

13. Postscript

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The reader of this volume may not have the impression that nowadays, nearly twenty years after Huizinga's death, a consensus about his work, his ideas and his place in the history of historiography has been reached. On the contrary, he will be able to see more clearly than ever in how many respects and on how many levels present-day readers of Huizinga's oeuvre vary in their interpretations of its precise meaning. If the papers collected here may be considered representative of expert opinion, it is obvious that the value of Huizinga's writings is beyond dispute. But whether Huizinga was a conservative or a liberal, a deeply religious man with mystical proclivities or a thinker of Erasmian tendency, profoundly sympathetic to humanist rationality; whether as an historian he was an innovator or a man who in the great methodological debate of the fin-de siècle between 'individualistic' and 'collectivistic', history opted for the old-fashioned and the traditional; whether he was pessimistic about the future of civilization or, with many reservations, fundamentally an optimist; whether he was a maladjusted man, an alien in the society and culture in which he had to spend his life, or a commentator endowed with such perspicacity that he was able to analyse his own times with astonishing precision - all these questions have been left unresolved. Apparently the debate about Huizinga has not yet been concluded and the uncertainties about his intentions and his position, which have accompanied his publications from the start, still remain.

Indeed, it is easy to recognize some of our hesitations even in the reviews of his first publications. In 1905 Albert Verwey, a leading Dutch poet and publicist, wrote a short note on the inaugural lecture Huizinga delivered that year in Groningen. He welcomed the lecture because it showed that the young professor was a good representative of the new direction in which Verwey himself was helping to guide modern culture. Huizinga, writes Verwey, is 'a psychologist, an aesthetist and an artist, a disciple of the movement of the 1890s'.¹ In 1919 a well-informed commentator declared in *De Socialistische Gids* that Huizinga's *Man and the Masses in America* (1918) was of particular interest to socialists because it constituted 'an example of applied historical materialism'.² At the same time, as Hugenholtz shows,³ *The*

1. *De Beweging*, I, iv (1905) 391.

2. H. A. Leenmans in *De Socialistische Gids*, IV (1919) 873.

3. *Supra*, 238-9.

Waning of the Middle Ages was regarded by the Dutch historians of that period as old-fashioned.

Are our hesitant reactions due to any contradictions in the work itself? It is easy enough to answer such a question in the affirmative. Any reader of Huizinga knows that he was a versatile man with many different faces, able to transform his views, or any rate the form of his views, according to the function he gave them in a particular situation. Even if his basic predilections and presumptions remained largely unaltered, the strong polemic element in his nature and his work obliged him to take various superficially somewhat contradictory positions in direct relation to the men or the phenomena he happened to be criticizing. Moreover, apart from these obvious contradictions, which are not surprising and are perhaps of relatively little importance in such a long career, there is, in the opinion of some commentators, another quality in Huizinga's work that causes difficulties. Gombrich⁴ has indicated that Huizinga's interest in the antithesis of play and seriousness dates back to his student years and inspired him throughout his life. This was of course not merely an intellectual problem to be solved or at any rate analysed by means of scholarly research. Huizinga himself, so it seems, liked to move along the border between the two spheres which, he said, our civilization distinguishes more deliberately than older cultures. Thus it is perhaps not always possible to determine whether his own pronouncements can be fitted into the pedantic categories of seriousness and non-seriousness. We all know that Huizinga won world-wide fame as the historian and diagnostician of cultural decline. Was he happy in that self-imposed role? Need we doubt that he was utterly serious in the 1930s when he was writing *In the Shadow of Tomorrow* or *Homo ludens*? I am totally sure in my own mind that this is not to be doubted. Yet in 1894, when he was 21, a young man well-read in contemporary literature and an admirer of J.-K. Huysmans who had declared that for three centuries 'Le monde n'a fait que déchoir', he organized a masquerade in Groningen. At the banquet which presumably formed part of the festivities Huizinga made a speech in which he is reported as saying that the masquerade as a genre showed such marked symptoms of decline that the present performance might well turn out to be the last one. 'And yet', he said, according to this report, 'we are proud, gentlemen, to be the last representatives of a good tradition that is now dying'.⁵ It is easy enough to picture the scene: a banquet in a thoroughly provincial town, attended by mockingly pompous students in rather cheap and ill-fitting evening dress, with Huizinga in the role of the proud decadent solemnly and in elegant language, pronounced in his hard northern accent, deploring the death of pageantry.

4. *Supra*, 278.

5. Quoted in Y. Botke and W. R. H. Koops, *Johan Huizinga 1872-1945. Tentoonstelling ter gelegenheid van de Johan Huizinga-Herdenking* (Groningen, 1972) 12: 'En toch zijn wij er trotsch op, mijne heeren, de dragers, de laatste, te zijn van een goed ding dat uitsterft'.

Undoubtedly many such speeches were made by young men in the 1890s and later, but did any student ever trace out in the few lines of a playful and semi-ironic speech the themes to whose examination he was to devote a lifetime of absorbed and deeply serious study? Where does in Huizinga's work play begin or end?

Even Huizinga's style was shaped in various ways according to the demands of his subject. Jansonius recognizes in his work two or three different styles which Huizinga was able to write simultaneously.⁶ *Man and the Masses in America* (1918) was written with another pen than was *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (1919) or *Erasmus* (1924). This example alone shows that Huizinga's pluriformity is not to be explained as the result of a normal process of development and ageing. Huizinga's views and means of expression undoubtedly changed in the fifty years of his career as a writer; there is nothing strange in the fact that, for instance, his religion seems to have assumed different forms in the course of the years and was in the 1930s expressed in ways substantially different from his earlier pronouncements. What is confusing, however, is that Huizinga gives the impression of being various personalities at the same time; man of letters, art critic, immensely accurate scholar, philologist, historian, philosopher of culture, a somewhat solemn and withdrawn professor and a playful mocker, an innovator and a conservative, a rationalist and a mystic. But the intellectual and spiritual poise which he achieved in his late twenties was never, as far as we know, disturbed by the diversity of his nature; there is nothing in his prose which would warrant a view of him as a man disquieted by inner tensions.

In a most enlightening essay (1954) our contributor J. Kamerbeek⁷ assessed the extent to which Huizinga's view of the world and the pattern of his thought were determined by the antinomies defined by Dutch men of letters, artists and essayists in the 1890s as the framework within which they wanted to pursue their passionate discussions and to reach their tentative conclusions: reason versus passion or mysticism, form versus content, individual versus community, art versus society. Weintraub⁸ wrote in his perceptive and learned chapter on Huizinga in *Visions of Culture* that the Dutch historian 'was deeply convinced that human thinking vacillates between antinomies, that is, that man is constantly forced to admit the validity of seemingly opposite points of view'. Vermeulen, too, catalogued a series of contrasts which according to him were central in Huizinga's thought: aristocracy versus democracy, rationality versus intuition, analysis versus synthesis, 'nominalism' versus 'realism'.⁹ These quotations, which could be easily multiplied, show that accor-

6. *Supra*, 195ff.

7. J. Kamerbeek Jr., 'Huizinga en de Beweging van Tachtig', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, LXVII (1954) 145-64.

8. Karl J. Weintraub, *Visions of Culture* (Chicago, 1966) 208-46.

9. E. E. G. Vermeulen, *Huizinga over de wetenschap der geschiedenis* (Arnhem, 1956) 36-54.

ding to a large number of experts Huizinga (I am choosing my words very cautiously) sought to bring order into his perception of the world by organizing his interpretation round a series of antinomies. It was obviously not his purpose logically to reconcile or sublimate these contrasts; there is no trace of a dialectical process in his method. Some authors, however, think that Huizinga did succeed in reconciling or overcoming the contrasts thanks to his own creativity. Indeed, they tend to interpret the antinomies, which Huizinga perceived in life and which he used to make life comprehensible, as inner contrasts or conflicts and they suggest that these tensions can be reduced to a common denominator, the fundamental antithesis in Huizinga's nature being the conflict between his artistic genius and his rational scholarship. In their view Huizinga succeeded in establishing a balance between the two extremes of his possibilities and this harmony, rarely achieved by any historian, explains the irresistible charm of his work.¹⁰

But is it indeed correct to assume that the antinomies, which apparently constituted for Huizinga the most convenient forms to order the chaotic world he perceived, represented fundamental inner conflicts that in some way or another he had to solve or to reconcile? It is not my intention to contradict such a cloud of distinguished witnesses and it would be arrogant to try to sound the depths of such a complicated man and such a complicated achievement. Perhaps, however, it is useful once again to draw attention to a number of well-known passages in Huizinga's writings to which some of the preceding papers refer only in passing but which may be of importance since they do not relate merely to the form of Huizinga's historical thinking but to the source of his historical inspiration. The first passage has been quoted various times in the present volume. In his elegant autobiographical sketch, written in 1943, Huizinga looks back to his years as a schoolboy and a student. He tells us that until his late twenties he remained an incorrigible day-dreamer and his intense relation to history he defines as 'a *hantise*, an obsession, a dream' rather than a solid, normal, scholarly interest. (I, 29) In 1920 - one year after the publication of his *Waning of the Middle Ages*-he included in an article on the function of a historical museum some paragraphs describing the sensation which the observer may feel when he is brought into direct contact with concrete historical reality. This sensation, which may be inspired by some fortuitous historical detail, a print or an old legal document, is, he says, not an aesthetic sensation but it is by no means of inferior quality. Such

a feeling of immediate contact with the past is a sensation as deep as the purest enjoyment of art; it is an almost ecstatic sensation of no longer being myself, of overflowing into the world around me, of touching the essence of things, of through history experiencing the truth. (II, 566)

10. *Ibidem*, 65-8. Vermeulen himself considers this harmony far from perfect.

Obviously Huizinga did not expect his reader to grasp the meaning of a sensation described in such classic mystical terms. At any rate he added an extraordinary passage in which he compared it with a sensation of a similar nature but apparently more common and widespread:

You are walking through a street and there is a barrel-organ playing; and when you approach you feel suddenly a whiff of recognition blowing through your mind as if for one moment you were understanding things which normally remain hidden under the veils of life. You would be ashamed to explain this as delight in music; it is a pathos, a moment's intoxication and you all know it, for it is a theme used in a thousand sonnets. (*Ibidem*)

In the late 1920s Huizinga developed this more soberly in his essay 'The Task of Cultural History'. Here he writes:

There is in our historical consciousness an element of great importance that is best defined by the term historical sensation. One might also call it historical contact. Historical imagination would be too comprehensive and historical vision too definite ... This contact with the past, a contact which it is impossible to determine or analyse completely, is like going into another sphere; it is one of the many ways given to man to reach beyond himself, to experience truth. The object of this feeling is not people as individuals nor human life or human thoughts. It is hardly an image which our mind forms or experiences. If it takes on a form at all this remains composite and vague: an *Ahnung* of streets, houses, fields as well as sounds and colours or people moving or being moved. There is in this manner of contact with the past the absolute conviction of reality and truth ... The historical sensation is not the sensation of living the past again but of understanding the world as one does when listening to music. (VII, 71)

I find it difficult to understand what exactly Huizinga was trying to describe in these passages. What he calls historical sensation is by no means equivalent to a sudden, illuminating insight or to an exceptional inspiration. On the contrary, in another passage written in 1935 he states that this is a kind of experience one undergoes almost daily. (VII, 166) It seems to him to be suprarational and to possess significance of a high order. Indeed the words used by him to define it are, as my quotations show, mystic. We shall have to accept that for Huizinga 'the essential moment of all historical knowledge' is suprarational and supraindividual. (*Ibidem*) The historian's personality expands into the past and in this process extends beyond its own limitations. Of course this sensation is not clear and definite enough to be translated into an historical interpretation. You cannot and you should not write history on the basis of such a mystic feeling. But by an historian it is felt almost daily as an experience which lifts him into a reality far more comprehensive than his own.

It is beyond the scope of a postscript to explore the implications of this. Perhaps, however, it is useful to emphasize that the description of the historical sensation

never takes the form of an apology for subjectivity. Huizinga dreaded and despised subjectivism as one of the most dangerous elements in cultural decline. For him the historical sensation represented a fundamental quality of the human mind enabling it to surpass its own subjectivity and to reach a level of understanding where subject and object are undivided. Another essay would be needed to investigate whether the historical sensation is more or less equivalent with the *Ahnung* about which the German historians studied by Oestreich in relation to Huizinga's inaugural lecture¹¹ wrote in an endeavour to vindicate the value of historicism in the tradition of Ranke. Ranke wanted to exclude his personality from the exalting drama he described; his pronouncement about the 'Universaliteit des Mitgeföhls' being necessary for an historian was quoted by Huizinga with obvious approval. (VII, 21) Yet it seems to me that there is, in spite of Huizinga's professed sympathy with historicism, (cf. VII, 152 and 190)¹² a world of difference between the point of departure of the Ranke school and that of Huizinga. Huizinga himself was aware of the necessity to make a distinction between the process of 'Nacherleben' or 'Nachfühlen' (re-experiencing and re-feeling the past) which Windelband, Rickert and others had indicated as the true method of historical research, and his own historical sensation, but he was perhaps not sufficiently interested in the matter to expand his rather short notes about the subject. (VII, 69-72) My impression is that Huizinga intended to define the source of his profound and total certainty, whereas 'Nacherleben' and 'Nachfühlen' are terms indicating the cautious, respectful approach of historians towards a past which they attempted to re-experience in all its majesty. There is in the historicism of the Ranke school something tentative and aesthetic - which Huizinga explicitly declared unacceptable as epithets adequate to define what he called the historical sensation. Moreover, Huizinga never prostrated himself before the glory of the past in the manner in which Ranke did. His work does not suggest that all history as such is beautiful and admirable and that the historian performs the priestly function of transmitting to the reader God's message revealed in history.

The description or analysis of the historical sensation is not adequate enough to allow Huizinga to generalize it into a historical theory. It is essentially an attempt to indicate the highly personal reaction of a sensitive, passionate and creative man whose daily work was the study of history. But if this sensation is indeed no more than an individual experience and if its description is lyrical rather than analytical,

11. *Supra*, 143ff.

12. Huizinga used the term historicism in a broad and vague sense. Obviously the 'problem of historicism' which in Germany was discussed so extensively and with such a painful introspection did not constitute a real problem at all for the Dutch historian. Huizinga quoted Troeltsch's *Der Historismus* but I have found no references to F. Meinecke's *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (1936).

it would still seem to be essential in explaining the most personal elements in Huizinga's historical writing and determining the very nature of his originality.

I shall try to develop this somewhat without repeating what is said in the preceding papers. What strikes the present-day reader of Huizinga's work is the boldness both of his historical interpretations and of his way of putting them forward. Huizinga gives a distinct impression of self-confidence. Of course, he is far from dogmatic. He has no system or doctrine to defend and often enough he pleads for caution and agnosticism in relation to historical problems. Yet his views are clear-cut and often challenging. They were so at the outset of his career as well as at the end. This is something I should like to emphasize. It would seem that in the Netherlands a view of the deficiencies in Huizinga's thought is still being circulated which is perhaps important enough to discuss briefly here. In the early 1930s Huizinga was bitterly attacked from two sides. Menno ter Braak, a trained historian as well as a young literary critic, and P. N. van Eyck, a poet in his early forties - both men of great talent and broad erudition - felt deeply irritated and considerably disappointed by Huizinga's volume of articles published in 1929 under the title *Cultuur-historische Verkenningen* (Explorations in Cultural History) in which they did not recognize the artistic talent and the creative imagination of the author of *The Waning of the Middle Ages*. In a laborious essay¹³ Van Eyck demonstrated that Huizinga was a failure both as a philosopher and as a man of letters. Ter Braak's essay¹⁴ is incomparably more readable. It is a witty and lyrical exercise and makes some interesting points. But reconsidered to-day, it turns out to be almost totally misdirected. Huizinga appears here as an immensely cautious scholar who has decided to play safe, to forsake the imagination and generally to refuse to take sides in the vital discussions of that age. Huizinga is described as 'by birth a cautious historian in the spirit of Ranke', longing to restore historical scholarship in its traditional form. Ter Braak's whole argumentation was the protest of a youthful artistic temperament against an author whose taste made him sceptical about some of the contemporary literary tendencies in historical writing. Another attack came from Jan Romein, then a still orthodox marxist historian in his late thirties, who had been Huizinga's student. His essay¹⁵ is solid, to the point and certainly not unsympathetic. His conclusion was not fundamentally different from that of Van Eyck and Ter Braak. Romein emphasized Huizinga's caution, his Erasmian spirit - with Erasmus in the role of the intellectual who did not take sides -, his withdrawal into a clair-obscur. It is thus obvious that some of the best representatives of

13. *Leiding*, I, v (1930) 203-22.

14. 'Huizinga voor den afgrond', *Man tegen Man* (Brussels, 1931) 103-30.

15. Originally published in 1931; reprinted in J. Romein, *Het onvoltooid verleden* (2nd ed., Amsterdam, 1948) 73-107.

the Dutch world of letters in the early 1930s no longer accepted Huizinga as an author who expressed their own ambitions, aspirations and views of life.

This would be no more than an episode in Dutch cultural history were it not that Pieter Geyl decided in 1961 to use these articles in his essay on 'Huizinga as Accuser of his Age', reprinted in an English version in 1963.¹⁶ Although Geyl's emphasis was different and his admiration for Huizinga's work genuine, it is still the image of Huizinga as depicted in the polemical articles of 1930 and 1931 which re-appears in this long essay. This is somewhat disappointing. After all, the critics of 1930 could not see in what direction Huizinga was going to develop, whereas Geyl had the complete works before him and indeed concentrated on Huizinga's writings of the 1930s. Did these then confirm the sad predictions of Van Eyck, Ter Braak and Romein? Of course not. Whatever one may think of Huizinga's late production, it is not the work of a man who refuses to take sides and withdraws into a clair-obscur. On the contrary, it shows Huizinga at his most combative and provocative. Of course Geyl knew this well enough and said it clearly and emphatically. Yet he did not integrate it into his picture of Huizinga's development and allowed himself to interpret this development fundamentally as a decline leading finally to *Homo ludens*, criticized by Geyl as 'a brilliant but wrong-headed improvization'; as an error 'dating from that last period when the obsession with decline and ruin and the rancour against his own time had taken complete control over his mind'.¹⁷ Thus Geyl's criticism constitutes a prolongation of the attacks levelled against Huizinga in 1930 and 1931 when he was depicted as a cautious, aristocratic, uninspiring man, unclear about his definitions, undecided about the fundamental issues of life, a voice from the past, no leader, no fighter, no thinker. What particularly aroused Geyl's irritation was Huizinga's plea for greater sobriety and simplicity, for ascetism, for a renunciation of the supernous and meaningless elements with which life had come to be encumbered.¹⁸ Geyl did not recall Huizinga's nostalgic complaint in 1943 about the loss of the landscape, the violation of nature by man's blind technology. Yet what in 1961 seemed desperately conservative to Geyl has now become familiar to us in the form of sermons delivered daily by young progressives.

My argument so far has dealt with two aspects of Huizinga's approach to history. There is his personal experience of immediate suprarational contact with the past on the one hand, there is on the other hand the boldness of his interpretations and the firmness with which he puts them forward. Is there a connection between these two elements? This is difficult to prove but it is not unlikely. If a man regularly, almost daily, has the impression of understanding the truth, as Huizinga told us he did, he should be able, given a certain talent for putting his ideas into words, to

16. P. Geyl, *Encounters in History* (London, 1963) 188-237.

17. *Ibidem*, 235-6.

18. *Ibidem*, 194.

formulate clear, firm, bold assertions. This indeed Huizinga was able to do. One should not be led by the incomparable elegance and subtlety of Huizinga's style to misjudge the character of his views: these are indeed assertive and coherent. In all his major works Huizinga puts forward a thesis which he develops in a closely-knit, though often complicated, argumentation and an apparently carefully chosen rhythm. His critics have often indicated contradictions and paradoxes in his work - and why should one deny that there may be many? His individual works, however, do not show such uncertainties. Within their own compass they all form a coherent unity in which the subject-matter is selected and interpreted in such a way that the author is able to present a uniform picture and a uniform thesis. These pictures or theses are not themselves aspects of the truth which Huizinga felt he experienced through his historical sensation. Yet they are undoubtedly connected with this feeling of identification with a lost world and to this they owe their firmness. In other and more sober words, Huizinga who knew the importance of hypotheses in scholarly research perfectly well, himself, it appears, only rarely had use for them. His major works are not based on hypotheses, checked, rejected, reworded and reworked, but on theses, visions, elucidated, enlarged, commented upon rather than demonstrated.

Underlying Huizinga's awareness of life's antinomies and his scepticism towards attempts to reconcile these through an ambitious philosophy or synthesis, was his absolute certainty that man is capable of grasping the meaning of life and of history by mystic or religious experience.¹⁹ If future historians try once again to determine his place in intellectual history they may judge it appropriate to invoke the names of Bergson²⁰ and of the two historians who were clearly influenced by Bergson: Spengler and Toynbee, not with intent to suggest that Huizinga adopted a specific philosophy and anticipated or shared Spengler's or Toynbee's ambitions but merely to state that he belonged to the particular intellectual climate in which such philosophies and such ambitions could grow.

In the history of Dutch civilization it was what Thys has called 'the movement of the nineties' which was the main source of inspiration for the young Huizinga.²¹ And, I think, for Huizinga not only as a young man. To some extent he remained loyal to the ideas and aspirations prevailing in his youth and, as has been said before, to the antithetical mode of perceiving, and thinking about life fashionable in those circles. Although Huizinga's intellectual versatility was astonishing even in his last period, he never endeavoured to dissociate himself completely from the preoccupations of the 1890s. There are in his work some constant factors and themes that can easily be traced back to the glorious last decade of the nineteenth

19. The psychiatrist C. T. van Valkenburg underlined the significance of this element in the thought of his intimate friend: *J. Huizinga. Zijn leven en persoonlijkheid* (Amsterdam, 1946) 58-61.

20. Margolin (*supra*, 262) suggests that in his *Erasmus* Huizinga adopted 'peut-être à son insu la méthode bergsonienne de l'intuition'.

21. *Supra*, 171ff.

century when Dutch culture reached heights perhaps never since surpassed. It may be appropriate to close this postscript and this volume (a volume designed not only as a tribute to Huizinga's memory but also as an attempt to have the value of his work critically assessed by specialists from different nations) with some short notes on the suprarational element in Huizinga's patriotism.

There is in modern Dutch history no period when national feeling was stronger and more self-confident than in the decades immediately before the outbreak of the First World War. In Dutch history explosions of national or nationalistic enthusiasm are relatively rare and the outburst of the 1880s and 1890s is thus in various respects remarkable. There are a number of causes which may help explain it. From the 1890s onward, the Dutch economy grew fast and regularly and in the course of two decades it reached the same level as in the major European countries. This was accompanied by the expansion of Dutch influence in their East Indian colony, an expansion which amounted to a form of imperialism. At the same time the Dutch reacted violently to the British attack on the South African Boer Republics. The Transvaal's resistance to Britain provoked a really surprising and spontaneous reaction. Their fight, it was thought, was proof of the revival of the true Dutch spirit. In South Africa the missed opportunities in the Dutch past could be made good. In the seventeenth century Holland had lost America to Britain; in the nineteenth century, Dutch commentators wrote, the Boers were reconquering South Africa for the Dutch race.

C. van Vollenhoven, a professor of International and Indonesian Law, who after 1915 came to be one of Huizinga's most intimate friends in Leiden, published in 1913 a little book, *De eendracht van het land* (The Concord of the Country), that made quite an impression and is very representative of some Dutch attitudes in this period. The Dutch people, Van Vollenhoven wrote, as if predestined by a higher power to greater things, had become strong again through economic recovery and through the magnificent development of their authority in the East Indies. Now Van Vollenhoven called upon the nation to restore its seventeenth-century glory by assuming an international task. The nation needed a 'central mission'. This was easy enough to define: the Netherlands' duty was to start building up an international police force, the strong arm of international law fighting for peace. It was obliged by its tradition to take up the challenging role of Jeanne d'Arc, La Fayette, Saint Paul - and it was in a better position to do so than the United States or France, which perhaps felt a kindred messianic call. It was more prosperous than France and more disinterested than any other nation. As a vital young people, Van Vollenhoven wrote, we want to resume our place in the first rank of nations; our inspiration must come from 'the knowledge that we can return to glory in an international role'.

I do not suggest that Huizinga ever propounded or conceived ideas identical with those of Van Vollenhoven. At any rate, there is nothing in his published work which encourages us to presume that he expected Holland to play such a great new part in international affairs. But he did share Van Vollenhoven's national pride and he developed a theory about Dutch national characteristics which is both in spirit and content in many respects similar to that of his friend. In a number of essays and lectures he tried to define the peculiar position of the Netherlands as a country wide open to German, French, and English cultural influences but, thanks to the fact that it possessed a rich and highly articulate national language, in no danger of succumbing to them. He sees the three major streams of European civilization somehow flowing together into the Dutch delta where they enrich Dutch culture without denaturing or denationalizing it. In a somewhat hesitant and inconclusive lecture delivered in Berlin on 27 January 1933 - an ominous date - Huizinga considered Holland's position as a mediator between Central and Western Europe. His emphasis however was really on the dualism of Dutch civilization itself, on the mixture of nationalism and internationalism that characterized it, on the view that the Dutch cultural identity was not weakened but strengthened by its openness. Thanks to what he called 'its happy fate' Holland was in a better position than any other country to understand foreign cultures and better able than Switzerland or Belgium to absorb their contrasting influences without in the process losing its own highly idiosyncratic national character. Apparently the very fact that these three major influences are contrasting enables a country which undergoes them simultaneously, to neutralize them. (II, 303, cf. 331)

It might well be that in the passage which I summarized the words 'a happy fate' ('ein günstiges Geschick') are no more than a rhetorical ornament. Comparison with other passages in his work, however, may lead the reader to take them more seriously. In 1934 Huizinga wrote in a small book on the Character of the Dutch Mind (*Nederland's Geestesmerk*) the following paragraph:

It is not the merits of individuals nor the excellence of the state's organization and its policies that account for all the advantages and qualities of Dutch life in the seventeenth century; nor are these to be explained as resulting from the happy coincidence of special circumstances. If one wished to summarize the cause of this phenomenon in one term, even when using purely rational standards, it would be impossible to find a better definition than: divine blessing. If history teaches other peoples to pride themselves on and to glory in their past, she teaches us, if we understand her lesson well, only humility. (VII, 284)

In a newspaper article of 1938, Huizinga stated that the history of Dutch national origins and growth displays a succession of totally unforeseen turns. History is always unpredictable but it would be difficult to find anywhere else such almost inconceivable turns of fate as was the destiny of the Dutch. (VIII, 563) Meanwhile

he had in 1932 delivered a series of lectures in Cologne on Dutch seventeenth-century civilization and published them in German. In 1941 he expanded these into his justly famous small book in Dutch. In this work, perhaps a long essay rather than a book, Huizinga described in a perfectly clear and balanced style the wonder of Dutch seventeenth-century civilization. I shall neither discuss the merits of this book nor try to indicate its flaws.²² What matters for me is the fact that we find here the elaboration of Huizinga's view that Dutch history is a miracle. The stylistic means used in this book are the rhetorical question and the paradox, and they serve to keep the reader constantly aware of the astonishing, inexplicable character of the subject matter. And indeed, in Huizinga's interpretation there is cause enough for astonishment. The Dutch state, so runs the argument, did not grow slowly and gradually; it was born by accident. But as soon as it had so abruptly come into existence, it was a world power, it developed a form of national identity and possessed a culture more varied than that of any other country in that period. That Athens, Florence, Rome and Paris functioned as cultural centres may be understandable, Huizinga declared, but Holland's case is different, for it was a minute country without a cultural past of more than purely local interest and as a nation not yet rooted in history. The phenomenon might have been understandable if by some happy coincidence Holland had in the seventeenth century developed into a centre where the general character of seventeenth-century civilization was most purely and completely expressed. However Dutch civilization did not really reflect the European style; it was a deviation, it represented an exception rather than a norm.

Huizinga's argument is so well-known that it needs no summarizing here. What is of importance for my purpose is that in this beautifully written, lucidly argued essay, full of subtle appreciations of Dutch literature and art, we find a bold, original, coherent interpretation of the place of Holland in seventeenth-century Europe as well as an almost religious awe at the whole phenomenon of Dutch existence and achievements. Holland is represented in this book as in all respects a unique case. It is clear that the unique cannot be explained. It is there to be admired and described as a gift of God.

22. *Supra*, 356ff.