo Japonica* maintains this attitude."⁹ Given the critical Enlightenment reception of the Jesuit mission, there would seem to be discrepancy between the school drama's focus on martyrdom and the missionaries' efforts to interweave Christian and Confucian thought, or at the very least a lack of coordination between different aspects of the society's mission, as it adapts itself for different audiences. After all, the question of what happens when one sector overhears a message intended for another part of the world became an enormous problem during the Rites Controversy. While Chinese literati probably never had the opportunity to attend a South German martyr play, Vatican and Sorbonne officials were clearly unnerved and outraged by the mission's accommodationist statements in Beijing.

If China and Europe share parallel fates of political instability in the mid-seventeenth century, just two generations later that same instability was remobilized to justify the absolute monarch's authority over his subjects. China continued to be seen as the equivalent of Europe, so that by the end of the seventeenth century European courts celebrated the perceived similarities in asymmetrical monarchical power by adopting chinoiserie as the court fashion. Dramas about colonial conquests became lessons affirming royal concentrations of power. The Spanish conquest of the New World became a political warning for European nations wanting to avoid the fate of the Aztecs and Mayans. The Dutch playwright Joannes Antonides van der Goes compared the Jesuits in China with the Spanish in Mexico, reinforcing the suggestion that Montezuma shares the same role as the last Ming emperor—a kingly sacrifice. By the start of the eighteenth century, the conquests of China and Mexico were readily interpreted as demonstrating the need for a strong centralized monarchy that can fend off rebellion and invasion. Frederick II

9. Szarota, *Jesuitendrama*, 3.2:2070.

staged the opera *Montezuma*, wherein the Aztec emperor's suffering serves as an admonishment against weakening monarchical power. Already in *Bello Tartarico*, Martini cautioned against monarchical decay. The Manchus appeared in his telling as vigorous, if somewhat barbaric warriors replacing an indolent southern order.

The last Ming emperor was a transitional figure not just between dynasties, but also religions. In baroque accounts, he has all the features of a powerful but indecisive tyrant—a king who is quite capable of executing anyone but who is so unsure that he drifts from one position to the other.¹⁰ In this sense, the emperor appears as a potential convert. Just as the warlord who is so impressed by the self-sacrifice of Japanese Christians that he turns against his own idols, the Chinese emperor holds a two-sided position. He can persecute the Christians at his court, but he might also be drawn over to them. In the Jesuit narratives, Chongzhen plays much more the role of the potential proselyte, the Asian Constantine.

Walter Benjamin argues that the tyrant and the martyr are two faces of the baroque sovereign—as extreme opposites, they both embody excess.¹¹ In Vondel's play, the two merge. The marginal figure of the martyred Asian convert moves from the periphery, where he would have stood as a figure defying traditional religions, to the (decaying) ontological center of the emperor. As the great ruler is shown to have become increasingly powerless, he becomes a figure of sympathy, yet the most important step, as far as European drama is concerned, lies in the emperor's conversion to Christianity. Because tragic dramaturgy presumes from the start that the ruler stands in as the embodiment of his people, the chance that he might have converted, but died beforehand as bandits and Manchus approached, suggests within theatrical conventions that all of China might have done the same.

The legend of Chongzhen's near conversion runs through Jesuit treatises and becomes explicit in personal letters. What Martin Martini does not include in his history, but what he and Adam Schall mention in other writings, is their belief that the last Ming emperor

10. Benjamin, *Tragic Drama*, 71.

11. Benjamin, *Tragic Drama*, 69.

was inclined toward Christians and in the eyes of Jesuits at court willing to be baptized.¹² In dramatizing the demise of the Ming dynasty, Vondel is following closely Adam Schall's own account of why Chongzhen was a flawed figure, worthy of sorrow:

So this monarch, almost the greatest in the world and second to none in the goodness of his character, with no companion and abandoned by all, through his imprudence perished by an unworthy death at the age of thirty-six. And the name of the empire Ta Ming (that is, Great Clarity) after it lasted 276 years with the royal clan which numbered almost 80,000 persons, was extinct. Although the emperor, to my sorrow, did not follow me when I showed him the way to salvation, yet he merits a deep lamentation because he not only sustained Christianity, which had been maintained in China and in the court by his grandfather, but he also praised and fostered it, to the maximum advantage of his subjects. He would have done even more had he not died such a violent and untimely death.¹³

In the dedication to his play, Vondel marshals examples from antiquity and his era, from Asia and Europe, to argue that no empire is secure in its dominion. He opens with Jupiter's promise to Aeneas—"Imperium sine fine dedi"—that the Roman Empire will rule eternally without limits.¹⁴ Vondel underscores the failure of such grand claims by emphasizing the corresponding theological claim that only divine rule lasts forever. Human politics will always lead to ruin; whereas the deaths of martyrs confirms the divine truth.

12. Adrian Hsia, "The Jesuit Plays on China and Their Relation to the Profane Literature," in *Mission und Theater, Japan und China auf den Bühnen der Gesellschaft Jesu*, ed. Adrian Hsia and Ruprecht Wimmer (Regensburg: Schnell and Steiner, 2005), 223.

13. Adam Schall, quoted in John W. Witek, SJ, "Johann Adam Schall von Bell and the Transition from Ming to Ch'ing," in *Western Learning and Christianity in China: The Contribution and Impact of Johann Adam Schall von Bell, S.J. (1592–1666)*, ed. Roman Malek, SVD (Sankt Augustin: China-Zentrum & Monumenta Serica Institute, 1998), 112.

14. "*Imperium sine fine dedi*: from the days of Quintilian down almost to the present, any schoolboy who was forced to read Book I of the *Aeneid* would, coming upon those words for the first time, know precisely (if unconsciously) what they meant" (W. R. Johnson, review of *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium*, by Philip Hardie, *Classical Journal* 83 [1988]: 269).

Further drawing on Virgil, Vondel suggests a parallel between Troy and China, Priam and Chongzhen, as he concentrates on Virgil's account of the Trojans' destruction in order to emphasize the monumentality of the play he is about to present.¹⁵ A quotation from book 2 of *The Aeneid* raises the motif of the decapitated ruler:

That was the end
Of Priam's age, the doom that took him off,
With Troy in flames before his eyes, his towers
Headlong fallen—he that in other days
Had ruled in pride so many lands and peoples
The power of Asia.

On the distant shore
The vast trunk headless lies without a name.¹⁶

From the butchered corpse of Priam, Vondel passes to Chongzhen, whose body fell before his triumphant enemy and was cut to pieces. Having cited Virgil, Vondel then draws a distinction between antiquity and the seventeenth-century understanding of the globe. Priam ruled over a small territory that could be considered the eastern edge of Europe, whereas the borders of the Chinese empire stretched much farther. The key distinction between the recent fall of the Ming dynasty and Troy was the presence of Christian missionaries in Beijing. The tropes Vondel uses are a first attempt at global history, comparing vast territories and subsuming them under rhetorical terms. He emphasizes the interconnectedness of Asia and Europe repeatedly, often in terms of an allegorical interpretation that isolates difference and connectedness as two extremes of the one continent. Shifting attention away from the Hellespont, a symbolically laden stretch of water, he shows Europe and Asia to be less clearly distinguished from one another. Separated by a succession

15. Nieuhof also describes the devastation he observed while on the Dutch embassy to the Manchu court as “a second Troy”; see Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 3:1669.

16. Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Vintage, 1981), 52.

of distances over the same land mass, they stand in a range of extended relations, rather than oppositions.

Vondel not only relies on Martini's political history of the Manchu conquest of China, but also includes Adam Schall (1592–1666), court astronomer and mathematician at the imperial court in Beijing, alongside the ghost of Saint Francis Xavier, as figures on the stage.¹⁷ Schall was well known in Europe. Leibniz refers to him as a “famous Mandarin” in a 1672 letter about the history of the Jesuit mission.¹⁸ Alexander Baumgartner ascribes the play to Vondel's deep admiration for the Jesuits and his “glowing enthusiasm for the spread of Christian faith.”¹⁹ Alfons Vāth, the twentieth-century biographer of Schall, explains further that the Jesuits were decisive in Vondel's conversion to Catholicism. In Amsterdam he belonged to a circle of friends around the printer Joan Blaeu, who shared an interest in the Jesuit mission. Given that the play is based on a scene depicted in Martino Martini's *De Bello Tartarico Historia*, it would be reasonable to expect that Vondel spoke directly with Martini in 1654 while he was visiting with Blaeu as his *Novus Atlas Sinensis* was being prepared. Martini would have imparted direct information about Schall's role at the imperial court.²⁰ Indeed, Martini states in the preface to his history that he wrote the work in part to answer the many curious persons who wanted to know about events in China. Even before Martini's arrival in Amsterdam, Vondel seems to have corresponded with Father Philipp Couplet who was in in China and who later published a Latin translation

17. It was not usual for Jesuit school plays to include in the cast the missionary who wrote the treatise upon which the play is based. A 1732 performance in Amberg, Bavaria, about a Chinese martyr baptized as Joseph, also includes the Father Parrenin, who first described the case in a letter, as a member of the cast. Adrian Hsia, “The Jesuit Plays on China,” 214.

18. Letter to Gottlieb Spitzel Augsburg February 7/March 8, 1672, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin (Darmstadt: O. Reichl, 1923), first series, 1:193.

19. Alexander Baumgartner, *Joost von den Vondel, sein leben und seine Werke* (Freiburg: Herder'sche Verlagshandlung, 1882), 261.

20. Alfons Vāth, SJ, *Johann Adam Schall von Bell S.J. Missionar in China, kaiserlicher Astronom und Ratgeber am Hofe von Peking 1592–1666 Ein Lebens- und Zeitbild*, new ed., China-Zentrum und Instituts Monumenta Serica (Sankt Augustin: Steyer, 1991), 349.

of Confucian works, *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (1687).²¹ Vondel's play, in turn, is dedicated to Cornelius von Nobelaer, whose two sons were both Jesuit priests.²²

In Vondel's telling, the Christian mission becomes a factor in the fate of the Chinese rulers. Unlike Virgil, the Chinese were offered "the Apostolic light of truth"; hence, they do not have the same standing as Dante's pagan philosophers. Vondel cites Xavier's mission to Japan and the martyrdom of Karel Spinola, who also inspired many young men to join the Jesuits.²³ Alongside the image of the dismembered emperor stands the martyr suffering willingly for divine truth. In Vondel's play, the convergence of emperor and martyr is implied cautiously, because ultimately the Zungchen did not convert to Christianity.

Walter Benjamin's thesis that the emperor and the martyr are two sides of the same political order comes clearly to the fore in John Dryden's 1665 play, *The Indian Emperour*, in which Montezuma is tortured on stage by Spaniards seeking gold. Performed two years prior to Vondel's drama, Dryden's states directly that the tortured ruler suffering represents his martyred civilization. In act 5, scene 2, Montezuma along with his high priest lie stretched out as they are interrogated for information about their hidden gold. Dryden inaccurately places Pizarro in the scene in Mexico so that he can perform as the cruelest conquistador. While critics have noted that Dryden does not devote many lines to the debate over Christian injustice in conquering natives, Montezuma's defiance quickly touches on the main topics of eighteenth-century discussions: natural reason versus divine revelation, the immorality of European ex-

21. Vāth, *Schall*, 235n62.

22. Baumgartner, *Joost van den Vondel*, 261.

23. The German Jesuit Kino wrote on November 16, 1680: "As far as I am concerned, I admit that from my earliest years (but especially after reading the life and martyrdom of Reverend Father Charles Spinola) I longed to go to the missions of the Orient. Hence I often worked hard at mathematics" (Ernest J. Burrus, SJ, ed., *Kino Writes to the Duchess, Letters of Eusebio Francisco Kino, S.J., to the Duchess of Aveiro* [Rome: Jesuit Historical Institute, 1965], 79). Kino was also inspired by Beatus Amrhyn and Adam Aigenier, who accompanied the Sicilian Prospero Intorcetta and died on the voyage out caring for plague victims onboard. Kino never had his desire to serve in China fulfilled, but he was quite important in Mexico.

pansionism, justice as a standard transcending religious conflict, the heroic ideal of restrained expression under torture. The point of Montezuma's defiance, "The gods will Punish you, if they be Just; / The gods will Plague your Sacrilegious Lust," his moral argument against the Spanish, is ignored by the Christian priest who takes it to be based on heathen worship.²⁴ The Spanish insistence that Montezuma convert to Christianity on the spot, without the slightest theological explanation, and their military conquest of Mexico stand as the obvious alternative to the Jesuit accommodation in China. The Mexican priest's despair, "Can Heaven be Author of such Cruelty?" was a common Buddhist and Confucian challenge to the Christian claim that God created evil as well as good, yet on Dryden's stage it draws the audience's attention even more closely to the graphic suffering of the two Aztecs. Pizarro heightens the torture: "Fasten the Engines; stretch 'um at their length, / And pull the streightned Cords with all your strength." Montezuma demonstrates his nobility by refusing to reveal where his gold is hidden, thereby setting up the principle that Lessing and Smith will debate: Does the noble man suffering express his anguish and do cries of pain weaken the spectator's empathy for the victim? To heighten his defiance, Montezuma pledges his eventual revenge, a long-running motif, one that Heine revisits in "Vitzliputzli." When the high priest weakens, Montezuma demonstrates his superior resolve: "Shame on thy Priest-hood, that such pray'rs can bring! / Is it not brave to suffer with thy King?" The conversation between victims, as with the crucifixion, guides the audience on how to judge their suffering. Montezuma sets the Stoic standard: "I charge thee dare not groan, nor shew one sign, / Thou at the Torments does the least repine"

Having asserted his ancient defiance and willingness to die suffering, the Christian priest urges Montezuma to convert. By raising the question of the soul and its afterlife, the priest shifts the discussion away from the classical depiction of the heroic death. The subsequent

24. Dryden, John. *The Indian Emperour* (London: 1667), act 5, scene 2, <http://ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/books/indian-emperour-1667/docview/2138574641/se-2?accountid=13158>. All following quotations in the text appear in act 5, scene 2.

debate covers topics familiar to all Christian missionaries and the point from which Enlightenment critiques commenced: the sufficiency of natural reason. The Christian priest argues the Thomistic point that revelation supplements reason as nonbelievers practice it. "Though Nature teaches whom we should Adore, / By Heaven's Beams we still discover more." Unable to convince Montezuma in what is the play's only extended attempt at proselytizing, the Christian priest heightens the pressure on the rack, killing the Aztec priest who was about to reveal the gold's location. To the last, even as Cortez arrives to release him, Montezuma asserts his defiance under torture, refusing the sympathy the Spaniard extends:

Am I so low, that you should pity bring,
And give an Infant's Comfort to a King?
Ask these if I have once unmanly groan'd;
Or ought have done deserving to be moan'd.

When Cortez (unhistorically) falls before Montezuma weeping at the sight of his tortured body, Montezuma refuses all sympathy, insisting on his own standard of masculinity: "Your grief is cruel, for it shews my shame." Ultimately Aztec honor shames the Spanish, so that Cortez, having conquered Mexico, declares "It makes me blush to owne a Victors name."

Zungchin's suicide similarly enacts the Ming dynasty's self-inflicted collapse. The emperor's death confirms the impermanence of political power. In Jesuit and baroque tragic dramas the death of the martyr makes the instability of human institutions spectacularly explicit: "Der 'Fall' des Martyrs ist Exempel der irdischen Unbeständigkeit" (The martyr's fall [in German meaning both the "case" and the "fall" of the martyr] is the exemplar of earthly inconstancy).²⁵ As Vondel states in his preface, certainty lies only in Christian faith, not in political power.

The connections between Dutch and German tragic drama were once well understood. Unfortunately, the national boundaries de-

25. Joachim Harst, *Heilstheater: Figur des barocken Trauerspiels zwischen Gryphius und Kleist* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2012), 60.

fining literary studies today are much less permeable than in the early modern period, when Andreas Gryphius attended the university in Leiden for six years, met Descartes there, and learned the tragic arts from Vondel. Even transnational studies are too often centered on one territory so that they focus more on just one foreign culture in one European country, while traditional comparative literature sifts through linguistic variations rather than political juxtapositions.²⁶ Although Benjamin regularly refers to the "niederländische Literatur" in his *Trauerspiel* book, German scholarship on baroque drama rarely considers Joost Vondel directly, and when it does engage his work, it does so either to dispel an anxiety about Gryphius's debt to him or to insist upon it.²⁷ The question of influence raises the much broader question of how, during the seventeenth century, Germans of all strata and professions were attracted to the Low Countries.²⁸ Edward Verhofstadt noted in 1969 that when scholars compare Vondel and Gryphius, they hope to use these authors to explain the enormous influence Dutch culture had on the rest of the Holy Roman Empire.²⁹ As an indication of the ease with which (low) German readers approached Dutch literature, one could point to the fact that through the nineteenth century, German libraries acquired Vondel editions in the original language, a sure sign that the differences between the languages were not enough to inhibit a reader already interested in the complexities of baroque writing.³⁰ One quality German and Dutch *Trauerspiele*

26. Adrian Hsia is the exceptional scholar who draws connections between Jesuit martyr plays about China and German-Dutch tragic dramas in *Chinesia: The European Construction of China in the Literature of the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1998), 25–33, 55–73.

27. A recent exception is James Parente, *Religious Drama and the Humanist Tradition: Christian Theater in Germany and in the Netherlands, 1500–1680* (Brill: Leiden, 1987).

28. Joseph Eugene Gillet, "De Nederlandsche letterkunde in Duitschland in de Zeventiende eeuw," *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsche Taal- en Letterkunde* 33 (1914): 1–31.

29. Edward Verhofstadt, "Vondel und Gryphius: Versuch einer literarischen Topographie," *Neophilologus* 53 (1969): 290.

30. English translations have been made of many plays that show Milton's affinity with Vondel, and a complete French translation was published in the nineteenth century. What was once self-evident in Germany has now become blocked.

share is their engagement with Jesuit theater. Scholars have long noted the international importance of school dramas in the development of the baroque *Trauerspiel*.³¹

In having Schall speak as the leader of the chorus, Vondel allows the Jesuit priest to guide the spectator's identification toward the doomed emperor. The chorus, led by Schall, interprets the political drama in theological terms, searching for two modes of historical causation in a way that tries to find the divine triumph in political catastrophe. However, the priests are never certain of how the two dimensions interact. They speculate while drawing analogies between China and other kingdoms where Christianity emerged out of political disaster: Japan, Rome, Europe in general.

Vondel's fondness for Schall is obvious immediately. The dramatist personae identifies Schall as an "Agripyner," which is to say, a native of Cologne (Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium under the Romans), the city where Vondel was born as his Mennonite parents had fled there from Antwerp. As is appropriate for the court astronomer, Schall calls attention to the heavens as he stands in the imperial courtyards addressing the chorus of priests. He looks to "hemels ring," an old-fashioned reference to the stars, one invoking the star over Bethlehem.³² As he describes the stars, Schall explains that the city has been surrounded by the rebel Li Zicheng's army, thereby suggesting a connection between the constellation's appearance and the arrival of war, but only cautiously, for later in the play Schall dismisses all manner of Chinese soothsaying. At what point do the heavens reveal the Christian God's will and when are they misunderstood by idol worshippers constitutes a serious question. The central conflict, and the title of play, concerns the col-

The linguistic convergence of Dutch and German no longer seems negotiable for readers, so that they now require a translation into modern German.

31. John O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 223, nevertheless argues that much research needs to be done on the importance of theater along with music and ballet in Jesuit schools.

32. A hymn celebrating Christ's birth uses the phrase. See Jodocus van Lodenstein, "Jesus Geboren," *Uyt-spanningen, behelsende eenige stigteyke liederen* (Utrecht: Willem Clerck, 1676), http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/lode002uyt_01_01/lode002uyt_01_01_0077.php.

lapse of the Chinese empire and the missionaries who stand in the middle. The end of civilization promises martyrdom. Schall declares that the priests are prepared to die if the catastrophe would further the spread of Christianity. Vondel shares Martini's claim that the fate of dynasties in China depends on how much they foster Christian teaching. Will the invading Manchus prove more lenient toward the missionaries? Is the current emperor in jeopardy for having failed to support the priests? Schall, like all good missionaries, speaks in metaphors of sowing seeds and gathering harvest. Matteo Ricci and Nicholas Trigault's *Ad Christiana* opens with the same references to the parable of the sower and the seed.³³ The scene unfolds as the imperial chancellor arrives and asks the priests to pray for the emperor. Schall's query into the political situation produces a brief history of China's conflicts with the Tartars to the north, which hints to the reader that more could be learned elsewhere—namely, in Martini's book. Schall points out that the Portuguese in Macao provided cannons for the emperor's war, which then leads the chancellor to give a typical baroque statement on the inconstancy of fortune:

Time does not permit us to speak in detail
 About how fickle fortune follows neither rule nor direction.
 But tumbles round and round, like a turning wheel.
 Anyone who hangs on, and holds on to what he can grasp,
 Sits in the middle, or ends up above, then below.³⁴

Added to the difficult wars in the north, the empire suffers from the administrative elite's massive corruption and oppression of the populace, which ultimately strengthens the appeal of rebels such as Li Zicheng. The dialogue concludes with Schall promising to keep watch over the city's gates with prayers—an inconclusive or perhaps double-sided message of practical and spiritual support.

33. Nicolas Trigault, *Historia von Einführung der christlichen Religion in das große Königreich China durch die Societet Jesu* (Augsburg: Antony Hierat, 1617), 1.

34. The Department of Dutch Language and Literatures at Leiden University offers a very helpful English translation online, last accessed November 17, 2019: <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/Dutch/Ceneton/VondelZungchin1667English.html>.

All subsequent quotations from Vondel's play refer to this translation; line numbers are given in the text.

As the chorus of priests prays for protection, they hold the hope that Asia might be born again like Europe. The Jesuits are fascinated with the analogy between the Roman emperor Constantine's conversion before the Battle of Milvian Bridge and the possibility that the Chinese emperor might similarly dedicate himself in order to win a battle. The chorus of priests sings:

And if the Emperor respected Christ's laws,
As did the Great Constantine;
Then you would see the enemy flee (174–76)

Like chaff blown away in the wind, China finds itself in a state of emergency, which grows worse in the second act as the emperor is informed that the rebel army threatens to take the city by stealth and deception. The ministers debate how the situation could have deteriorated so completely, leaving the court with nothing to do but stand watch lest the rebels sneak past the walls. The chorus of priests accompanies these political stratagems with a history of the Jesuit mission in China. Matteo Ricci and Trigault are named as the first to have unlocked China so as to combat idolatry. Vondel shows no particular sense for an accommodationist approach. Rather than consider a synthesis of Christian and Confucian teaching he instead portrays the Chinese as heretics by equating the idol Fo with Beelzebub, the Christian devil. Francis Xavier is praised in turn for having won converts in Japan. Vondel follows Martini's tendency to equate setbacks in the mission as matters of divine will, while victories for nonbelievers are characterized as fortune. Thus, the mission's reversal in Japan and the thousands of Christians killed there are described as a triumph for martyrs who demonstrate their faith in death. The sacrificial logic of Japan's Christians points to a similar figuration in China: the ultimately success of Christianity in death. Vondel's distinction between spiritual and earthly kingdoms resolves the contradiction by having dying martyrs ascend to heaven, the only stable order in contrast to the upheavals of worldly politics. The threat of disaster opens the opportunity for conversion. Only in desperation may the Chinese chose Christianity. However, the chorus of priests is hardly infallible, for they worry that a change

in regime from Ming to Qing would weaken the mission. The Japanese reaction against Christianity could happen in China as well, and thus the priests resolve to keep watch and pray more intensely.

The third act brings together Schall and the empress in a dialogue comparing Christianity and superstition. The empress, Jasmine, sees the signs of a new authority coming:

The dogs howl at night. There are ghosts along the backroads.
The ravens caw ominously. The ground of the earth trembles.
Fog occludes the sun. All that breathes and live,
With soul o without, monsters on the beaches
Indicate that a change of regime is at hand. (574–88)

Vondel's presentation of Chinese beliefs does not put much emphasis on Ricci's synthetic interpretation of Confucian teaching. Only once briefly does Schall praise the Chinese teacher. Instead, the empress and court are shown to be thoroughly superstitious. Europe is presented as enlightened, as having risen above superstitious habits, as the source of Christian teaching. Confucius is praised for having "planted golden morals," yet he is cited more as the local authority who confirms European disdain for soothsayers (592–94).

Some balance must be asserted between the two continents; otherwise it makes little sense for the Jesuits to so assiduously pursue their mission, or for the audience to be carried along by the empire's demise. The troubling images equating Asia with Troy from the preface are countered when, at the end of act 3, the chorus praises Asia and China unreservedly as the site of divine creation, affirming the ancient presumption that humans came into existence there:

Happy Asia, trodden by God
The gardener of Eden,
And angels, and God the son,
You are the greatest of three regions
Of the earth, and among majestic lands
You, with reason, wear the best crown. (901–6)

China is thus physically closer to the creation than Europe, and it enjoys a paradisiacal abundance. China, in a sense, is the Edenic

garden, the geographical origin of humanity and its original bond with the divine:

All that the first man was given
In paradise, so richly blessed
Flows to you out of heaven's lap. (913–15)

This ideal is immediately dashed by historical events, as the last two acts lead to the turning point in the Martini's narrative and the culmination of Vondel's play: the emperor's suicide and murder of his daughter. Both versions hint that this sacrifice might produce a more just political order—that it fosters Christian teaching as well. Neither telling includes an overt reference to Livy's account of Verginius's murder of his enslaved daughter, yet the prominence given to this scene both within Martini's text and its many illustrations suggests that the analogy was familiar enough to seventeenth-century readers. Vondel also revives the comparison to Priam given in the preface, when the imperial chancellor describes a city and court without a monarch as headless torso (1199). When, in act 5, the rebels swarm the city, the analogy is reiterated:

The whole of China is in meltdown.
Beijing has been abandoned and looks like headless torso,
A body without the head. (1345–47)

The catastrophe has become unstoppable; the chancellor announces his intention to die just before the emperor presents a letter written in his own blood, denouncing his own betrayal to his apparent successor, the rebel Li Zicheng. The emperor then turns to his daughter, explaining that he must kill her to prevent her being raped by the conquerors. Even as he acts to avert his daughter's fate he describes how she would be stripped naked, raped in front of her family with her chest torn open and her heart pulled out with hot pinchers and fed to dogs, her body's mutilation demonstrating ostentatiously the collapse of her family's power. Not quite as extreme as Emilia Gallotti later, yet still stoical enough, the crown princess affirms her father's resolve, upon which they walk off stage. The chancellor im-

mediately lauds her in a manner that suggests the intermixing of the Chinese imperial and Christian sense of having heaven's mandate: "O glorious, agreeable one chosen by heaven [*hemelsche*] . . . You, most beautiful phoenix-flower in the holy valley of crowns" (1383–85).

In the end, tragic drama relies on potentiality: events that might have happened but never came to pass. The emperor and his court die, while the Christian message, and the Jesuits who deliver it, survive. Before a European audience, the play fosters continued evangelizing, continued prayers for the salvation of the Chinese. Zungchin becomes an object of sympathy because the ambidextrous dramaturgy of baroque tragic drama presents him in the double Christian role of ruler and subject, a more nuanced figure than the Asian despot character of earlier plays. The emperor receives sympathy because he has been incorporated into a fully theological account of Chinese history. The brief moments of religious reflection in Martini's history became the metaphysical basis for Vondel's fully Catholic incorporation of the emperor into the emotional economy of baroque tragic drama. Vondel's play compensates for the missionaries' inability to convert Zungchin by placing Chinese history within a Catholic eschatology.