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ON GOING TO HELL. THE CONCEPTION
OF THE UNDERWORLD IN *PRZERAŻLIWE
ECHO TRĄBY OSTATECZNEJ* (*THE SHRILL
SOUND OF THE ULTIMATE TRUMPET*) (1670)
BY FATHER *KLEMENS BOLESŁAWIUSZ*
(1625-1689), AND OF THE OTHERWORLD
IN *LUCIFER* (1654) BY JOOST VAN
DEN VONDEL (1587-1679)

 It seems that, in the seventeenth century, writing about the affairs of heaven and hell, and about the history of paradise became something of a fashion in literary circles of various European countries. The two best known fruits of this fashion are John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and the far less known, mainly because written in a language that has not had the good luck to become a world language, but still highly respected *Lucifer* by Joost van den Vondel, the Dutch dramatist, who was, roughly speaking, Milton's contemporary. But the fashion itself had more wide ranging effects. L. C. Van Noppen, in his "*Lucifer*" *an Interpretation*, being part of the introduction to his own English translation of Vondel's work, notices the popularity of the subject in various European literatures in the Early Modern period extending from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries:

We would, in passing, call attention to the curious coincidence that so many poets of so many different nations, most of them doubtless without knowledge of the others,

should about the same time have chosen this subject of such historical and symbolical importance. For besides the poets mentioned were many others: the Scotchman Ramsay, the Spaniard de Azevedo, the Portuguese Camoes, the Frenchman Du Bartas, and two Englishmen, Phineas Fletcher and John Milton. A more remarkable instance of telepathy is not, we believe, on record. (Van Noppen, 158-159)

I would like to add to this list the poem by a Polish Catholic priest *Klemens Bolesławiusz* (1625-1689) entitled *The Shrill Sound of the Ultimate Trumpet, or the Four Last Things Awaiting Man* (1670).¹ It is obvious enough, at the same time, that the Polish poem is no match for Vondel's epic drama, let alone for Milton's *Paradise Lost*.²

It also has a clearly different character. Instead of being an attempt to "justify the ways of God to men", as in the case of Milton's poem, and instead of being a vision of the tragedy of Lucifer, and of the human species, which seems to be the main subject of Vondel's play, *Bolesławiusz's* vision of the Otherworld has a clearly didactic, rather than theological, philosophical, or political purpose, and is meant simply to make the reader become terrified of hell, that is of sin, and attracted to heaven, that is to virtue. And yet I would claim that all three poetical works share, apart from obvious thematic similarities, also a certain moral passion and intuitive understanding of metaphysics which seem to constitute necessary conditions for someone who wants to deal with the always topical subject of supreme good and supreme evil.

By saying "always topical", I mean that the validity of the matter of paradise, or banishment from it, does not depend on the acceptance, or lack thereof, of the religious dogmas that lie behind the Christian interpretation of this story.

.....

¹ If not stated otherwise, all translations are mine.

² Nevertheless, *Bolesławiusz*, in his description of hell, he can sound quite similar to Milton. In Milton's *Paradise Lost* we read:

A dungeon horrible, on all sides round
As one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible. (Book I, 61-63)

See: Milton, 213.

And in *Bolesławiusz*:

Ogień tam z siebie światła nie wydaje, Fire does not send out light there
Katem się tylko, o jak srogim, staje! It merely becomes a tool of torture,
Kopząc jaskinią czarnymi sadzami, Smudging the cave with black pitch,
Z siarki dymami. With sulphurous fumes.

(Book IV, 13-16).

See: Sokołowska, Żukowska (1965, II, 147).

The “Four Last Things Awaiting Man”,³ in Bolesławiusz’s poem, are obvious: death, judgement, hell or heaven.⁴ The necessity of such judgment is motivated, first of all, by a passionate desire for justice, and the obvious lack of such justice in the social reality.

It seems remarkable that Bolesławiusz emphasizes the lack of a defence council in the so called “particular judgement”⁵ that the sinner is supposed to undergo immediately after death, where the devil plays the role of the prosecutor, and a very ruthless one, while God Himself appears in the double role of a witness, and of the judge. We are not told expressly if He is going to be a witness for the prosecution, or for the defence, but the former seems to be clearly the case, since there is no defence. This would put Bolesławiusz’s God in a somewhat inferior position in relation to the devil, at least in His capacity as a witness, but naturally it is also possible that Bolesławiusz, not being a lawyer, did not distinguish between those two kinds of court witnesses:

It is evident that the idea of a defence counsel was in Bolesławiusz’s mind associated with a possibility of corruption. Hence the defunct sinner can count only on what might be called “mathematical justice”, embodied in the divine judge, and consisting in cold and objective counting and weighing up of his good deeds and, presumably, comparing them with the evil ones.

Bolesławiusz mentions, to be sure, the possibility of an intervention of the sinner’s guardian angel at the time of the former’s passing away. The poet assumes that this is the time when the devils are going to launch an all-out attack against the dead man’s soul:

.....

³ Jacek Sokolski claims that Bolesławiusz could be partly inspired by the Latin work *Cordiale quattuor novissimorum* (composed around 1460) by a Netherlandic writer Gerard de Vliederhoven, which treats about the subject of “the four last things”. See: Klemens Bolesławiusz, (ed. Sokolski), 7.

⁴ It has already been noticed that Bolesławiusz ignores the existence of purgatory. The matter is discussed in the “Wprowadzenie do lektury” (“Introduction”) to: Klemens Bolesławiusz, *Przerażliwe echo* (15-16).

⁵ As the Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it: “Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment that refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven-through a purification or immediately, -- or immediate and everlasting damnation.” See: www.scborromeo.org/ccc.htm.

Tu jadowity czart przeciw smutnemu
Człowiekowi stanie obżałowanemu,
Chcąc, by go w ogień wieczny
potępiono,
W nim pogrzebiono.
Tu chytry praktyk, ani też orator,
Nie będzie z tobą, mądry prokurator,
Który sędziego mógłby sztuką nową
Zwieść chytrą mową.
Sam tylko staniesz a sumienie Twoje
Mając uczynki za rzeczniki swoje,
Które tak ściśło, gdy sędzia zasiędzie,
Roztrząsać będzie.
Sam się Bóg świadkiem i sędzią pokaże,
Wprzód niżli dekret na winnego skaże.
O jakież tam sąd będzie sprawiedliwy!
O Boże żywy!

* This excerpt comes from a 1913 edition, which is apparently a reprint of the 1871 edition of Bolesławiusz's poem authorized apparently by the Archdiocesan Curia in Poznań, and available at: www.pbi.edu.pl/book_reader.php?p=30528. This version does not seem to differ, apart from some very minor details, from probably the best edition of the poem, which is the above-quoted Klemens Bolesławiusz, *Przeraziłwie echo* (ed. Sokolski).

Gdy tak na ciało bóle następują,
Czarni do duszy hurmem się zlatują,
Wojsko szykują wielkie na jednego
Konającego. ...
Anioł stróż sobie chcąc poruczonego
Człowieka bronić, jak skarbu drogiego,
Będzie się starał, by mu go nie brano,
Nie potępiano.
Krzyknie do drugich: Święci Aniołowie,
Obrońcy ludzi i miłośnikowie,
Na pomoc proszę prędko przybywajcie
Mnie wspomagajcie.
Brońcie, by nie był człowiek przekonany,
Za którego Bóg ciężkie podjął rany,
Którego stworzył, żeby mieszkał z nami,
Swymi synami.
Szczęśliwy, który będziesz miał przy sobie
Świętych aniołów, zjednawszy ich sobie;
Oni w tym razie będą cię ratować;
I zastępować.
(www.pbi.edu.pl/book_reader.php?p=30528)

Prose translation:

Here, the malicious devil will stand against the contrite defendant, desiring to have him doomed to eternal damnation. Here, you are not going to have a defender, a clever lawyer, who could deceive the judge with his cunning speech. You shall stand alone, and only your conscience and your deeds will plead your case, and the judge will weigh them up very carefully. God Himself will appear as witness and as judge, before the verdict is announced. O what a fair trial it is going to be! O Spirit of the living God!

Prose translation:

When the body is so much in pain, the devils throng around the soul, they prepare a great army against the lonely dying man. . . . The guardian angel, desiring to defend the person he was in charge with, as if he were a precious treasure, tries to prevent the man being taken away from him, and doomed for ever. He would shout to the other angels: Come here quickly, o Holy Angels, defenders and devotees of people, with your help man will not be defeated, isn't he the one for whose sake God has suffered such grievous wounds, the one whom God created so that he may live with ourselves, God's sons? Happy is he who can count on the holy angels, having propitiated them. When in need, they will try to save him and act on his behalf.

Reading this, rather peculiar, passage we can have the impression that the dying man should not expect too much from God, the Holy Virgin, and the saints—God the Father and God the Son are mentioned, but only as those who did something for man in the past. The dying sinner is not even encouraged to call on them. The only denizens of Heaven that he can count upon in his final hour is a flight of angels brought together on the spur of the moment by his own guardian angel. But even this does not look like a very effective help, we do not eventually learn what those angels manage to achieve; they certainly do not safeguard the soul of the dead sinner from damnation. If he is sentenced to hell, the devils will sooner or later get hold of him again, and rather sooner than later, because the “particular judgement” seems to be based on a court of law that issues swift verdicts, and there is no possibility of any further appeal. This angelic levy in mass may remind the reader of the situation in the seventeenth century Poland’s Eastern borderlands where an effective defence against a foreign invasion could usually be organized only on the basis of the local forces because the central authority was usually too ineffectual to be relied upon.

The image of angels and devils contending for the soul of a dying man is obviously very traditional, and may be traced back to the ancient allegorical motif of *psychomachia* (conflict of the soul) or *bellum intestinum* (internal warfare) (Lewis, 66-83). This motif may be associated by the lovers of English literature with the figures of “Good Angel” and “Bad Angel” in Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, while the lovers of Polish literature may perhaps recall the poem *Człowiek igrzysko boże* (*Man—God’s Playground*) by Wacław Potocki, a Baroque poet, in which we find an angel and a devil playing chess with each other, and it is, of course, man’s soul that is at stake in that game (Sokołowska, Żukowska, 1965, 29).

In Vondel’s *Lucifer*, the situation is apparently totally different. The plot of the play is told from the point of view of supernatural creatures, who are mostly angels, but in the process of becoming devils because consumed with pride and envy. The theme of death, so prominent in Bolesławiusz’s poem, is also very important in Vondel’s work, but it appears first as a distant and rather unlikely perspective. In Act I, we witness a conversation between two angels, Apollion and Belzebub, destined of course to become devils, where the former submits a report to the latter concerning Apollion’s visit to the Earthly Paradise inhabited by Adam and Eve in the yet unfallen state.

BELZEBUB:

Wat baet al 's menschen roem, indien zijn schoonheit smelt,
En endelijck verwelckt, gelijk een bloem op 't velt?

APOLLION:

Zoo lang die hof beneên niet ophoude ooft te geven,
Zal dit gezalight paer by zulck een' appel leven,
Die daer in 't midden groeit, bevochtight van den stroom,
Waer by de wortel leeft. dees wonderbare boom
Wort 's levens boom genoemt. zijn aert is onbederflijk.
Hier door geniet de mensch het eeuwich en onsterflijk,
En wort den Engelen, zijn' broederen, gelijk,
Ja overtreftze in 't eindt; en zal zijn maght en Rijck
Verbreiden overal. wie kan zijn vleugels korten?
Geen Engel heeft de maght zijn wezen uit te storten
In duizentduizenden, in een oneindigh tal.
Nu overreken eens wat hier uit worden zal.

(Act 1, 175-188)

(See: www.archive.org/stream/vondelucifer00vond#page/282/mode/1up)

BELZEBUB:

What profits human glory if even as
A flower of the field it fades and dies?

APOLLION:

So long their garden fruit doth give, shall this
Most happy pair live by an apple sweet
Grown on the central tree, that nurture finds
Beside the stream that laves its tender roots
This wondrous tree is called the tree of life.
'Tis incorruptible, and through it man
Joys life eterne and all immortal things,
While of his Angel brothers he becomes
The peer, and yea, shall in the end surpass
Them all, until his power and sway and reign
Spread over all. For who can clip his wings?
No Angel hath the power to multiply
His being a thousand thousand times, in swarms
Innumerable. Now do thou calculate
What shall from this, in time, the outcome be.

(See: www.archive.org/stream/vondelucifer00vond#page/282/mode/1uP)

This passage shows that, in Vondel's mind, human beings, even before the Fall, were stigmatized, as it were, with mortality. Belzebub assumes, although it would be, I am afraid, rather difficult to say on what grounds, that Adam and Eve are mortal and, for this reason, inferior to angels. Apollion disabuses Belzebub of this notion, but not quite so because he begins his speech with the ominous "so long", which clearly indicates that our first parents' immortality is not unconditional.

Before the above quoted exchange takes place, Apollion expatiates on the joys of the sexual relationship between Adam and Eve, and utters the following lament:

APOLLION:

Hoe arm is eenigheid! wy kennen geen gespan
Van tweederhande kunne, een jongkvrouw,
en een' man.
Helaes! wy zyn misdeelt: wy weten van geen trouwen,
Van gade of gading, in een' hemel, zonder vrouwen.

(Act 1, 139-142)

APOLLION:

How poor
Our loneliness ! For us no union sweet
Of two-fold sex, of maiden and of man.
Alas! how much of good we miss: we know
No mate or happy marriage in a Heaven
Devoid of woman.

This "joy of sex", however, is in the angels' minds inextricably linked with natural reproduction, which, again, is rather difficult to explain bearing in mind that no children are born in heaven, among the angels, and also that the union of Adam and Eve remains, so far, childless.

In fact, the story of the first parents, as told in the Book of Genesis, suggests very strongly that bearing children is the obverse of mortality, and an aspect of the Fall, no children are born to Adam and Eve before they are banished from Paradise, and Eve is doomed to "bring forth children in sorrow" as part of the punishment for her disobedience. This is also the case in Vondel's version of the story, but he envisages the possibility of man's multiplying while remaining immortal, and thus filling all of the available space both one earth, and in heaven. Indeed this vision, adduced above, of "een oneindigh tal" ("swarms innumerable") is quite frightening and makes the reader sympathize with the angels, soon to become devils, rather than with the dehumanized humanity reduced to mere mathematical numbers: "duizentduizenden" ("a thousand thousand"), even though Apollion's tirade is merely a prophecy. This explosion of life seems to call for death as its natural regulator.

What connects Vondel's *Lucifer* with Bolesławiusz's poem is also the way both are fascinated with images and metaphors denoting debasement and loss of human dignity. Bolesławiusz is fond of connecting the fate of the doomed with animals that are traditionally regarded as frightful, despicable and evil:

Tedy jak psy z łańcuchów spuszczeni,
Okrutni czarci, jak lwy rozjuszeni
Rzucą się, mając moc na potępionych
Sobie zleconych. . . .
O jak będą źli wrzeszczeć kozłowie
Kiedy ich będą piekielni wilkowie
Pożerać z jadem, kłami rozdzierając,
Żalu nie mając.
Ze wszystkich ścierwów, trupów i zgniłości
Zebrane smrody, wszystkie do jedności
Nic prawie nie są względem piekielnego
Smrodu srogiego.
Żaby, jaszczurki, parchate bufony
Żmije rozjadłe i węzów ogony
Padalce, trzewa z gadziny brzydliwe
Wspomnieć straszliwe.
To czarci w usta potępieńcom tkają,
Jedną za drugą potrawę podają.
Ach, jaki smak w tych potrawach czuje
Co ich kosztują.
Pasma padalców na głowę włożono
Na miejsce włosów żmije zawieszono
Jazczurkowie zaś jagody kęsają
Cery dodają.
Piersi węzowie gryzący pilnują
Żaby zaś usta rozkosznie całują
Jad zaraźliwy w nie z siebie puszczając
A nie przestając.
(www.pbi.edu.pl/book_reader.php?p=30528)

Prose translation:

Like dogs unchained, the cruel devils, like enraged lions, will pounce on the damned who are in their charge . . . they will be screaming like goats eaten alive by those ruthless wolves, and torn apart by their fangs . . . All the stench emitted by all kinds of corpses and rotting bodies will be nothing when compared to the terrible stench of hell. Frogs, lizards, mangy toads, venomous vipers, serpents' tails, blindworms, revolting animals' guts, terrible to mention, are being stuffed into the mouths of the damned. Such dishes they serve one by one, oh, what those who taste them feel. Chains of blindworms are put on their heads, vipers hang from them instead of hair, their cheeks are being bitten by lizards, which make them more rosy, their breast are being stung by serpents, and lips are kissed voluptuously by frogs that never cease to pour their venom into them.

The essence of the above passages seems to be encapsulated in the following statement about the damned:

Żyjąc, umierać nigdy nie przestają
Żądają śmierci, przecież jej nie mają
Choć umierają

They shall live while dying, they cry for death,
but they won't get it, even though they
are constantly dying

The author invents a number of tortures that betoken the state of perpetual transition between life and death, a kind of ironical immortality, and they consist in establishing an intimate, but also very painful, contact between human body and all kinds of “low” animals (frogs, toads, serpents, vipers, lizards), which, in this case, means simply animals that move close to the ground. Also other animals are mentioned, namely wolves, dogs and lions, which are known for their ferocity, but it is clearly the former ones that are meant to awake the reader's strongest horror and disgust. The above descriptions are taken from the part of the poem that deals with the sinners whose main offence was gluttony, hence the devils constantly feed them with the kind of food they would have probably never touched with a bargepole when alive, the foods the consumption of which breaks important social taboos (not only those concerned with “low” animals, but also the taboo against eating human corpses), and one can imagine that only abject poverty might induce one to become interested in them.

In Vondel's *Lucifer*, we do not have descriptions of infernal torments as the action of the play takes place before the first human soul was consigned to hell, but we have a number of references to the human race that emphasize man's being an earthling, a creature that is for ever bound up with the idea of mortality, even though he is still in a state of immortality:

LUCIFERISTEN:

Wat is by ons alree mishandelt of misdaen,
Dat Godt een waterbel, vol wint en lucht geblazen,
Verheft om d' Engelen, zijn zoonen, te verbazen?
Een basterdy verheft, gevormt uit klay en stof?

LUCIFERISTEN:

Hoe kan de meerder voor een minder zich verneêren?

APOLLION.

Zoo groot een ongelijck valt lastigh te gedoogen.

BELIAL.

Het overtreft bykans ons krachten en vermogen.

LUCIFERISTEN:

Waerom belast men ons een' snooden worm te dienen,

Te draegen op de hant, te luistren naer zijn stem?

LUCIFERIANS:

What have we done
Amiss? How erred, that God a water bubble,
Blown full of vapid air, exalts, His sons,
The Angels, to abase—a bastardy Exalts.
Formed out of clay and dust? (Act III, 83-87), (335).

LUCIFERIANS:

How can the greater to the lesser yield? (III, 129), (338).

APOLLION:

It is hard such inequality to bear.

BELIAL:

It almost goes beyond our utmost strength. (III, 167-168) (341)

LUCIFERIANS:

Why stand we charged to serve a worm so base,
To bear him on our hands, to heed his voice? (III, 514-515), (363).

Man is thus a “snooden worm” (“base worm”), a “waterbel” (“water bubble”), “klay en stof” (“clay and dust”), and to serve him is for the rebellious angels the grossest injustice. From the point of view of Vondel’s Luciferians, man is God’s illegitimate child, a bastard, which curiously invokes a female element, fundamentally absent from the Judeo-Christian story of creation, as if the angels were a fruit of God’s marriage to an unknown goddess, and man was born out of God’s union with a mysterious, and presumably less exalted, mistress. The Luciferians seem then to treat God as if he were a pagan god, such as Zeus, who, apart from his legitimate wife, the goddess Hera (or Juno), had also numerous affairs with earthly women, but for whom, obviously, earthly women are not available. In both poetical works, then, we observe a certain obsession with the material limitations of the human condition.

What most clearly connects Vondel’s play and Bolesławiusz’s devotional poem is the character of Lucifer. In Bolesławiusz’s text, he is not given much attention, but he does make an appearance in the part of the poem based on the Latin and medieval *Visio Tundali* (*Vision of Tundale*), and he is rather thoroughly dehumanized:

What we get is a vision of a curious, and monstrous, circular movement. The souls of the damned are repeatedly swallowed and vomited, and swallowed again by Lucifer, who, in order to torment others, has to undergo unspeakable torture himself because the rhythm of his monstrous inhaling and exhaling is dictated by the pangs of his pain caused by the waves of heat produced by the devils blowing the bellows.

Tam był Lucyper większy nad wszystkie widziany

Rzeczy, które w piekle są, do nich przyrównany.

Tak jako kruk się ona bestyja czerniała,

A od nóg aż do głowy postać ludzką miała.

...

Leży to dziwowisko straszne, niewidane,

Na kracie rozpalonej mocno przykowane.

Nieprzeliczeni czarci ogień podpalają.

Dmąć miechami, pod kratą płomienie wzniecają. ...

Za wszystkie członków stawy smoka przywiązano,

Łańcuchami mięszymi z spiże przykowano.

A gdy na roście owym zostaje pieczony,

Gniewając się okrutnie, od jadu wścieczony,

Coraz to się obraca na bok zawsze drugi,

A w tym na dusze, czarty jak na swoje sługi

Ściąga ręce i one, nimi napelnione,

Ścisła, że jak jagody bywają stłoczone.

Tu, wzdychając, dech puszcza, a zaś w różne strony

Rzuca dusze na ogień on nieugaszony. ...

A gdy znowu dech wraca od siebie puszczoney,

Pożera wszystkie dusze smok nienasycony,

które z ogniem do jego paszczęki wpadają.

Te zaś co jego zęby i ksieniec mijają,

Ogona swego siecze ostrymi brzytwami,

Dusze nędzne katując pospołu z czartami.

I tak mordując inszych, sam bywa dręczony

Nad insze wszystkie duchy, smok on potępiony.

Tedy rzecz Anioł do duszy strudzonej

„Ten jest anioł Lucyper od Boga stworzony.

Tęgo, gdyby Pan Bóg mocy nie ukrócił,

Wszystek by świat i samo to piekło wyrócił.

(*Echo* V, lines: 443-486)

Prose translation:

There one could see Luciper, bigger than everything else that could be found in hell.

This beast was raven black, from the waist up it resembled a human being. This terrible, unheard-of weirdo is lying there, fastened firmly to red-hot bars. Innumerable devils are feeding the fire, blowing the bellows, they kindle flames under the bars. ...

All the members of that dragon were tied with heavy chains made of wrought iron. And when he is being burned on that grill,

fuming with anger, enraged by the venom, every now and then he turns over onto the other side. While doing it, he embraces

his servant devils, and squeezes them like berries in a press. Sighing, he exhales, and

throws the souls in all directions so that they get burned In the inextinguishable

fire. ... And when that insatiable dragon inhales, he devours all the souls that fall

into his maw. The ones that manage to avoid his teeth and stomach are slashed

with the sharp edges of his tail, thus he torments both the miserable souls and the

devils. While murdering others he himself is tormented more than other spirits, that

damned dragon. Thus the Angel speaks to the tired soul: "Here is Luciper created by

God, who, if not subdued by God, would have turned the world and the hell itself,

upside down

This symbolical image in Bolesławiusz is apparently traditional and confirmed by late medieval iconography. It may remind us, for example, of a well known miniature depicting hell by the Limbourg Brothers, from a series of miniatures known as *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*. The central figure in that miniature is Leviathan, apparently synonymous here with Satan, undergoing and inflicting torture at the same time: he is shown lying on a grill, squeezing a tangled couple in each fist and trampling on other human beings tormented by snakes. On either side demons work enormous bellows which fan the flames that consume the damned beneath him. (See: www.christusrex.org/www2/berry/f108r.html)

But it seems to be possible to apply this kind of symbolism also to the figure of Lucifer in Vondel's play, even though Vondel's Lucifer, unlike Milton's Satan, and unlike Bolesławiusz's Lucyper, appears, for most of the time, as a yet un-fallen angel who neither acquired any of the implacable hostility towards God, that characterized Milton's Satan, nor the beastly and contemptible characteristics typical of Satan, or Lucifer, shown as denizens of hell. The complexity of Lucifer's character is much in evidence in the following scene that features the conversation between Lucifer and Gabriel, one of the chief archangels, who, in Vondel's text, seems to play the role of God's spokesman, or minister of propaganda. Lucifer calls him "Herald and Interpreter of Heaven" (Act 2, 129), or, in the original "Herout en tolk van 't hemelsche paleis":

Verschoon me, o Gabriël!
Indien ik uw bazuin, de wet van 't hoog be-
vel,
Een luttel wederstrev, of schijn te weder-
streven.
Wij ijvren voor Gods eer: om God zij Recht
te geven,
Verstout ik mij, en dwaal dus verre buiten
't spoor
Van mijn gehoorzaamheid.

Think not too harshly then, I do beseech
Thee, Gabriel, if now thy trumpet's voice,
The new-made law given by the High
Command,
I do resist, or seemingly oppose.
We strive for God's own honor, yea, to give
To God His Right, should I become thus
daring
And wander far beyond the narrow path
Of my obedience. (Act 2, 243-249)

This "verschoon me" seems to be, more or less, equivalent to the English "let me excuse myself", and it certainly does not mean "spare me", in the sense "treat me gently", which is what these words seem to mean literally.⁶ Lucifer

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⁶ I base my suggestion that "zich verschonon" may mean "excuse oneself" on (ed.) H. Coenders (2001).

clearly does not regret his having raised a rebellion, he only wants Gabriel to see that his rebellion is justified by the circumstances. Lucifer also offers a paradoxical argument through which he hopes to show that he only seemingly rebels against God, while, in fact, he defends God's honour that has been jeopardized by God's own, somewhat inconsiderate, decisions. Interesting in this context is the word "luttel", in "een luttel wederstrevē", left untranslated in the English version. Apparently it means that Lucifer, at least from his own point of view, resists God's power only "a little", or, as he later adds, "seemingly". Vondel's Lucifer, unlike Milton's Satan, is prepared, or at least appears to be prepared, to make compromises, and to keep up appearances.

One might of course suppose that Lucifer only pretends to have adopted a more conciliatory approach in order to gain time, and not to alienate Gabriel too soon, considering that he is a very influential archangel. Lucifer's strategy can plainly be seen in his conversation with Raphael, who is shown as the most sentimental among the archangels, believing, for much longer than Michael and Gabriel, in the possibility of reaching some kind of peaceful agreement with Lucifer. The latter counters Raphael's bitter reproaches in the following way:

Heer Rafaël, ick verdien noch dreigement, noch toren. Mijn helden hebben Gode en Lucifer gezworen, En, onder 's hemels eedt, dien standert opgerecht. Men stroie wat men wil den hemel door: ick vecht En oorloghe onder Godt, Tot voorstant van zijn kooren, De hantvest, en het Recht, hun wettigh aengeboren, Eer Adam zijne zon zagh opgaen, eer de dagh Zijn paradijs bescheen.	Lord Raphael, I nor threat Nor wrath deserve. My heroes both by God And Lucifer have sworn, and under oaths To Heaven have raised this standard thus aloft Let rumours, therefore, far and wide be spread Throughout the Heavens, I battle under God For the defence of these His choristers, And fro the Charter and the Rights which were Their lawful heritage ere Adam saw The rising sun: yea ere o'er Paradise The daylight shone. (Act IV, 232-241)
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We seem to be facing a peculiar schizophrenia, Lucifer tries to fight against God, and "under God", at the same time, and the consistency of this, rather paradoxical, line of thinking seems to show that this more than merely a stratagem.

An interesting passage in Piotr Oczko's book on the culture of the seventeenth century Netherlands can be found on this subject:

Czy jednak wszystkie nawiązania do Biblii możemy uznać za realizację mitu Holandii—Nowego Izraela? Na pewno nie będzie nią *Lycyfer* Vondla, dramat o buncie aniołów, odczytywany czasem w katolickich Niderlandach Południowych (całkowicie wbrew zamiarom autora) jako polityczna aluzja do wojny holendersko-habsburskiej, w którym tytułowy bohater reprezentować miał niby Wilhelma Orańskiego (sic!), Bóg—Filipa II, Michał—księcia Albę, a Lew i smok wprzęgnięci do rydwanu Lucyfera prowincje, które najwierniej wspierały Wilhelma—Holandię i Zelandię. Nawiązania takie są bowiem zbyt odległe, a interpretacja ta stanowi przecież krytykę Republiki, a nie jej afirmację.⁷ (Oczko 2009, 162)

The story sounds familiar, John Milton was also suspected to have represented Oliver Cromwell in the guise of Satan in his *Paradise Lost*, implying that the role of God should be associated with king Charles I of the Stuart dynasty (Morrissey 2008, 269). The fact that Milton was a staunch supporter of Cromwell, and a sworn enemy of the Stuarts, resulted in the general opinion that the interpretation is, to say the least, far-fetched. What happened was rather the opposite, the interpretation led to the famous attempt, by William Blake, to make facts obey that interpretation, rather than the other way round. I mean, of course, the opinion: "Milton was of the Satan's party without knowing it" as suggested by Blake in "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" (180). Perhaps Vondel as well was of Lucifer's party without knowing it? The most obvious answer is, just as in the case of Milton, he was, and he was not. By analogy, also Vondel's Lucifer is William of Orange, and, most emphatically, is not William of Orange. Naturally, the difference here is that, while Milton was acquainted personally with Cromwell, Vondel could not personally know William of Orange, known also as William the Silent. William was assassinated in 1584, whereas Joost van Vondel was born three years later, in 1587.

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⁷ "Are all the references to the Bible to be interpreted as part of the myth of Holland—the New Israel? This does not seem to concern Vondel's *Lucifer*, a drama on the rebellion of the angels, sometimes read in the Southern Netherlands (totally at odds with the author's intentions) as a political allusion to the war between Holland and the Habsburgs, in which the title protagonist was supposed to represent William of Orange, God-Philip II, Michael—the duke of Alba, and the lion and the dragon, harnessed to Lucifer's chariot, were to stand for Holland and Zeland, the two provinces that the most staunchly supported William. Such correspondences are too far-fetched, and the interpretation itself constitutes a criticism of the Republic, and not its affirmation".

If we take into account the sixteenth century probably anonymous poem *Het Wilhelmus*, which is the national anthem of the Netherlands, and also has the form of William's self-presentation, we notice that the Prince of Orange, or rather his poetical persona, justifies his position, and the rebellion against the Spanish rule, by means of a mixture of ostensible loyalty, and understated disloyalty, that is very much like Lucifer's in Vondel's play:

Wilhelmus van Nassouwe
ben ik, van Duitsen bloed,
den vaderland getrouwe
blijf ik tot in den dood.
Een Prinse van Oranje
ben ik, vrij, onverveerd,
den Koning van Hispanje
heb ik altijd geëerd.

William of Nassau
am I, of Dutch blood.
Loyal to the fatherland
I will remain until I die.
A prince of Orange
am I, free and fearless.
The king of Spain
I have always honoured.

Mijn schild ende betrouwen
zijt Gij, o God mijn Heer,
op U zo wil ik bouwen,
Verlaat mij nimmermeer.
Dat ik doch vroom mag blijven,
uw dienaar t'aller stond,
de tirannie verdrijven
die mij mijn hart doorwondt.

My shield and reliance
are you, o God my Lord.
It is you on whom I want to rely,
never leave me again.
[Grant] that I may remain brave,
your servant for always,
and [may] defeat the tyranny,
which pierces my heart.

William of Orange, as shown in the poem quoted above, is, or at least styles himself to be, a reluctant revolutionary, a conservative at heart, and an upholder of social hierarchy, who joins the forces of a rebellion only because his, essentially also conservative, loyalty to his own nation, and sympathy with its undeserved plight, makes any other course of action impossible. Another historical figure that can be mentioned in this context is undoubtedly Martin Luther's; his famous statement "hier stehe ich, ich kann nicht anders" (qtd. Werner Scholze-Stubenrecht, 223).

This is all very much in the spirit of the reluctant rebellion. Luther's position is slightly different from that of Vondel's Lucifer, or of the William from *Wilhelmus*. The former pledged, first of all, their loyalty to the people over whom they ruled, or from whom they originated, while Luther talks about loyalty to himself. The principle is nevertheless basically the same. Another such "reluctant rebel" is Brutus from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, who, shortly after

murdering Caesar claims that: “If then that friend demand why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer: not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more” (3. 2., 19-22).

It certainly is hardly a mere coincidence that all the rebels: Prince William, Luther, and Brutus challenged the authority of Rome embodied either in the Roman Empire, in the Church of Rome, or both—Philip II (*de Koning van Hispanje*) was a son of the emperor of the so called Holy Roman Empire, Charles V, who, incidentally, used to be an ally and protector of William's. Brutus killed the man traditionally considered to have been the first of the long line of Roman emperors, and, at the same time, the man who, as the high priest of Jove, bore the title of Pontifex Maximus (greatest bridge-maker, or Supreme Pontiff), the title later used also by the popes. Brutus did it (as Shakespeare, following Plutarch, claims), for the love of Rome; William, for the love of his countrymen. They, as it is emphatically stated in the poem (*ben ik, van Duitsen bloed*), were not Romans, they did not speak a Romance language, or, in their majority, belong to the Roman Catholic Church. Yet, William himself, like Vondel, was a Roman Catholic, and he owed the title of the prince of Orange to his having inherited the small principality of Orange, in Southern France, which was surrounded almost on all sides by the papal territory of Avignon, where once the popes resided. Also Milton, though a sworn enemy of the Church of Rome, was, somewhat paradoxically, an Italophile, who, like many Protestant intellectuals, had a thorough knowledge of classical Latin and Italian literature as well as of Roman historical monuments.

In conclusion, let me say that it was not my purpose to show any influence or fundamental similarity between the two poetical works discussed above. They are very different from each other and it would be useless to pretend otherwise. My contention is only that they were born out of a similar intellectual climate, out of the keen interest that the culture of the Baroque showed to the doctrine of “the four last things”, that is of death, judgement, salvation, and damnation. Yet, it is only Bolesławiusz's poem that addresses this topic directly. Vondel's play shows rather how these “four things” came about. It begins with the motif of the dissatisfaction and jealousy of the angels grouped around Lucifer, while they are still in Heaven, and ends with their being thrown into Hell, by God's decree, and with the announcement of the first parents' disobedience and eating of the forbidden fruit, which makes God banish them from Paradise, but also make them subject to death. In other words, the four topics of heaven, hell,

death and judgment (*mors, iudicium, gehenna, Gloria*)⁸ are skillfully brought together and given as much prominence, though in a different way, as in *The Shrill Sound of the Ultimate Trumpet*.⁹

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⁸ In medieval and Renaissance Latin.

⁹ See, for example, the oration of Caspar Barleus, a professor at Leiden University, held at the funeral of Joannes Arnoldus Corvinus in the Dutch town of Leiden in 1648: “Unde quatuor nobis sunt meditanda novissima; mors, iudicium, gehenna, gloria” (“Hence we should contemplate four last things: death, judgement, heaven, hell”) at [www. let. leidenuniv. nl/Dutch/Latijn/Corvinus. html](http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/Dutch/Latijn/Corvinus.html).