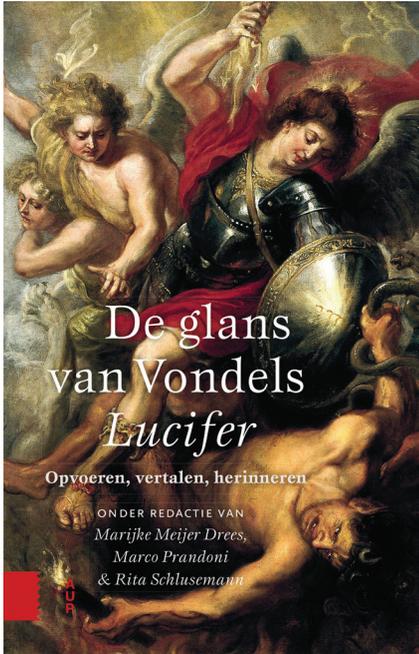


## Review

Marijke Meijer Drees, Marco Prandoni, and Rita Schlusemann (eds.), *De glans van Vondels Lucifer. Opvoeren, vertalen, herinneren*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2018, 234 pp. ISBN 9789463721110.



The 1654 tragedy *Lucifer* is undoubtedly Joost van den Vondel's (1587-1679) best-known publication, both within the Dutch Republic and outside. *De glans van Lucifer* (*The Lustre of Lucifer*), a collection of sixteen essays by scholars, editors, translators, playwrights, and directors, explores the grounds of *Lucifer*'s distinctive popularity. The compendium is the outcome of a 2014 conference at the University of Bologna and brings together an impressive range of international and interdisciplinary expertise. The three editors, Marijke Meijer Drees (Groningen), Marco Prandoni (Bologna), and Rita Schlusemann (Berlin), are well-acquainted with the opportunities and limitations of the 'international transfer' of Dutch literature. The employment of this notion in the introduction seems deliberate in order to avoid Michel Espagne's concept of 'cultural transfer' – even if the latter is used in some of the essays –, opting for an approach that takes the power relations

between nation-states as its point of departure; unfortunately, however, there is little elaboration of the theoretical assumptions of this approach. The book is divided into three parts, each covering a different sphere of reception. The first part involves the reception of *Lucifer* performances in the theatre. The second part discusses the tense relationship *Lucifer* maintained with the literary canon at different points in time. The third and most comprehensive part outlines the reception of *Lucifer* translations in nine different countries. Since the publication does not endeavour an overarching answer to the guiding question of *Lucifer*'s popularity, this review summarises the contributors' insights within each of these three parts.

*Lucifer's* major attraction for members of the twentieth-century theatre scene was Vondel's intriguing stage direction: 'The stage is in heaven' ('Het toneel is in den hemel'). As Vondel director Hans Croiset attests in his essay, it was this stage direction that convinced the crew of his 1979 *Lucifer* production of the freshness of the play. During those years 'repertoire' was regarded as sluggish and insincere, but Vondel's stage direction invited actors and technicians to a playful experiment with the scenery, costumes, and props. In the final performance, the angels were dressed up as sad clowns, dangling on swings instead of clouds. It was the same stage direction that drew director Antonio Syxty into Vondel's literary universe, leading to the only Italian *Lucifer* performance (1999), as Simona Brunetti relates in her essay. Syxty chose to depict heaven as a 1930s ghetto in which gangsters dare to question their chief. Another aspect of *Lucifer* that is repeatedly mentioned as appealing to theatre practitioners is Vondel's language. Theatre expert Caroline de Westenholz, in her essay on elocutionist Albert Vogel (1874-1933), describes a time in which the melodious declamation of Vondel's tragedies was very much in vogue. These days may seem over, but although Croiset's actors at first ridiculed the idea of burdening a twentieth-century audience with alexandrines, they demanded to perform the complete text in verse once they acquired a taste for Vondel's metre.

The book's second part sheds light on the different ways in which *Lucifer* can be considered a subversive text, which managed both to repulse and mesmerise its readers. Clearly, the Calvinist clergy of Amsterdam in 1654 were not amused by Vondel setting the scene for what they considered to be idolatry and licentiousness. They convinced the Amsterdam burgomasters to cancel the entire production after only two performances, which only contributed to *Lucifer's* reputation. The play experienced its first *succès de scandale*, and many more were to come. According to Marco Prandoni, the incident of 1654 charged future *Lucifer* performances with a fierce subversive power. On this note, literary scholar Agnes Sneller critically analyses Eve's ambiguous role in *Lucifer*. The casualness with which Eve occupies an absolute minority position in a man's world, which is heaven, is poignant yet at the same time filled with complexity and contradiction, creating space for reflection on the position of women in seventeenth-century society. Annette van Dijk's essay on Albert Verwey's fascination for *Lucifer* as a mediator between good and evil demonstrates how *Lucifer's* subversive profile appealed to modern poets. In Verwey's 'Hymne aan Lucifer' ('Hymn to Lucifer', 1936), *Lucifer* represents the imagination which enables the poet to look into the invisible, as the morning star that adds depth to twilight.

Even though translations are commonly written to overcome language barriers, an important motive for a translation can be the *affinity* between the translator's and the translated language. This is the case for two South-African editions, which involve some, but only limited translation, discussed by Marijke Meijer Drees. She describes how the problematic ideology of an African-Dutch 'kinship' (*stamverwantschap*) catalysed expressions of cultural nationalism during the Boer Wars (1880-1881 and 1899-1902). The first edition of *Lucifer* (1925), for instance, was advanced within the context of the Afrikaner revolt against the English. Yet as political circumstances changed, first during the Second World War, when the Afrikaners supported the Germans, and later during the struggle that led to the end of Apartheid, African-Dutch relations and Vondel were floundering. Despite linguistic affinity with the former Dutch colony Java, an Indonesian *Lucifer*

translation does not exist. On her search through Javanese newspaper archives Chiara Beltrami Gottmer did, however, find evidence of a Javanese *Lucifer* performance: a compelling crossover of baroque tragedy and traditional Javanese gamelan dance and music written by a Javanese student in 1916. The only review, by a Dutch journalist, speaks of a 'Christianisation of Javanese dance'. Disappointingly, he did not have an eye for the transformations *Lucifer* underwent in this thought-provoking project.

The major motive for *Lucifer* translations, judging by the essays, seems to have been an interest in the universal theme of the battle between good and evil. This did not always work in Vondel's favour. In Poland, for instance, Piotr Ockzo's *Lucifer* translation of 2002 was hardly recognised, while his literary study *The Myth of Lucifer* (2005) achieved quite a success – according to Natalia Stachura because it was received as a cultural biography of the devil. Another important motive for translation was the existence of a similar narrative in the translator's culture, thus allowing Vondel's *Lucifer* to serve as a comparison. Famous examples of such narratives are Dante's *Inferno* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but Orsolya Réthelyi demonstrates how the Hungarian *Lucifer* translation inadvertently benefited from common ground shared with the nineteenth-century play *The Tragedy of Man* (*Az ember tragédiája*, 1861) by Imre Madách. Similar to the motive of the universal theme, the motive of a common ground does not necessarily involve interest for Vondel's specific approach to Lucifer. Other essays show how translations aimed to align Vondel's provocative interpretation of Lucifer with religious dogma. Vondel described Eve's seductive beauty in great detail, of which Adam is also fully aware. However, both the Italian translation of 1960 by Luigi Calvo and the Russian translation of 1988 by Evgeni Vitkovski erased all references to prelapsarian intercourse, because according to both the Catholic and the Russian Orthodox Church, Adam and Eve were innocent in paradise. Not seldom do translations cover up cultural inconsistencies instead of generating a real transfer.

Dutch institutions are no exception in this respect, as has already become clear from the journalist's response to the Javanese adaptation. Another example involves professor Kåre Langvik-Johannessen's dissertation on Vondel, *Zwischen Himmel und Erde* (1963). His Norwegian and psycho-symbolistic approach were rather unconventional from the perspective of Vondel expert W.A.P. Smit. Instead of being grateful for international interest and grasping the opportunity for a Norwegian-Dutch cultural transfer, Smit dismissed the work, writing that 'I hope this will not become an authoritative work on Vondel in the German-speaking world; there is already enough misunderstanding about our literature there!' (my translation). A more recent example involves Jean Robaey's remark that most Dutch funding bodies do not support Vondel translations that are not in verse, inconsiderate of the fact that in other languages rhythm, word play, or typography might prove more effective. In many cases transformation may contribute to transfer.

Readers should not expect to find a profound vision on the international reception of *Lucifer* in *De glans van Vondel's Lucifer*. This would require an elaborate, overarching theoretical framework, which this publication does not provide. Rather, they can enjoy a stroll through the different contexts in which Vondel's *Lucifer* has taken root and, sometimes, flourished. On the one hand, this light-footed approach of interdisciplinary and international receptions in various contexts makes a significant contribution. On the other, the basic concept of international transfer seems limiting, as a one-way perspective that puts

too much emphasis on what is lost in passing national borders, while the cultural potential of the transfers remains invisible. The collection would have benefited from the mutual concept of cultural transfer, which assumes that the transformations involve both the translating and the translated culture. A reflection on the transformations the Dutch *Lucifer* and Dutch literature underwent as a result of the play's numerous receptions would have significantly strengthened this publication. Beltrami Gottmer rightly observes that 'Lucifer remains hidden between the palm leaves by the side of the rice fields', but this is the Dutch Lucifer.

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