

Johan Huizinga's Russia

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SYNOPSIS

This article deals with the changing views of Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (1872–1945) on such topics as Russian culture, 19th-century Russia, and the Soviet Union. While Huizinga did not count them among his core research interests (he never published an independent work on Russia or the Soviet Union), he remained preoccupied with these topics, particularly during the last phase of his life, in relation to his criticism of the declining forms of contemporary culture. Little has been made of the fact that Huizinga prepared a course on 19th-century Russia for students of history at the university of Groningen in 1914 (he taught the course in 1935/6 at Leiden). It was also in 1914 that he became interested in the idea of pan-Slavism in Russia and Central Europe. Huizinga's unpublished lectures on Russia and pan-Slavism demonstrate his exceptional knowledge of history, surpassing that of his academic contemporaries. The lectures also show Huizinga's critical attitude towards the political life of 19th-century Russia as well as the Soviet political experiment.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA / KEYWORDS

Johan Huizinga; Rusko v 19. století; panslavismus; obecná historie; kulturní historie / Johan Huizinga; Russia in the 19th century; pan-Slavism; general history; cultural history.

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In Nazi occupied Amsterdam, at the beginning of January 1941, Johan Huizinga (1872–1945) gave a lecture entitled *Over vormverandering der geschiedenis* ('On the changing form of history') to the members of the Dutch Royal Academy. In the lecture, Huizinga, a renowned professor of general history at Leiden University, formulated some general ideas on the issue of literary forms for writing on history, at the same time expressing his sceptical view on the possibility of grasping the historical image of the United States of America within the narrative schemes that structure our ideas about the past. It was not long before the text of Huizinga's lecture attracted international attention, thanks to the German translation by the author's younger Swiss colleague and friend, Werner Kaegi (1901–1979). Other translations



followed during World War II and the immediate post-war period.¹ With his comparison of historiography to the literary genres of epic and tragedy, the author of 'On the changing form of history' strikes one today as a forerunner of the metahistorical thinking of Hayden White (1973). The lecture also seems to indicate a possible narrative scheme for Huizinga's own great historic works, particularly *Autumntide of the Middle Ages* (1919). Huizinga's scepticism about the alleged 'formlessness' of the modern history of the United States of America, as Wessel E. Krul noted in 1990 (Krul 1990, p. 207), was in opposition to the historical picture of that country he had given in 1918 in his work *Mensch en menigte in Amerika. Vier essays over moderne beschavingsgeschiedenis* ('Man and the masses in America: four essays on the history of modern civilisation').

It is little discussed that, in the 1941 lecture, Huizinga dedicates a paragraph to Russia, a country whose global importance was already clearly recognizable on the horizon of historical events, gradually becoming comparable to that of the United States:

Now contrast [the French Revolution] with the Russian Revolution of 1917–18. I have no doubt that it would be possible to give a fascinating account of that event based in its details. But do you believe that anyone could produce an historical reconstruction of that event equalling that of the French Revolution, i.e., an image charged with such epic and dramatic power? Even a committed Marxist would not attempt such a thing. It is conceivable that something like an historical picture might be produced by adding a bit of social or national phraseology to the description of situations and events, so to speak, thereby giving them historical colour. It is not possible, however, to produce a real epic or drama in this way. [...] A history that can no longer be condensed [...] into tragedy has lost its shape (Huizinga 1948–1953, VII, p. 197–198).²

If we leave aside the question of what *real* tragedy and *real* epic meant for Huizinga, or if we do not consider the key issue underlying it — namely, Huizinga's understanding of *real* history (historiography) —, the passage quoted above presents us with two questions, or perhaps two sets of questions: one concerns Huizinga's attitude toward

1 Besides Kaegi's German translation (Huizinga 1942, p. 107–128), a Hungarian translation was made by Miklós Radnóti (Huizinga 1943a, p. 29–58); an abbreviated version of Huizinga's own English translation (Huizinga 1943b) was also published, as well as the post-war Italian translation by G. Chiaruttini (Huizinga 1946). See also: Lem 1998, p. 349.

2 'Stel nu daartegenover de Russische Revolutie van 1917–18. Ik twijfel er niet aan, of het zal mogelijk zijn, ook van die gebeurtenis een door zijn details boeiend relaas te geven. Maar geloof je, dat iemand in staat zou zijn, daarvan een historisch beeld op te bouwen, equivalent aan dat der Fransche Revolutie, d.w.z. een beeld, geladen met epische en dramatische kracht? De leerstellige marxist zelf zou waarschijnlijk zelfs de poging tot zoo iets versmaden. Het is denkbaar, dat er een schijn van een historische beeld zou ontstaan door aan de beschrijving van toestanden en gebeurtenissen wat sociale of nationale phraseologie toe te voegen, er om zoo te zeggen wat historisch rouge op te leggen. Daarmee echter wordt geen echte epiek of dramatiek geboren. [...] Een geschiedenis, die zich niet meer laat verichten [...] tot tragedie, heeft haar vorm verloren.'



Russia (the Soviet Union), and the other his knowledge of Russian history and the relevant historiographic literature.

Russian history had never been a subject of Huizinga's research. During his career as an academic scholar, culminating in his tenure as professor of history at universities in Groningen (1905–1914) and Leiden (1914–1942), Huizinga is known to have carried out research and published works dealing with Indian literature and culture, local and regional Dutch history, general Dutch history and cultural history, museology, medieval Western Europe, the Renaissance and early modern times, the history of the USA, theoretical issues of historiography, and the theory of games and their historic forms, in addition — occasionally — to contemporary Dutch art, and, in the final phase of his life, a series of critical studies on the state of European civilisation in the face of declining European democracies and rise of totalitarianism, particularly fascism. He never published anything on Russian history. Should we wish to investigate these questions further, we would find our inquiry limited by the scarcity of materials: a small number of notes scattered throughout Huizinga's published works (Huizinga 1948–1953) and correspondence. It will therefore be necessary to examine his unpublished writings, kept at the Special Collections Department of the University Library Leiden and available in digital form online since 2020.³

Huizinga probably first made his critical view of the October Revolution as a world-changing historical event publicly known on 13 December 1918 (Huizinga 1989, p. 244) in a letter to Jan Romein (1883–1962), who was his student, and who later taught as professor of history in Amsterdam. In the letter, Huizinga — a political liberal and committed advocate of Western civilisation — indicates his preference for the 'American solution'⁴ vis-à-vis social and global political issues brought about by modernity, 'despite, or even because of capitalism'⁵ (ibid.). He would hold this view until the end of his life. However, as a man open to and interested in new scholarly inquiries and schools of thought, Huizinga attended lectures on Marxism by Dutch astronomer and Marxist philosopher Anton Pannekoek (1873–1960) as early as autumn of 1917. Yet, Huizinga had little esteem for communism or the rise of Soviet Russia. In 1917, the events in Russia gave Huizinga various topics to discuss with his radical leftist friends, such as the poet Henriette Roland Holst (1869–1952) and her husband, the painter Richard Roland Holst (1868–1938) (cf. Huizinga, L. 1963, p. 96), or else with his student Jan Romein. Neither Henriette Roland Holst's admiration for Lenin or Trotsky, nor Romein's views on the socialist revolution of the Leiden ring *Vereeniging tot Studie van het Socialisme* (*Association for Study of Socialism*) (Tollebeek 1990, p. 264) seem to have had any impact on Huizinga's own views.

With his Dutch middleclass background and upbringing in a Baptist family, one moreover connected with the academic milieu in Groningen, Huizinga remained a lifelong political liberal. Like other academic elites and bourgeois of his generation, he tended towards cultural conservatism as he grew older. The cultural changes brought about by the new regime in Russia only confirmed his critical attitude to-

3 The collection of Johan Huizinga's works is fully available online: <https://huizinga-online.nl/> (last retrieved: 1.03.2021).

4 'Amerikaansche oplossing'.

5 'ondanks en zelfs dóór het kapitalisme'.



wards the Soviet political experiment. It can be said that from a certain point onward, Huizinga focused his interest on such phenomena that would confirm his opinion that Soviet Russia represented a declining civilisation. In the 1930s, for example, he regarded the systematic renaming of cities as a demonstration of cultural infantilism, or 'puerilism'. The growing cult of Lenin as leader of the October Revolution struck him similarly as an example of false heroisation. In 1943, in view of the build-up to war, Huizinga was forced to acknowledge the future *global political* significance of the Soviet Union. In his popular, cultural-critical publication *Geschonden wereld* ('Disfigured world'; written in 1943, published posthumously in 1945), he speaks unfavourably of the Soviet Union's role as one of 'the three greatest power units of all time'⁶ (Huizinga 1948–1953, VII, p. 598). According to Huizinga,

the name U.S.S.R. is trying to say too much [...]. It is almost an entire catechism. [...] It remains to be seen whether the principle of councils, which was expected to win in a number of countries, was such an original discovery, and whether it really works in Russia as a core factor of state and government. After all, throughout history, the principle of the community or municipium has been found everywhere as a much more fruitful and fundamental starting point for state formation than that of councils or cells (ibid.).⁷

Although Huizinga's antipathy to communism as a form of violent social and technological modernisation, and to Soviet Russia as a Marxist political dictatorship was crucial in determining his notion of unsound and amorphous political and social conditions, his complaint about the 'lack of form' was not limited to the October Revolution or the state in which it was carried out. In his late treatise *Geschonden wereld*, Huizinga raises criticisms of the 'lack of form' of Russian history during the second half of the 19th century. In accordance with Western European liberal historiography, Huizinga describes Russia as 'unpredictable'⁸ (ibid., p. 554) within the context of international politics after 1871, a period characterised by its 'tough and brutal nationalism with imperialistic tendencies'⁹ (ibid., p. 553). It was then a relief for the Europeans, who had been 'traditionally prejudiced against the spectre of tsarism'¹⁰ (ibid., p. 542), when at last, in 1905, 'distinct symptoms [...] of inner decline'¹¹ (ibid., p. 542–543) came to light in the absolutist tsarist regime. Although Huizinga does not comment on the Russian Revolution of 1905 or the fragile and imperfect parliamen-

6 'de drie grootste machtseenheden van alle tijden'.

7 'De naam U.R.S.S wil veel te veel zeggen [...]. Het is bijna een geheele catechismus. [...] Het blijve in het midden of het raden-beginsel, dat omstreeks 1919 in allerlei landen meende te gaan zegevieren, primo zulk een bijzondere vondst is geweest en secundo, of het werkelijk in Rusland als kernfactor van staat en regeering werkt. Men vindt door de gansche geschiedenis heen toch eigenlijk overal het beginsel van gemeente of *municipium* als een veel vruchtbaarder en wezenlijker uitgangspunt van staatvorming dan dat van raden of cellen.'

8 'dat onberekenbare Rusland'.

9 '[...] grof en brutaal nationalisme met imperialistische strekking'.

10 'men was zoo traditioneel preoccupeerd door een schrikbeeld van het tsarisme'.

11 'eerste symptomen van Ruslands inwendig verval'.



tary democracy that followed, it is evident that he perceived the subsequent events of 1917 as a fall into chaos which had already come to characterise Russia in the 19th century. He considered the subject of Russian history, the Russian nation, as representative of the 'Slavic type' and a 'puzzle'. Overall, he claimed, we have 'little accurate information on the importance of Russia and the rest of the Slavic community for today and for the future'¹² (*ibid.*, p. 588). It is possible that Huizinga held Russia responsible for the continually unsound character of civilisation in this part of the world and for the 'lack of form' of its history. Huizinga's classification of 'cultural types' seems to echo Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (*The Decline of the West*, 1918), which he had read some years after its publication. In particular, he seems to have been influenced by Spengler's description of the 'Russian soul lacking in will, its ancient symbol being an infinite plain' which 'strives to disappear and to resign itself to service in the horizontal fraternal world'¹³ (Spengler 2006, p. 394). Incidentally, this image of the 'Russian soul' corresponds to the older organic image of Russian culture advanced by Nikolay J. Danilevsky, ideologist of pan-Slavism and forerunner of the 'Euro-Asian' movement, whose work *Russia and Europe* (1869) was evidently known to Huizinga as early as 1914. We may also see here the influence of Jacob Burckhardt's *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* (*Reflections on History*, 1905), particularly the fourth part, in which Burckhardt compellingly argues that the main cause of historical crises can be found in the migration of nations. This argument had an enormous impact on Huizinga's interpretation of the formation of civilisations well before World War I, which he associates with the negative effects of technological and social modernisation.

But Huizinga's way to understanding Russian history did not consist simply in amassing and confirming antimodernist tendencies and other forms of cultural prejudice. Indeed his development, which began with an interest in the language and literature of Russia, ultimately led him to an attitude of political detachment.¹⁴ As a young man, Huizinga was attracted to the Russian language, and while enrolled as a philology student at Groningen, he spent his 1895–1896 winter term abroad at Leipzig University where he 'smelled the air of the East'¹⁵ (Kaegi 1947, p. 10). While continuing to pursue his Indo-Europeanist interests, Huizinga met with August Leskien (1840–1916), a professor of Slavic studies, who lent him a Russian textbook¹⁶ and helped him with Russian pronunciation, thanks to which 'Russian [...] was added to his other linguistic skills'¹⁷ (Kaegi 1947, p. 11). Huizinga, a polyglot scholar, would

12 'Slawisch type', 'een raadsel', 'wij weten veel te weinig nauwkeurig, wat Rusland en het overige Slawendom nu is en in de toekomst worden kan'.

13 'Die russische, willenlose Seele, deren Ursymbol die unendliche Ebene ist, sucht sich in der Brüderwelt, der horizontalen, dienend, namenlos, sich verlierend aufzugeben.'

14 Huizinga's intellectual coming to terms with Russia and communism is mentioned also by his biographer A. van der Lem, e.g. in relation to the Roland Holst couple (Lem 1993, p. 183–186); typological propinquity with Nikolay A. Berdyayev's cultural criticism is found in Huizinga's work by L. Hanssen (Hanssen 1996, p. 115–118).

15 '[...] witterte er die Luft des Ostens'.

16 This was most likely a text by either Pawlowsky (1853) or Ásbóth (1889).

17 '[...] das Russische [war — A. B.] zu seinen übrigen Sprachkenntnissen hinzugekommen'.



go on to work in Russian not only as a reader — that is, passively and with the help of a dictionary —, but as a moderately proficient speaker of the language, alongside English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Lithuanian, Arabic, and (later) Portuguese. He also worked in such classical languages as Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Sanskrit, as well as Old Irish, Old Norwegian, and Gothic, the basics of which he had acquired at the university of Groningen. His son Leonhard (1906–1980) would later recall his father's discussions at their Leiden house with Polish-British anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski (1884–1942), in which the conversation would alternate between Italian and Russian (Huizinga, L. 1963, p. 146). Huizinga also left behind several postcards from 1914 written partly in Russian (cf. Hinrichs 2005, p. 198) and addressed to his friend Nicolaas van Wijk (1880–1941), the first professor of Slavic studies in the Netherlands, who worked at Leiden University starting in 1913. However, Huizinga's active multilingual abilities were limited to English, French, and German. In his youth, Russian was important for him largely because he longed to read Russian literature, particularly Tolstoy, in the original. Huizinga's correspondence also reveals that in late autumn of 1900, prompted by the linguist and Huizinga's former grammar school teacher Jan te Winkel (1847–1927), he considered competing for a teaching post in Russian language at a business academy in Amsterdam. As he then wrote to Te Winkel, he would have been able to teach 'provisionally the principles' of Russian, and later 'after systematic ongoing study, even more'¹⁸ (Huizinga 1989, p. 39). However, at the beginning of December of the same year he gave up this plan and retained his secondary-school teaching post at Haarlem, believing that preparations to teach Russian would rob him of his independence and free time. It is evident however, that Huizinga was able to read fiction and Russian literature in the original as early as the turn of the century.

It is difficult to determine the exact extent of Huizinga's knowledge of Russian literature. It is clear, however, that by the time he completed his studies at Groningen he had attained an understanding comparable to other educated Dutch readers of the early 20th century, following the fashion that emerged in 1887 with the first translations in the Netherlands of Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy (by World War I, Tolstoy¹⁹ had become the most translated and widely read Russian author²⁰). After 1900 the first Dutch translations of Chekhov, Maxim Gorky, Leonid Andreyev, and Dmitry Merezhkovsky followed. However, the Dutch multilingual elite undoubtedly

18 '[...] voorloopig de beginselen te onderwijzen, en bij eenige doelmatig voortgezette studie iets meer'.

19 Gogol 1887; Dostojewsky 1887; Tolstoi 1887a; Tolstoi 1887b.

20 'De ontwikkelde mens kent Pierre Bezoechow, Lewin en zijn vrouw Kitty alsof hij dagelijks met hen verkeerde, en men kan aan bijna ieder jongmens vragen, wie hij liever tot vrouw zou hebben, Kitty of Dolly, zonder dat hij meer moeite met het antwoord hebben zal, dan als men twee dames uit zijn omgeving had genoemd: men bewondert niet alleen Tolstoj's werk, men kent het ook!' ('An educated person knows Pierre Bezuchov, Levin and his wife Kitty, as if they were familiar with them on a daily basis, and almost every young person can be asked if they would prefer to have Kitty or Dolly for a wife while he would not have any difficulty answering, as if one had just named two ladies of his acquaintance: Tolstoy's work is here both admired and well known!') (Wijk 1910, p. 521).

read Russian literature in German and French translation as well. In 1922 Jan Romein corresponded with Huizinga on the Russian satirist Mikhail J. Saltykov-Shchedrin (Huizinga 1989, p. 416–417), and in 1931 Huizinga praised Jef Suys's (1897–1956) doctoral thesis on the Russian philosopher Lev Shestov (cf. Hanssen 1996, p. 287) and his criticism of rationalism (Huizinga 1990, p. 608–612). Between 1915 and 1916, Huizinga edited articles on Russian literature by Nicolaas van Wijk for the renowned literary journal *De Gids* (van Wijk had been a more or less regular contributor since 1904). Almost certainly, Huizinga would have also been acquainted with the popular *Inleiding tot de Russische literatuurgeschiedenis* ('Introduction to the history of Russian literature') by translator and publicist Zadok Stokvis (1878–1947), a work first published in 1909 by Maas en Van Suchtelen as part of its 'Bibliotheek van Russische literatuur' series, which presented classic Russian authors of the 19th and 20th centuries. Later, during the interwar period, Huizinga followed the reviews by his distant cousin Menno ter Braak (1902–1940), a pioneer of literary Modernism and expert in Russian and Soviet avant-garde film. However, Huizinga was not interested in Soviet cinematography, disdaining film as an inferior art.

In the summer of 1914, as professor of history at Groningen University where he had been teaching since 1905, Huizinga began preparing a two-term course on 19th-century Russia that would be part of his weekly two-hour lectures on general history (these preparations required his proficiency in the Russian language). It is no accident that the idea came to him in 1914, a year Huizinga would later describe as his 'annus horribilis', not only because his wife Mary Vincentia-Schorer (1877–1914) died in July of that year, but because it was when signs of radical change first became apparent to him, as the trends that had defined the 19th century came to an end. The lectures were to focus on the period 1800–1914, starting with the decision by Tsar Paul I of Russia to join the international coalition against France and ending with the assassination in Sarajevo of Franz Ferdinand d'Este, heir to the Austrian throne, on 28 June 1914. In the end, the two-term course that Huizinga prepared over the rest of the summer was never delivered at Groningen, as he was unexpectedly invited to take up the post of professor of general history at Leiden University. It was not until much later, in 1935, that Huizinga 'dusted off' the course he had prepared some 21 years earlier and delivered it to his students at Leiden. The course, however, produced a by-product: a lecture on pan-Slavism which Huizinga gave to the *Historische Genootschap* ('Historic society') at Groningen on 28 October 1914, of which some brief notes made by the author have been preserved.²¹

When reconstructing Huizinga's opinions on 19th-century Russia at the time of the outbreak of World War I, it would be a good idea to take a closer look at this one-time lecture,²² of which little carried over into the courses he later gave his students. The

²¹ When reconstructing the notes to this lecture, as well as to the series on the 19th-century Russian history, I utilised the written sources found in Huizinga's archives kept in the Leiden University Library and generously provided by Dr. Anton van der Lem, the trustee of Huizinga's archives, in 2018. The archives have been accessible in digital form online since 2020 (cf. note 3).

²² Huizinga's notes for his lecture on pan-Slavism are kept in Johan Huizinga's digital archives under the reference numbers HUI 48:1 [13]a to HUI 48:1 [13]f.



notes on pan-Slavism that have been preserved testify to a deeper effort to understand the history of Eastern European ideas of the 19th century, which is otherwise not evident in Huizinga's published works. The envelope in which Huizinga kept his notes to the lecture is labelled 'Eigenlijk Pansl. en Čechendom' ('Actual pan-Slavism and Czechdom'), and its contents show a specific method of preparation. It comprises 38 paper strips, each one consisting in one to 21 lines, with abbreviated bibliographic references,²³ key words, and some more elaborate phrasing. The order of the lecture is impossible to reconstruct since the notes are not numbered,²⁴ but we know it was intended to be a sort of cursory outline of the pan-Slavic movement in Central-Eastern Europe, with a strong emphasis on Austria. Today, the notes reveal the author's knowledge of issues relating to the Czech and Slovak national revival that he would never return to in later work. They also deepen the context for Huizinga's reflections on 19th-century Russia.

Huizinga's lecture on pan-Slavism was probably based on a brief description of the linguistic and cultural situation in Galicia and Ukraine starting at the end of the 18th century (Jagič 1908, p. 18), and an outline of the reasons why Ukrainians and Poles had little interest in joining the pan-Slavic movement during the 19th century. While Ukraine experienced its 'Sturm und Drang period'²⁵ after the birth of the Ukrainian language, 'Poland took a more direct standpoint about its autonomous past. It had more considerable traditions than Czechia' and was therefore 'less open to the idea of pan-Slavism'.²⁶ The notes then go on to provide examples of historical and etymological constructions: 'Samo — Svatopluk — Břetislav — Ottokar — Marbod' and 'Břetislav — Pressburg — Brezalauspurc — Bratislava'. In reference to Ján Kollár's ideas, we find the note 'is not all this just deliberate camouflage? — he left the consequences to others',²⁷ followed by the formalised analogy: 'Kollár : Herder = Štúr : Hegel'. From other notes it can be assumed that Huizinga spoke on Jan Kollár, Ludovít Štúr, Russian Slavophiles, Russia's civilising mission (according to N. J. Danilevsky), pan-Slavic ideas concerning the pre-eminence of Russian literature, A. S. Pushkin as a Russian Goethe (according to Wesselovsky 1908, p. 59), folk poets, the influence of Romanticism 'on the entire Slavic nature and culture'²⁸, and Kollár's linguistic follies.²⁹ He includes a note on the linguistic situation in Bulgaria and the Balkans starting in the 10th century, and mentions such literary figures as Josef Dobrovský,

23 The resources on Huizinga's lecture that can be reliably reconstructed are mainly the following: Jagič 1908, Dzeduszycki 1884, Danilevskij 1871, and in general the volumes of *Zeitschrift für Osteuropäische Geschichte*.

24 However, we are able to determine in what order Huizinga made the notes, as the sheet with the notes were cut into strips only *after* the notes were written. The notes are kept in Huizinga's archives in the original order which we have followed.

25 'Sturm & Drangperiode'. Here Huizinga quotes Jagič 1908, p. 18.

26 'Polen stond veel directer bij zijn autonoom verleden, had veel wezenlijker tradities dan Boh. [...] — vandaar P. minder toegankelijk voor panslavisme'.

27 'is het alles niet opzettelijke bemanteling? — hij liet de gevolgtrekkingen aan anderen over'.

28 'de invl. v. d. romantiek op het heele Slaw. wezen en cultuur'.

29 'linguist. zotheden: Kollár'.

Václav Hanka, and Josef Jungmann. A note on František Palacký and Karel Havlíček characterises them as ‘not pro-Russian’.³⁰ He also quotes Palacký (second-hand and edited): ‘Had the Austrian imperial state not existed, we would have had to invent it for the sake of Europe and mankind’.³¹ He expresses views on Czech as the language of peasants, Havlíček’s relation to Germanness and Russian tsarism, and the fact that Havlíček ‘does not want to know anything about Kollár’s dreams’,³² as well as two statements attributed to Havlíček, one of which is likely quoted from Havlíček’s article *Slovan a Čech* (1846, taken second hand): ‘Russians, Poles, Czechs, and Illyrians do not make up one nation [...] to be good Slavs, we have to seek the goodness of our own nation first’.³³ Huizinga also outlines Leo Thun’s attitude towards Czechdom and the Czech-Slovak conflict (‘but Slovaks do not want to know anything about the Czech language’),³⁴ and mentions liturgical languages in the Slavic world as well as the role of the Old Slavic language. This is followed by a note concerning the impact of Romanticism on cultivating vernacular languages, and the extent to which Slovaks are able to naturally use the Czech language as a literary language (with reference to V. Jagič). Other notes cover a range of topics: Kollár’s work *Slávy dcera* (*The Daughter of Sláva*) and his conception of literary reciprocity; Václav Hanka, František Palacký, Kollár, and Pavel Jozef Šafařík (again); the events of 1848 in Prague; the second Slavic congress in Moscow in 1867; the Russian protectorate and its Polish boycott (according to O. Hötzsch); Russian involvement in the pan-Slavic movement between 1880–1890, its attenuation after the Russian-Japanese war (1904–1905), and the origin of neo-pan-Slavism; the situation of Slovenia and Serbia starting in the 18th century, the pan-Serbism of Vuk Karadžić, and the Serbian and Croatian languages; Illyrianism and Vienna’s attitude toward it. At the end of Huizinga’s notes we find the comment: ‘in Volhynia, 1823, the Association “United Slavs”. Statutes in Polish. First demonstration of pan-Slavic sentiment: much more the unification of all Slavs while preserving independence within the republican union’³⁵ — he highlights the utopian project of Slavic federation ‘Obščestvo sojedinnennych slavjan’ (‘Society of united Slavs’) founded in Novgorod — Volhynia in 1823 by the brothers Andrej and Peter Borisov, which undeniably points to Huizinga’s interest in an institutional basis for the idea of pan-Slavism.

In his course on 19th-century Russia, Huizinga used these free notes only marginally. In the final and clearly legible manuscript of the two-term lectures of 82 pages dating from the summer of 1914³⁶ there is no reference to the sources he used for his

30 ‘niet russ. gezind’.

31 ‘Als Oostenr. keizerstaat niet bestond, moest men hem in het belang v. Eur. & de menschheid uitvinden’.

32 ‘wil niets weten van Kollár’s droomen’.

33 ‘Russen, Polen, Čechen, Illyr. vormen niet één volk... om goede Slaven te zijn, moeten wij in de eerste plaats het welzijn onzer eigen natie zoeken’.

34 ‘maar reeds willen Slowaaken van Čechisch niet weten’.

35 ‘1823. In Volynie, Vereenigde Slaven’. statuten in het poolsch. eerste uiting van panslavisch gevoel: vereen. v. alle Sl. met behoud v. zelfstand. in republ. bond’.

36 In Johan Huizinga’s digital archives documents NL-0200050000_HUI_HUI-002-0-01-000_001 to NL-0200050000_HUI_HUI-002-0-01-000_087.



article on pan-Slavism. The manuscript comprises, among others, the list of secondary literature compiled in 1914, which was later amended and enlarged.

In his lectures on 19th-century Russia, Huizinga strictly adheres to a chronological sequence from 1800 to 1914 (never deviating from it), and approaches the history of 19th-century Russia — based on Western historical studies and Russian textbooks, as well as historical interpretations and specialised studies — mainly as *political history*. At the beginning of the course Huizinga makes a sociographic digression in the form of a survey of the ethnographic state of European Russia (p. 3): an overview of the nations and nationalities, social classes (stating that the third class was non-existent), and religions. He subsequently offers an image of Russia dominated by four aspects. *First*, he presents a detailed description of the evolving international political (diplomatic) relations and military confrontations between Russia, England, France, Prussia, and Austria, with consequences for the European North and West (mainly Poland, Finland, and the Baltic countries), the Near East, the Balkans (Greece and Bulgaria), the area of the Black Sea (Crimea and Turkey), the Middle East (Afghanistan, the Caucasus, etc.) and Far East (Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands). This aspect also includes the creation and disintegration of European alliances. From this perspective, Russia, as an active entity, is quite often eliminated. In the description of the first 15 years of the 19th century (before the Vienna Congress), Huizinga did not pay any attention either to the Napoleonic wars or to Napoleon's invasion of Russia as the key 'epic' event of the new Russian history. (He either assumed that his students had knowledge of the Napoleonic Wars or he reserved the space for free improvisation on this topic). *Second*, apart from international politics, Huizinga's discourse on Russia consists mainly in his personalised account of developing power relations within the empire (the sequence of Russian Tsars from Paul through Alexander I, Konstantin I and Nikolas I, Alexander II and III, and Nicholas II), with elaborate character descriptions of major political actors — Count Alexei A. Arakcheev in the first half of the century and prime minister Piotr A. Stolypin at its close —, and with tacit understanding of the role of the Russian Orthodox Church within Russia's home policy. *Third*, Huizinga follows the line of political and social reforms (the abolition of serfdom, constitutionalism, educational and agricultural reforms, and democratisation of the empire in 1905). And *fourth*, Huizinga makes subtle indications of pan-Slavism as a function of the various attempts to unite Slavs in a politically liberal federative form, starting with the 'Obščestvo sojedinnennyh slavjan' of 1823 and ending with the ideas of the philosopher and journalist Piotr B. Struve concerning the great (Slavic) Russia of 1908, with Karel Kramář's trip to Russia and the Prague Slavic congress in 1908.

Following the course of 19th-century Russian history along these four lines, Huizinga does not tend to reflect on the logical course of events, or their causes and historical consequences. His portrayal of the Russian 19th century as a historical entity is based on the chronological chain of political aspects and events. His notion of a 'lack of form' thus follows directly from his choice of perspectives. First, Russia's foreign policy following the Vienna Congress does not seem to follow any higher logic — shifting alliances reflect pure 'political situationism'. Second, the mentality of the tsarist court is conservative, and its reforms inevitably fail confronted with a sprawling and backward empire, so it is impossible to speak of a domestic political continu-



ity in the sense of progress. This is related to the sense of incoherence presented by the third line of Huizinga's lectures. Attempts to bring about reforms are unsystematic; the country is perceived as underdeveloped, with unfavourable comparisons of the economic and social conditions of 19th-century Russia to the European Middle Ages (this analogy appears on p. 3 and p. 9).³⁷ And fourth, pan-Slavism was never realised, remaining a chimerical and utopian idea.

Huizinga's portrayal of Russia takes a dramatic or tragic tone with regard to only two events. The first is his depiction of the struggle over succession to the throne after the death of Alexander I in 1825. In Huizinga's detailed and drama-laden interpretation, these events acquire the dimension of a royal tragedy revolving around the question of whether the country is capable of reform. This question would unfortunately become associated with the Decembrist uprising, after the suppression of which Tsar Nicholas eliminated part of the Russian military elite. The tensions between Constantine and Nicholas as possible successors to the throne are drily commented upon by the sceptic Huizinga as: 'no generous match at all'³⁸ (p. 16) — a tragedy, but one with open brutality and no pretence of idealism. From the political point of view, the developments of 1905, which Huizinga describes in their minutiae and over several pages, come across rather as a bourgeois tragedy revolving around the Constitution, the creation of the Duma, and concrete political reforms. The escalation of tensions in 1905 had been caused by pressure from the bottom (the mutiny on the battleship Potemkin, the fall of Port Arthur, debates in the daily press), culminating in the murder of the priest Georgy A. Gapon and assassination of the chief of the Tsarist police force Vyacheslav K. von Plehve in 1904. Again, Huizinga takes a sceptical attitude of the reform movements, noting in the margin 'all a copy of the W[est]'³⁹ (p. 66). By contrast, however, the portrayal of the Crimean War of 1853–1856, which Huizinga depicts in detail over several pages, completely lacks the dimension of human tragedy. Huizinga fails to mention the hundreds of thousands of victims, or the fact that the Crimean War introduced the first position trench warfare in the history of mankind.

In his lectures, Huizinga depicted what he knew from historical literature. He used older works as well as the latest studies in Friedrich Meinecke's *Historische Zeitschrift* ('History journal') and the recently founded *Zeitschrift für Osteuropäische Geschichte* ('Journal of Eastern European history'), which specialised on the Russian context. The way Huizinga worked with resources on the history of Russia deserves special attention. He used resources which were available in the university libraries at Groningen, and after 1914, at Leiden, where he would prepare his lectures on the history of the United States of America in 1917, and a year later, his book *Mensch en menigte in Amerika*. Huizinga probably updated the list of resources twice in different

37 'een vergelijking met ME W. Europa soc. en econ. voor Rusl. zeer ongunstig' ('comparison with Middle Ages in Western Europe soc. and econ. for Rus. very unfavourable'); 'vergelijking met vroege Me. in Europa voor Rusl. zeer ongunstig' ('comparison with Early Middle Ages in Europe for Rus. very unfavourable').

38 'volstrekt geen grootmoedigheidsstrijd'.

39 'alles copie van het W.'



periods. In the mid-1930s he evidently returned to his notes on pan-Slavism,⁴⁰ probably to 'dust off' his lectures on Russia. Apart from the older writings, the manuscript of the university course is dominated by German and Russian political and historical literature, alongside another Berlin expert on the history of Eastern Europe and Treitschke's disciple, Theodor Schiemann (Schiemann 1893–1895; Schiemann 1904). He later added the reference to the three-volume work by the liberal Russian historian Alexander A. Kornilov (Kornilov 1918). We also find references to several other works: Sergey F. Platonov's textbooks on Russian history (Platonov 1909 and Platonov 1889), the chapters on Russia in the multivolume work *Cambridge Modern History*, and *The Expansion of Russia* (1905) by British traveller and Oriental scholar Francis Henry Skrine. However, it is equally necessary to mention Huizinga's correspondence of September 1914 with Nicolaas van Wijk, the Leiden Slavic scholar mentioned above, who recommended a number of books to Huizinga including *The History of Russian Social Ideas* (1907) by philosopher and critic Razumnik Ivanov-Razumnik and the first volume of *Russland und Europa. Studien über die geistigen Strömungen in Russland* ('Russia and Europe: Studies on intellectual trends in Russia') by the Czech philosopher and first president of Czechoslovakia T. G. Masaryk,⁴¹ published in Jena in 1913. The two works that focused primarily on the history of ideas were not used by Huizinga but he made use of Van Wijk's reference to the cultural-historical work by liberal Russian historian Pavel N. Milyukov (Miliukov 1909).

Considering Huizinga's cultural-historical interests and the fact that he only gave his course on 19th-century Russia (with minor changes) during the 1935–1936 academic year at Leiden, there is some question about what might have been missing in his historical interpretation. In addition to the ideological and economic⁴² aspects, the lecture lacked information on social movements, political parties,⁴³ and Russian emigration⁴⁴, not to mention developments in literature and the fine arts that were so important to Huizinga as author of *Autumntide of the Middle Ages*, which he was working on at that time. In the entire series of lectures on Russia, Huizinga includes only two discrete and superficial references to works of fiction: Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (p. 8) and *Anna Karenina* (p. 50). This apparent omission is even more striking in contradistinction to his abundant observations on art and literature in *Autumntide*, and to his analyses of fiction and poetry in 'Man and the masses in America'. While

40 It is evident by virtue of the name 'Locher', which appears twice on the notes to his lectures on pan-Slavism alongside his comments on Kollár's ideas. The name refers to the doctoral thesis of Huizinga's disciple, Theodor Jakob Gottlieb Locher (1900–1970); cf. Locher 1931.

41 On Masaryk's *Russia and Europe* N. van Wijk wrote to Huizinga: 'het boek over Russland van dat moment' ('at present that book on Russia'). The letter is kept in Huizinga's archives (available online). See also Hinrichs 2005, p. 198.

42 In connection with the technological modernisation of Russia in the 19th century, Huizinga paid more attention to railways (p. 46, 61, 71, 72, 76). It is thus known what importance Huizinga attributed to railways transport on the mental map of Europe. Cf. *The Netherlands as Mediator between Western and Central Europe* in Huizinga 1968, p. 138–157.

43 The lectures include only one mention of the Social Democratic party (p. 67).

44 Huizinga mentions just once (p. 41) Belinsky, Gercen, and the *Kolokol* magazine.



he frequently used slides in his lectures and organised exhibitions to accompany his courses, Huizinga found little significance in the art and literature — or visual culture more generally — of 19th-century Russia.⁴⁵

The last question concerns additions to the original 1914 lectures made by Huizinga in 1935–1936. Huizinga's handwriting remained unchanged for years, so it is impossible to claim with certainty that the last pages of the manuscript⁴⁶ came into existence as late as 1935,⁴⁷ and it is only possible to positively identify the author's references to literature published after 1914 (Pokrovskij 1923; Stählin 1935; Milukov — Seignobos — Eisenmann 1932–1933), along with several minor commentaries on the original lecture texts. We know, however, that his comparison of military colonies set up in the early 19th century (by war minister Alexey A. Arakcheev) with 'Soviet methods'⁴⁸ (p. 4) originates in the mid-1930s, in the text that appears on a special sheet of paper at the very beginning of his lectures, where we read the following melancholy note on 19th-century Russian history from the perspective of the 1930s: 'Old cows [rubbish] — or has it changed less than it seemed? Russia as the political unity within international history — and the Russian nation within. Does this [nation] have a history in the 19th century? Liberation? Or just an idea? All preparation for 1917?'⁴⁹ Huizinga seems to have given up trying to answer these questions. After the revolution of 1917, 19th-century Russia no longer appeared to hold the possibility of anything new. He regarded it tacitly as a closed epoch, without teleological demands and with few attempts to adjust his understanding. Is it possible that Huizinga had simply reprised the gesture from *Autumntide*: a coming to terms with the epoch as the end of *the old* without any hope of finding there the *germs of a new era*?

In any case, we may point out how, of the abundant material on Russian history he had studied in the summer of 1914, Huizinga wove one important thread into *Autumntide of the Middle Ages* — a single sentence in the second chapter that draws a comparison between medieval court etiquette and pre-Romanov Russia, where the courtier's struggle concerning the order of precedence vis-à-vis the throne had become a permanent aspect of civil service: 'That form is yet unknown in medieval Western countries but the jealousy of precedence also holds a firm position here' (Huizinga

45 Huizinga was not interested in Russian art at all. It is significant that in his late book *In de schaduwen van morgen* ('In the shadow of tomorrow', 1936) he mentions only two Russian painters: his contemporaries Wassily Kandinsky and Marc Chagall. However, they represent for him the loss of reality through the abandonment of the object (Kandinsky) and the victory of mythology and philosophical voluntarism over rationality (Chagall). Cf. Huizinga 1948–1953, VII, p. 405, 407.

46 From p. 73 up to p. 82.

47 It is possible, however, that one minor graphology finding could prove (indirectly) that in his manuscript of 1914 the author consistently wrote the lowercase 't' with a macron, while in the last pages of the lecture the letter occurs occasionally without it.

48 'lijkt op sowjet-methoden' ('it resembles the Soviet methods').

49 'oude koeien? — of is er minder veranderd dan het lijkt? Rusl. als pol. eenheid in de intern. gesch. — en de Russ. natie inwendig. heeft deze in XIX. een gesch. de bevrijding? of enkel de gedachte? alles voorbereiding op 1917?'



1948–1953, III, p. 49; Huizinga 2020, p. 58).⁵⁰ Even when comparing it to the contemporary West, Huizinga looks rather unfavourably on late medieval Russia. The crucial thing in the case of Huizinga, however, was that late medieval Russia exhibited certain ‘forms’ that seemed to have disappeared in subsequent Russian history, but only because he was not willing to accept the new forms. They had all arisen from the ‘formlessness’ of 19th-century Russian history.

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⁵⁰ ‘In het oude Russische rijk vóór de Romanov’s had zich de strijd om den voorrang bij den troon ontwikkeld tot een vast departement van den staatsdienst. Dien vorm kennen de westersche staten der Middeleeuwen niet, maar ook hier neemt toch de naijver om den voorrang een groote plaats in’ (‘In the old Russian Empire, before the Romanovs, the struggle for precedence before the throne had developed into a permanent department of the civil service. That form is unknown in the western medieval states, but here, too, jealousy of precedence looms large all the same’).



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