An eloquent enigma: the dramas of Jacobus Cornelius Luminumæus àMarca (c. 1580 - c. 1628) and their contexts

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CONCLUSION
THE ENIGMA EXPOSED?

Both the life and work of the Ghent Benedictine Jacobus Cornelius Lumenaeus à Marca (c. 1580 - c. 1628) have proved impalpable. His life is perhaps best described as of paradoxical nature: he showed both a natural propensity towards piety that demanded internal and introvert contemplation, and a literary talent that – in order to be fully counted – was best served by an extrovert approach. While devoting his entire life to pious literature, he gradually became entangled in a noisy web of allegedly rampant behaviour, through which his piety could scarcely make itself heard. Though this aspect has received infinitely more attention than his literary production, still, if anything, religion serves as the central theme of his life. And to this noble cause he set his pagan Muses.

Born to a family of which most members were to occupy respectful positions in society, Cornelius too treaded on the path of ambition: in those troubled times of the late sixteenth, early seventeenth century, when the Southern Netherlands had lost their momentum to the Northern Provinces both economically and culturally, Lumenaeus slipped into the international network of humanists that had formed around the Louvain professor Erycius Puteanus, where he made a name for himself as author of Biblical tragedies and as a gifted orator. A man with his devotion and talent for rhetoric and poetry would often become a school rector, a courtier, a professor, an abbot. But though he never quite obtained – or even wanted to obtain? – any such post, still his ambitions were grand, his outlook international. Accordingly, his life knew many successes. He revived and redesigned Latin Biblical tragedy, published various prose and (religious) poetry, and managed to skillfully employ his rhetorical talent in the various areas of his professional life, enabling him to visit the world-renowned cities of Italy and to befriend some of the most illustrious men of his time.

Nonetheless, Lumenaeus remained on the outer edges of contemporary attention. Perhaps he considered a secluded life in an abbey the ideal opportunity to peacefully develop his Christian-humanist calling. His extant publications and correspondence make clear that he gradually reserved ever less space for non-religious literature, even passing up on his best chance of world fame – writing a history of the Dutch Revolt –, in order to devote his efforts almost exclusively to the Holy Virgin. Still, however, his literary production may seem to have functioned only in the margins of the Counter-Reformist offensive, keeping an orderly distance to
controversial issues. In his speeches, abounding with Biblical and classical images, he for the most part resisted the urge to touch upon contemporary events. The same applies to his tragic production, the contexts of which remain unclear to this day. Were they written for performance at schools or colleges? Or did he solely intend them to be read or recited in humanist circles? In any case, he seems to have thought that a literature that was released from most contemporary bonds would be the key to eternal fame and international, supra-confessional admiration. But while his friends and fellow humanists admired his poetical and rhetorical skills, in the storm of partisan and polemically charged literature his production was soon forgotten. A restless man, he had trouble successfully combining his religious piety and humanist calling; a man of weak health, who was charismatic and intelligent enough to procure the assistance of many dignitaries, but who nonetheless failed to make it all the way to the top; a man who, at least in the unforgiving eyes of history, remained struggling in margin; a monastic who was unable to win over to his cause the one patron he needed most, his own abbot.

**Exposing the enigma**

In this thesis, I have initiated research into the possibilities of the contextual interpretation of early modern Latin drama. As a case study, the dramas of Lummenaeus à Marca provide an exceptional challenge: both the author and the printed editions of his work have yielded close to nothing about the various contexts of his drama (genesis, poetics, performance, distribution, etc.), and thus, if we want to be able to say anything about the interpretational possibilities, we are forced to work first and foremost from the actual texts themselves. But while these texts have been subjected to only summary modern research, bold attempts to link Lummenaeus’ works to various contextual circumstances have nonetheless been undertaken.¹ Not surprisingly, I have called these earlier results into question: I have argued that properly substantiated conclusions will in any case have to be based primarily on textual evidence. In order, then, to provide this textual evidence, I first had to map Lummenaeus’ literary model, before continuing to identify literary strategies, to distill mutually interactive perspectives of value and, eventually, to move the investigation from text to context.

¹ Cf. for instance p. 139, regarding *Carcer Babylonius*. 
Lummenaeus’ literary models

Lummenaeus à Marca never hid his literary debts, though the opposite has been stated. On the contrary: by explicitly referring to George Buchanan’s Iephtes in the preface to his own Jephthah-tragedy, the author actually invites the reader to consider his Iephte alongside the famous work of the Frenchman-from-Scotland. By referring to Robert Garnier’s tragedy Les Juifves in the poem honouring Hermann de Bourgogne’s Sedecias tragoedia, Lummenaeus attests to being aware of the work by his widely known French predecessor. Any scholarly comparison should take such precious clues into account, and it would be rather shortsighted to call Lummenaeus’ work – without further substantiation – mere plagiarism of these models, as Jean-Marie Valentin has done.

Throughout chapter two, I have argued that Lummenaeus gradually created a dramatic model that was based primarily, though not exclusively, not only on the tragedies of Seneca, but also on the tragedies of the French Renaissance authors. And – so I argue – like these French humanist tragedians before him, Lummenaeus worked with models of dramatic techniques rather than dramatic treatises, like Jean de La Taille’s De l’Art de la tragédie, or Scaliger’s Poetics. This, however, does not mean that his work – or that of the French humanists, for that matter – is mere plagiarism: rather, Lummenaeus’ indebtedness to these models resulted in a healthy spirit of competition that ranged from imitatio to aemulatio, and which resulted in a literary dialogue, so to speak, in which Lummenaeus’ position can be primarily identified by determining the different dramatic choices he made (a ‘foreignization’ between source and reception, which he realized most distinctly by means of thematic variations) – to which he even rather explicitly confesses with regard to Buchanan’s Iephtes, as we have seen. I have argued, in fact, that Lummenaeus, by creating a type of drama that consisted almost entirely of monologue and chorus song, successfully attempted to move beyond these models. Still, though his work received ample praise from his fellow humanists, Lummenaeus never obtained a literary success that could match De La Taille’s or Garnier’s. Had he overplayed his hand?

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3 For Lummenaeus’ reference to Buchanan, see Iephte (1608), A2ro-vo (cf. above, p. 171); for Garnier, see Puteanus, Epistolarum Reliquiae, 98, reprinted in Lummenaeus, Opera omnia, 231-232 (cf. above, p. 92(nt12)).
4 Valentin, Le théâtre des Jesuites, II, 789.
5 Cf. chapter two, pp. 99ff.
7 Cf. above, p. 171.
8 Cf. chapter two, pp. 105ff.
In the last fifty years, the retrospect criticism which scholars of early modern drama had for quite some time applied in their evaluation of drama that had preceded the literary highlights of authors like Shakespeare and Corneille, has rightly given way to a critical approach that defines and evaluates these earlier works as products of their own time and place. If one fails to recognize the extent of Lummenaeus’ indebtedness to French humanist tragedy, the static model which he developed on the foundation laid by Seneca and brought further by the French, is consequently prone to being misjudged as well. It is in this respect interesting to note that Lummenaeus himself actually appears to have been aware of the transitional shifts that took place within his own tragic oeuvre: he started writing tragedy in a somewhat hybrid manner that found its roots partly in the Dutch vernacular tradition of rhetorician’s drama (Dives Epulo), after which he overtly attempted to emulate Buchanan’s masterpiece (Iephte) and only with Carcer Babylonius found his own literary niche in which to give shape to the rest of his dramatic oeuvre. Once he had found this niche, he apparently no longer felt the need to provide an apologetic preface to his Carcer Babylonius – contrary to Iephte’s. Even though he clearly rivals Robert Garnier’s Les Juifves, the modest emulation has become an actual literary contest in which Lummenaeus deems himself a worthy adversary to his French predecessor.

It can be assumed that Lummenaeus recognized the – relatively – peculiar position of his early work and considered it unfit for reappearance among the representatives of the grand model he had gradually created. After some twenty years, Lummenaeus deemed both Iephte and Carcer Babylonius fit for reprint (though in thoroughly modified and abridged versions) while the Dives Epulo did not make the cut. However, the fact that an author, even himself, may have recognized the gradual transition does not warrant a retrospect approach: after all, he had originally, in another time and place, deemed the Epulo fit for publication. It is in the original time and place, then, that the play has found its place in this investigation.

Form and function in Lummenaeus’ tragedies

An intimate knowledge of Lummenaeus’ literary models and the ways in which they functioned proved of fundamental importance for accurately assessing Lummenaeus’ dramatic structure and techniques. I have argued that form and function in the plays of Lummenaeus are mutually complementary, despite – some might instinctively suppose – the very static appearance of Lummenaeus’ plays. This shows clearest in the use of the

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9 In chapter two, I have referred to these processes with regard to English and French drama, but also with regard to Dutch Renaissance drama.

10 Which constitutes, in my view, one of the main flaws in earlier studies by Worp and Parente. Cf. chapter two (pp. 89ff.).
chorus, which often takes up 50 to 75% of his plays. Lummenaeus’ long and lyrical chorus songs contribute immensely to the prevailing of specific views expressed, by carrying the plays to emotional heights by the use of words alone. By reacting to the extensive monologues – Lummenaeus’ usual act structure is a single monologue followed by a single chorus song – which generally portray a single emotion (hate, grief, etc.), the plays gradually force upon the audience or readership a balanced perspective, an equilibrium of emotions in which not just one of the views is allowed to gain the upper hand.

In essence, such a theatre of words, of rhetorical ‘action’ found its prime model in Seneca’s drama – as did many forms of European drama in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Its rhetorical characteristics were developed even further by French Renaissance tragedians. Working from both these models, Lummenaeus eventually moved beyond both. But the novelty of his drama lies not only in the fact that the author departs from his models in developing the rhetorically shaped appearance of tragedy, but for a large part also in keeping its moral aims implicit. By means of this rhetorical emphasis on _emovere_, on language and emotion rather than on cunning dialogues or aphorisms, the play’s morals are steadily forced upon the audience. An important role in this process, that is aimed at _docere_ and _persuadere_, is assigned to the chorus, as a mere glance at the data already suggests. But the extraction of the prevalent perspectives of value is rather complicated: Lummenaeus did not use _sententiae_ to make certain views more explicit, nor did he direct the reader’s attention to important aspects of the play in a foreword or dedication – instead, he trusted form to generate function, function to be dictated by form. I will return on the method I used for extracting these views – any view, not necessarily the author’s – below.

The rhetorically shaped dramatic model that Lummenaeus had developed has been reason for most scholars to consider his plays _Lesedramen_, or closet drama. But I have shown that his dramatic model was by far not as isolated as many have thought. Lummenaeus’ main model, the popular drama of Robert Garnier, was essentially devoid of dramatic action (in the modern sense of the word) and derived its strength most notably from a rhetorical display of emotions; still, _his_ plays were widely staged, in the Southern Netherlands as well. Additionally, the fact that a Dutch

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11 For my discussion of Lummenaeus’ emphasis on chorus and monologue, cf. pp. 105ff.
12 In 2002, Jan Konst suggested something similar with regard to Dutch tragedy of the seventeenth century, arguing that scholars have somewhat ignored the close connection that – in his view – exists between form and content. Cf. Konst, ‘De relatie tussen vorm en inhoud’.
13 Cf. above, p. 89.
14 As has been shown by the influential French scholar Raymond Lebègue, and more recently by Katell Lavéant. Cf. above, p. 92.
rhetorician from the Chamber of Aalst, Guilliam Caudron Sr., translated Lumnenaus’ *Saul* into the vernacular, while retaining the quintessential rhetorical features of the original and adding only a few ‘smoothening’ transitions,\(^\text{15}\) proves that these tragedies could surely have been enjoyed on stage, notwithstanding the fact that no decisive evidence regarding any performance has yet come down to us.\(^\text{16}\)

*The road to contextual interpretation*

The research for this thesis has essentially been based on analyzing text, on distilling perspectives of value in conjunction with the determination of possible reader response reactions, and on transferring these findings onto a given context. James Parente’s pioneering work in the area of the contextual interpretation of Lumnenaus’ dramas – though not infallible – has proven invaluable for providing a *repoussoir* that encouraged further research into the possibilities of such research on early modern drama. These earlier contextualized interpretations have, however, been constructed without the provision of thorough textual evidence; in fact, they were based on rather general thematic aspects alone.

Since Lumnenaus was partly working from the French Renaissance model, the contextualization of his drama would perhaps seem self-evident: with regard to French humanist tragedy, it has been argued that ‘a common characteristic of all these dramas is their topicality: thanks to these plays, the distant episodes of the Old Testament are relived in the audience’s present.’\(^\text{17}\) During the religious wars, French playwrights had been ‘naturally preoccupied above all with the nation’s agony: the nation’s suffering and its origin in the people’s sinfulness was reflected in their work, even when those events gradually became a distant memory.’\(^\text{18}\) The influential French scholar Raymond Lebègue in fact argued that if we want to fully understand the underlying mechanisms at work in Robert Garnier’s tragedies, we need to be aware of the ‘horrors of the age, of the captured cities, the violence and crimes of all sorts.’\(^\text{19}\) But we should not forget that this approach is for a large part instigated by Garnier himself, who, while refraining from any

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\(^\text{15}\) Cf. above, pp. 129-132.

\(^\text{16}\) The relationship between Lumnenaus’ *Saul* and Caudron’s translation, as well as the actual connection between the two men, deserve a more detailed investigation, which I have planned for the near future. Cf. above, p. 130nt178.

\(^\text{17}\) ‘Le trait commun de tous ces drames c’est leur actualité: grâce à eux, de lointains épisodes de l’Ancien Testament reprennent vie dans l’histoire présente.’ Soulié, ‘Le théâtre et la Bible au XVI siècle’, 642.

\(^\text{18}\) Street, *French Sacred Drama*, 60.

\(^\text{19}\) ‘(...) les horreurs de l’époque, les villes forcées, les violences et les crimes de toutes sortes.’ Lebègue, *La tragédie française*, 46.
other explicit topical references in his plays, states in his preface to *Les Juifves* that Israel had caused its own misfortune, because it had ‘comme nous abandonné son Dieu’, abandoned their God, like we have.

But there are also dissenting views, claiming that the audience of French Renaissance tragedy would have remained psychologically and emotionally excluded from the action. The author would have created an ‘over-distancing’ effect on the audience. Above all, such dissenting views first and foremost remind us that care should always be exercised when attempts to contextualize the interpretation of drama, be it French or Neo-Latin, are undertaken, the more so when the author refrains from explicit statements.

In the case of Lummenaeus’ drama, contextualized interpretations can not be self-evident: Parente’s previous attempts were based on thematic aspects alone, but these themes had such widely divergent topical uses that a more thorough substantiation of any such claim is required, as I have argued in the introduction to this thesis. Therefore, I have proposed an approach through which a play’s contextual positions may be more accurately pinpointed. Connecting to the set of ideas collectively known as reader-response criticism, I have essentially attempted to reconstruct the effects of text on a (reading) audience. In what way(s) did Lummenaeus’ dramatic texts guide the audience? For this, I have first, by means of a thorough analysis of form and function, determined the perspectives of value expressed by the different characters, and weighed them within the play as a whole. Which perspectives, so to say, prevailed? The answer(s) to this question I have then tried to combine, or ‘match’ with specific contextual circumstances.

It is only fair, however, to call into question the objective validity of the results thus obtained: reader-response criticism has, quite understandably, been labelled a ‘subjectivist feast’. In fact, the method applied in this thesis is confronted with subjectivity in two ways: not only in the person of the researcher, but also, and perhaps most notably, in his reconstruction of a contemporary reader’s own subjective interpretation. However negative the connotations summoned by something as ‘subjectivism’ – let alone such a dual-layered phenomenon which I just described –, it is something that proved unavoidable in this research. The inevitability stems necessarily from the lack of other means on which a reasoned contextualization of Lummenaeus’ tragedies can be based: if we were not able, as a reader, to subjectively explore the text itself, what other options would then remain? Some comfort may perhaps be gathered from a striking thought that can *mutatis mutandis* also be applied here: “The question of whether value is in the

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21 Cf. above, pp. 1-2. See for instance also p. 201nt97.
23 There are historians who actually praise the workings of subjectivity. Cf. Ankersmit, *Historical Representation*, ch. 2 ‘In Praise of Subjectivity’, pp. 75-103.
poem or in the reader is radically and permanently ambiguous, requiring two answers. Of course the value is not in there, actually, until it is actualized, by the reader. But of course it could not be actualized if it were not there, in potential, in the poem. With Lummenaeus’ drama, then, it is up to the reader to actualize any contextualization; and since the early modern reader has left us nothing to work with, it is in fact up to the modern researcher to reconstruct a reader’s perception, by essentially becoming that reader and subjecting himself to the text’s potential.

Struggle, perseverance and the Catholic cause

In *Carcer Babylonius* (1610), Lummenaeus calls attention to two types of rebellion – political and religious –, both of which were highly topical in view of the dissident Protestants of the Northern Provinces. But that does not necessarily mean that the play actually engages in polemics against those Protestants. In fact, my analysis has shown that the audience’s perception might very well have generated quite the opposite: in war, the people – no matter what side they are on – never win. Through the chorus, attention rather shifts from the cause of rebellion to the misery and suffering of the ordinary people, while maybe – we are talking 1609-1610, the early stages of the Twelve Years’ Truce – even alluding to the current opportunity for long lasting peace personified by Archduke Albert.

Something similar may have been the case with *Iephte* (1608-1609): there are no discussions on the validity of the vow, and the tragic display does not leave room for pointing fingers. Thus, the tragedy does not aim, as Parente claimed, at convicting Calvinistic rigor in adhering too strictly to religious laws. In *Iephte*, too, it is through rhetorical monologues and extensive choral lament that the audience’s attention is drawn first and foremost to the admirable attitude of Jephthah’s daughter as an – explicitly explicit! – Christological parallel and a celebration of Mary’s Holy Virginity.

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25 I have also shown that a full implementation of a ‘Protestant-parallel’ would ultimately lead to rather insurmountable interpretational difficulties. Cf. pp. 158-159.

26 Cf. pp. 166-167. In the analysis of *Carcer Babylonius* in chapter three, I have briefly discussed some issues of sovereignty and kingship. It may not have gone unnoticed that the issues essentially go much deeper than just an appraisal of the Archducal regime, for which I argued there. Frans-Willem Korsten’s *Sovereignty as Inviolability* has shown that there are many aspects to ‘sovereignty’ and its presentation in drama that deserve a more thorough investigation; whether or not such an in-depth investigation would cause the relevance of these plays to extend beyond the confines of their own time and place, as Korsten argued with respect to Vondel’s drama (p. 21), would surely be an interesting perspective for further research.

But here the limitations of this contextual approach become clearly visible as well: though I have been able, by means of textual evidence, to refute Parente’s contextual claim, the results have not readily warranted an alternative suggestion. But perhaps the dramatic outlook – a rather explicit appraisal of virtuous submission to God, even in the face of adversity, and a celebration of Mary – can be understood in the light of Lumnenaus’ dedication to his own abbot, Cornelius Columbanus Vranx. His very first publication, the tragedy could have served to strengthen and celebrate the restoration of Catholic faith (the cult of the Holy Virgin is, of course, something that is not found in Protestantism) and to commemorate and praise the perseverance of those who had lived through the recent hardships under Calvinistic rule. The dedication of Iepte to Vranx – who practically embodied Ghent’s Catholic perseverance, as we may recall\textsuperscript{28} – would, in this view, be more than justified.

What is perhaps most striking about these analyses, then, is the apparent conclusion that topicality did not necessarily imply polemic.\textsuperscript{29} Though it has in the past proved tempting to offer a polemically charged interpretation of Lumnenaus’ dramas, the analyses now show otherwise. The outcome may perhaps be counterintuitive, especially in view of the Counter-Reformist offensive of the early seventeenth century. Nonetheless, it matches quite well the conclusions that have been drawn also for contemporary Jesuit theatre. Even though one might suppose that especially the missionary zeal of the Jesuits would show a fierce anti-Protestantism in its dramas, a study by Fidel Rädle has shown that quite the opposite holds true. Since anti-papism was more easily mobilized than anti-Protestantism, the Jesuits’ well thought-out Counter-Reformist strategy, therefore, was not just to attack the opponent’s positions, but rather to strengthen their own. And by doing so, Jesuit plays portray a rather high degree of self-contemplation.\textsuperscript{30} Thus is the case with the dramas of Lumnenaus: they do

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{28} Vranx was one of the few who remained active as author of Catholic treatises during the Calvinistic Republic of 1578-1584; he saw his goods burned out on the street. After Catholic rule had been restored by Alexander Farnese in 1584, it were men like him who had to lead the restoration – in every respect. Cf. above, p. 161nt105.
  \item \textsuperscript{29} Richard Griffiths came to a similar conclusion regarding Robert Garnier’s Les Juifves (\textit{The Dramatic Technique}, 88).
  \item \textsuperscript{30} Rädle, ‘Das Jesuitentheater in der Plicht der Gegenreformation’, passim. See also McCabe, \textit{An Introduction to the Jesuit Theater}, 25-26. This does not mean, however, that Protestant drama always had an anti-Catholic orientation. Protestant drama might indeed display fierce anti-papism (Creizenach, \textit{Geschichte des neueren Dramas}, III, 331ff.), but might as well be aimed at providing moral didactics instead of polemical demarcation from Catholicism, in a manner similar to Jesuit drama (cf. Lotz-Heumann and Pohlig, ‘Confessionalization and Literature in the Empire’, 56).
\end{itemize}
not primarily manoeuvre against something, but rather work with the cause of
the Southern Netherlands.\textsuperscript{31}

Like the Jesuits, Lummenaeus apparently considered the stage ill-suited for controversy, even though the Biblical themes in any case could have provided ample opportunity had he preferred otherwise. But this approach – best described as careful – is perhaps also rooted in Lummenaeus’ wishful desire to let his tragedies play their part in the supra-confessional republic of letters, which was geared first and foremost towards propagating a shared humanist ideal that was firmly rooted in classical culture. Thus his connections with northern humanists like Daniel Heinsius and Hugo Grotius should be explained, thus his hesitation in writing a history of the Dutch Revolt, thus his specific treatment of possibly controversial themes,\textsuperscript{32} thus his use of such diverse literary models: we must not forget that Lummenaeus indiscriminately connected with the work of Catholic dramatists (Garnier), Protestants (Jean de La Taille) and religiously somewhat controversial authors (Buchanan) alike. In the supra-confessional república litteraria even a Catholic monastic could find a place at the table. By carefully navigating through the rough seas of Biblical drama, Lummenaeus skilfully managed to stay clear of controversy, without renouncing his faith, aesthetic principles, or humanist ideal.

But why and for whom, then, did he write his tragedies? I have argued that Lummenaeus’ work can be considered ‘art’ perhaps first and foremost. As with French Renaissance tragedy, its audience was in any case a social and cultural elite, and through his literary production, Lummenaeus himself gained access to this elite. But once there, he set himself to writing and publishing ever more. His work, so it seems, was both a means to an end as well as a goal in itself – though it failed to procure him a decent living. There are few indications that he may have written (part of) his drama with another audience in mind – schoolboys or college students, perhaps.\textsuperscript{33} But as was the case with Garnier’s plays – which were performed by travelling

\textsuperscript{31} As we have seen, dramatists in the Southern Netherlands generally refrained from polemic overtones in their work. Cf. above, p. 168.

\textsuperscript{32} Lummenaeus himself, however, never even hints at his dramatic themes being controversial in any respect. First and foremost, they are considered to be solid, tragic subjects. A theme such as Jephthah’s and its broad spectrum of interpretational possibilities still cause heated scholarly debate even today. Cf. e.g. with regard to Joost van den Vondel’s Jeptha (1659) Konst, ‘De motivatie van het offer van Ifis’, and Korsten, ‘Een reactie op “De motivatie van het offer van Ifis” van Jan Konst’. Lummenaeus’ friend Antonius Sanderus nonetheless hinted at some theological controversies in which Lummenaeus had been involved (cf. above, p. 85nt273), though it is uncertain to which aspect(s) of his work or period in his life these were possibly connected. A more thorough investigation of his oeuvre, especially his speeches, may shed some light on the issue.

\textsuperscript{33} Cf. chapter two, e.g. p. 113nt101.
bands also in the Southern Netherlands, in a less elite setting\(^{34}\), once such drama was released in print, it was there for the taking. Besides, the mere fact that Lummenaeus had his work actually printed, makes it to a certain extent stand out from its literary brethren: Jesuit drama, for example, was generally not published at all. Whatever the case, the printing of Lummenaeus’ plays made them available for performance, adaptation or translation by whoever so wished.\(^{35}\)

I have argued that the possibility of public performance can in any case not be ruled out based on the model’s rhetorical and static appearance alone, to which the translation of Lummenaeus’ *Saul* by the Aalst rhetorician Caudron is perhaps our best witness.\(^{36}\) The fact that his plays were written in Latin may have been partly responsible for his rather modest fame.\(^{37}\) Nonetheless, Jesuit drama – mostly in Latin as well – proved to be increasingly popular in the seventeenth century. But as popular entertainment, this type of theatre, with an increasing emphasis on show and spectacle, on display rather than words – which to some extent held also true for vernacular authors like Van Nieuwelandt –, might very well have left Lummenaeus’ drama, at least where a less educated audience was concerned, far behind.\(^{38}\) And if the moral education of the ‘ordinary’ public was not a priority for our Ghent Benedictine, we should perhaps not be surprised that the plays’ morals prove difficult to find.

*The essence of Christian tragedy?*

A discussion on the relationship between God and man inevitably brings another issue into focus. Throughout this thesis, it has become clear that Lummenaeus’ Biblical tragedies touch upon a fundamental issue, on which many have shared their thoughts: the (im)possibility of Christian tragedy.\(^{39}\) Had not George Steiner already noted that ‘tragedy is alien to the Judaic sense of the world. (...) Jehova is just, even in His fury. Often the balance of retribution or reward seems fearfully awry, or the proceedings of God appear unendurably slow’?\(^{40}\) For Christianity, in history only three or four

\(^{34}\) Cf. above, p. 92.

\(^{35}\) The Jesuit *Absalon* tragedy (1625), of which a periocha has been preserved in Ghent (cf. above, p. 55nt163) could perhaps be such an adaptation.

\(^{36}\) Cf. above, pp. 129-132.

\(^{37}\) Cf. above, pp. 134-135.

\(^{38}\) For the increasing popularity of Jesuit drama, and the emphasis on spectacle, cf. Porteman and Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen*, 280; 302ff.

\(^{39}\) In addition to the works quoted below, Korsten (*Sovereignty as Inviolability*, 139-142) refers to several other works on the issue: Cox, *Between Earth and Heaven. Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, and the Meaning of Christian Tragedy*; Hunt, *The Paradox of Christian Tragedy*; and Bouchard, *Tragic Method and Tragic Theology: Evil in Contemporary Drama and Religious Thought*.

\(^{40}\) Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, 4-5.
events really matter: the creation, the fall, and the redemption of mankind through Christ’s birth and passion, and, eventually, His second coming. ‘The rest is history’.

But the fact is – as Lummenaeus, as one among many, has aptly demonstrated – that such tragedies were actually written and that they were based on material that Scripture has handed down through the ages. Especially from a Catholic point of view, a typological interpretation of Old Testament narrative would formally have prevented the classification of many of these narratives as ‘tragic’ in a classical sense of the word: if everything that happened, happened in the giant scheme of God’s Providence working towards the Redemption, how could anything be considered truly tragic? Without going into a full consideration of the highly complex discussions on Christian tragedy, it may enhance our understanding of early modern dramatists’ ideas on the subject by saying a word or two on Lummenaeus’ general approach in this respect, as implicitly demonstrated in the editions of Iephte and Carcer Babylonius discussed in this thesis.41

Interestingly, it has been argued that Jephthah’s daughter in Lummenaeus’ tragedy does not prefigure Christ’s sacrificial death.42 Strictly speaking, this is true. There is indeed no mention of Christ or any other direct marker in that direction in Lummenaeus’ play. But would it really have been possible not to have in mind Christ’s sacrificial death? In view of the exegetical history of Judges 11, sacrifice and redemption appear inseparably connected to both Jephthah and his daughter, and the seventeenth-century audience would have noted the descriptive similarities to Christ’s ascent of the mount of Olives and, above all, his sacrificial death. Then there is the Carcer Babylonius. A remarkable passage I have discussed in detail elsewhere in this thesis (cf. pp. 164-166) concerns the chorus’ desperate illusion of their imminent salvation by a Messiah, who stemmed from the ‘tree of Jesse’. But the Messiah – the allusion to Christ is clear – did not come; not yet, at least.

What do we make of such instances, then? Do they not weaken the tragic outlook of these tragedies? A solution to this problem has been proposed by Mueller, who asked the same question: ‘How is Christian tragedy possible if both the representation of salvation and of damnation [i.e. the just punishment of a wicked man] does not arouse the

41 When discussing such a broad theme as ‘Christian tragedy’, there are many other aspects that may be highlighted. For example, in the paper I delivered at the 10th congress of the International Association of Neolatin Studies (Uppsala, 2009), cf. above, p. 214, I have discussed Lummenaeus’ approach to the Stoic fatum, which is in many ways irreconcilable with Christian Providence and the notion of free will. It is on this aspect rather than on the question of Christian Providence, on which e.g. McCabe focused in his discussion of the tragic principles of Jesuit drama. Cf. McCabe, An Introduction to the Jesuit Theater, 144-156.

sympathetic pity that is a necessary feature of tragic response[43] violate fundamental conventions of tragedy? Mueller observed two approaches: the first being ‘to focus on the process rather than the outcome of damnation’; the second being to focus on ‘the distance that separates the sufferings of the here and now from the eventual achievement of salvation’. Mueller argues that Buchanan’s Jephthah-play can be considered the proto-type of this second approach, where the agonies of the here and now must be endured without the solace of a promised end. However, Shuger has observed the transformation of Buchanan’s daughter in a type of Christ, for the Christic resonances in her final speech and her grasp of her death as an ‘expiatory sacrifice’ make this transformation, in her view, unmistakable. With Lumenmaeus, in my view, it is safer to suppose that the transformation is – due to an extra-textual frame of reference – unavoidable rather than unmistakable. Thus, de facto both of Mueller’s suggestions are still exemplified by Lumenmaeus’ Iephte, where much more emphasis is placed on the process of Hyanthe’s suffering than on the outcome, or even the origin, of the tragic events, while the author strictly speaking refrains from inserting any typological markers. In Carcer Babylonius, the insertion of a Christic resonance is realized somewhat more specifically, as I have noted above. But the actual salvation – so the audience, familiar with the Biblical narrative, is aware – will be a long time coming. This way, a rather strong emphasis is placed specifically on the suffering of the here and now, instead of on the salvation of a distant future.

In Christianity, it has been argued, tragedy cannot be more than a transitional phase. Similarly, with regard to the literature of mediaeval monasticism, Burcht Pranger has asserted that ‘there is no denying that the course of history in its entirety is governed by divine providence. As such it moves with iron certitude toward a happy end. For the time being, however, it is mostly instability and chaos that reign.’ It is in this period of instability and chaos, this transitional phase, then, that the tragic events seem to find their place in the plays of Lumenmaeus. In my opinion, the Ghent Benedictine at least secured stylistic purity by not formally inserting the comforting promise of Redemption – as was not uncommon in similar

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44 Idem.
45 Mueller, _Children of Oedipus_, 154.
46 Shuger, _Renaissance Bible_, 148.
47 Bomhoff, _Vondels drama_, 26 (quoted by Korsten, _Sovereignty as Inviolability_, 141). Korsten ( _Sovereignty as Inviolability_, 141-142), following W.E. Tayler (‘Milton’s Samson’), suggests that tragedy in Vondel’s work exists in a sudden about-turn of matters. Such a sequence of events, however, is absent in Lumenmaeus’ plays.
literary treatments of the Jephthah-episode. The impressive display of human suffering and misery served this cause as well.

With regard to the famous Jephthah-tragedy of the German Jesuit Jacob Balde (Jephtias, 1654), Heidrun Führer has argued that the play is ‘ein theologisches Exempel, das wegen des tröstenden Charakters als Gnade und Botschaft des Heiligen Geistes ‘von oben’ Bestätigung erfährt’ (Führer, Studien zu Jacob Baldes Jephtias, 164); or Shuger’s remark with regard to Buchanan’s tragedy (cf. above). I would also like to recall the fact that Lummeneus, in an oration he delivered some years later, emphasized and praised the daughter’s virginity, something that he – at least in explicit terms! – passes over in silence in his tragedy. Cf. above, pp. 204-206.