

J. Huizinga

My Path to History

On an Interest in History

Translated by Diane Webb

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Foreword*

I could not persuade my late husband to write an autobiography – for various reasons he balked at the idea.

I subsequently asked him to jot down some brief notes about his career, both for me and for our daughter, who was three at the time. It was with pleasure that he then wrote ‘Mijn weg tot de historie’ (‘My Path to History’), which should by no means be taken as a complete autobiography.

Several months later my husband adapted the piece for use as the introduction to a volume that was supposed to appear after the war under the title ‘Verspreide Geschriften’ (‘Random Writings’). Now, however, these articles will be included in the Opera Omnia.

A friend, the Basel historian Professor Werner Kaegi, has already translated and published this introduction in German – so I think I should no longer leave it unknown to the Dutch public.

A. Huizinga-Schölvinc

Leiden, 7 January 1947

*This Foreword, written by Huizinga’s wife, was published only in the 1947 edition and was not included in the *Verzamelde Werken*. Here it has been restored, because it was at her encouragement that Huizinga wrote these recollections. Huizinga and Auguste A. C. M. Schölvinc (1909-1979) married on 4 October 1937. Their daughter, Laura M. Huizinga, was born on 4 November 1941. For more details, see the Acknowledgements.

My Path to History¹

An inclination towards the autobiographical has been alien to me until now. I have never kept a diary, since even the notes in which I recorded the day-to-day course of my journey through the United States in 1926 cannot be called such;² and for my journey to Java, Bali and Hong Kong in the winter of 1930-1931, when I was handicapped by an injury to my right eye, I must rely entirely on my memory.³ Only once in my life have I talked more or less about myself, for an audience of history students at a conference in Woudschoten on 17 March 1936.⁴ My lecture was not intended to be autobiographical. The topic I had chosen was the question: ‘What is an interest in history? How does it come about and how does it grow? I spoke from notes, as I was in the habit of doing in lectures, and that’s all.’⁵ Now that I’ve grown old, and must look for work for which I need few books,⁶ it pleases me to return to that subject, and to expand somewhat on the material I then handled in a one-hour lecture.

The Dutch word *belangstelling* is a very curious and precious word. One cannot actually convey its meaning straightforwardly in the foreign languages familiar to us. For neither the French ‘*intérêt*’ nor the German ‘*Interesse*’ nor the English ‘*interest*’ expresses as purely as our word does the activity, the sense of

¹ This translation is based on the published Dutch text. Variant and supplementary passages taken from the unpublished version are included between { } or in the notes, whichever proved best. The names of internationally renowned painters, writers and composers are not annotated. For further details, see the Acknowledgements.

² Published as J. Huizinga, *Amerika Dagboek 14 april-19 juni 1926*. Anton van der Lem, ed. (Amsterdam/Antwerp: Uitgeverij Contact, 1993).

³ At the invitation of the ‘Bond van Kunstkringen’, Huizinga travelled in late December 1930 to Java, where he spent January and February 1931 on a lecture tour. On the outward journey, he suffered an eye injury caused by a deck tennis ring. He also visited Bali and journeyed home via Hong Kong, in order to visit his daughter Elisabeth and her family there in March. Cf. J. Huizinga, *Briefwisseling*, Léon Hanssen, W. E. Krul, Anton van der Lem, eds (3 vols, Utrecht/Antwerp: Veen/Tjeenk Willink, 1898-1991) II, nos. 873-82. Hereafter referred to as *Briefwisseling*. Cf. Anton van der Lem, *Inventaris van het archief van Johan Huizinga * Bibliografie 1897-1997* (Leiden: University, 1998), no. 77: Lectures delivered in the Dutch East Indies, with itinerary and eleven subjects. Hereafter referred to as *Inventaris archief Huizinga*.

⁴ The Woudschoten conference centre, Woudenbergseweg 54 in Zeist, was built in 1931 by the Dutch Christian Student Association (NCSV).

⁵ *Inventaris archief Huizinga*, no. 7 III: notes in draft (pencil); no. 112 II: notes in fair copy (in ink). See hereafter, pp. @@

⁶ Living in De Steeg, to the east of Arnhem, Huizinga did not have access to his own books, which had been left behind in Leiden. Both his age and the circumstances of war prevented him from visiting libraries.

purpose, the avidity that drives us to the past. I did not dwell on these psycholinguistic issues, however, but illustrated the point – without delving into questions of gnosiology or semiotics – simply on the basis of my personal recollection and perception, in the short space of an hour-long talk.

Now, perhaps, the time has come and the opportunity is favourable to return to that subject in a rather more explicitly autobiographical way. My development into a historian has been singular enough, so that I have a mind to record it in somewhat more detail than in the above-mentioned lecture.

My first contact with history was of a very particular nature, and it left in my memory a great many vivid recollections, which for the most part I can still check with those of my slightly older brother.⁷ It was late summer in 1879. I had finished year one of primary school, and was not yet seven. The Groningen student union was celebrating one of the university's five-year anniversaries, and the theme of the masked procession was the entry of Count Edzard of East Friesland into the city of Groningen in 1506.⁸ [ill. 1] I now doubt that the costumes met high standards of historical exactitude, but that this masquerade was historically well prepared is quite certain.⁹ The soul of the anniversary committee was the student J. A. Feith, the later state archivist and unparalleled historian of Groningen.¹⁰ With one or more of his fellow members, he had paid a visit to the Count of Inn- und Knyphausen, on the domain of Lützburg near Norden¹¹ (the manor house burned down on Christmas night in 1909), where they had been given a warm welcome and where the daughters of the house

⁷ Jakob Huizinga (1870-1947), Johan's brother and senior by two years. See also note 17.

⁸ Edzard I Cirksena (1462-1528), Count of East Friesland from 1492 until his death in 1528, repeatedly intervened in the many complex political and military conflicts in the region. In May 1506 he was welcomed by the people of Groningen as the man who would protect them from other parties' claims to power. This event was related in detail by Menno O. Gratama, J. A. Feith, *Geschiedkundige aantekeningen bij en programma van den optocht, voorstellende den intocht van "Grave Edzard I den Grote, tho Oost-Freeslant", in mei 1506 binnen Groningen, te houden door de leden van het Groninger studentencorps "Vindicat atque polit" 24 september 1879* (Groningen: J. B. Huber, 1879).

⁹ Huizinga was particularly interested in the history of costume, and repeatedly lectured on the subject. His ability to draw quickly and accurately ensured that these lectures were always a great success. Cf. *Inventaris archief Huizinga*, no. 134 I.

¹⁰ Johan Adriaan Feith (1858-1913) enrolled in 1877 as a student of law at Groningen University and earned his doctorate in 1885, after writing his dissertation on a topic of legal history. In 1891 he became a co-founder of the Groningen Museum of Antiquities, and a year later the state archivist of the province of Groningen. Cf. J. Huizinga, 'In memoriam Jhr mr J. A. Feith' (VW VI, 324-26).

¹¹ Norden, on the coast of the Wadden Sea in German East Friesland. In the typescript and hence the later editions, it is given incorrectly as Vorden.

had dressed for them in the Manninga family's historical garb, still preserved there.¹² Feith told me all of this much later, during the period of our close friendship, between 1905 and his untimely demise in 1913.

The pageant was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. I could still recount plenty of details about it: that the procession set out from Marktstraat, hence very close to our house on the corner of Ossenmarkt and Lopende Diep, that it was blowing hard, and a flagpole broke near our house, so that the flag wound itself around a horseman – but I'll restrain myself. The protagonist was Willem Alberda van Ekenstein, later a judge in Groningen, tall and robust, a splendid Count Edzard, armoured from head to toe in gleaming metal.¹³ [ill. 2] When the festivities were over, the schoolboys took part in a masquerade. Our mothers had made beautiful costumes for us, but the mayor¹⁴ did not approve of our parading through the streets with pomp and circumstance, so we had to content ourselves with a display of our magnificence at the theatre, still the old one, in the Nieuwe Kijk in 't Jatstraat. Afterwards life went back to normal, but I'd been gripped by my first contact with the historical past, and it was deep and unwavering.

In 1881/1882, when I was in year four (of seven), I received lessons in 'Dutch history'. Our teacher was Miss J. Nuiver,¹⁵ a niece of the headmaster, A. Nuiver, whom I can still see clearly in my mind's eye, with his top hat, black side-whiskers, and a face at once stern and yet kind and friendly.¹⁶ Later on Miss Nuiver held a post at the teacher training college, and died, I think, a few years ago. She must have

¹² Edzard Friedrich Ludwig, Count (and from 1900) Prince of Inn- & Knyphausen (1827-1908). He and his wife, Luise von Krassow (1843-1930), had seven daughters and one son. He published 'Ostfriesische Volks- und Rittertrachten um 1500 in getreuer Nachbildung der Originale des Häuptlings Unico Manninga in der Gräfllich Knyphausenschen Hauschronik zu Lützburg', *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst und vaterländische Altertümer zu Emden* 10 (1893), vol. 2. The Manningas' housebook was known mainly for its beautiful drawings of the costumes of those years. With thanks to Yme Kuiper.

¹³ Willem Alberda van Ekenstein (1856-1923) studied law at Groningen University and became president of the Groningen district court.

¹⁴ Berend van Roijen (1832-1893), a lawyer active in municipal politics, was mayor of Groningen from 1872 to 1880.

¹⁵ Jacoba Alberdina Nuiver (1854-1934) enrolled as a student of literature at Groningen University on 6 October 1883. In the municipal register she is also recorded as an assistant teacher, Gelkingestraat 116 (now 38). With thanks to Jilles van den Doel. At the first Rijkskweekschool voor Onderwijzeressen (state teacher-training college for women), founded in Apeldoorn in 1896, she taught German and geography from 1896 to 1919. After celebrating her jubilee in 1919, she resigned for health reasons.

¹⁶ Albert Nuiver (1835-1907) was head of the 'Eerste jongensschool' (First primary school for boys) in Groningen from 1861 to 1901. This institution prepared boys for secondary and grammar school. Nuiver and his brother-in-law, O. J. Reinders, co-authored various schoolbooks on history.

taught us history exceedingly well. Frisians, Franks and Saxons came to life for me, I felt closely attached to the lineage of the Counts of Holland, the Compromise of the Nobility mattered greatly to me.¹⁷ I have always felt that the framework of my knowledge of history remains grounded in Miss Nuiver's instruction. I still remember that she taught us, from very close by, how to pronounce the name Requesens correctly, with the accent on the last syllable. Only later, at grammar school (*gymnasium*), did I learn the usual, incorrect pronunciation Rēkweezens. Does one know, by the way, that the name of the West Gothic king Recceswinth¹⁸ can be found in that name?¹⁹ In the meantime, of course, I was coming into contact with historical material in many ways other than through the lessons at school. Quite a few of the books floating about our house had once belonged to Grandfather Huizinga,²⁰ retired clergyman since 1879 – schoolbooks and children's books from the beginning of the nineteenth century, mostly still with the 'long s', which seemed extremely ridiculous to us, and full of good old-fashioned education.²¹ If only I could have that collection in front of me again! I took only very moderate pleasure in Jules Verne, eagerly devoured by my friends, most of his books I didn't read at all. Hugely appealing to me were the Fairy Tales by Andersen. Silly, my friends said, but I didn't let that put me off and knew very well that they were wrong. I enjoyed them in precisely the same way I still enjoy them,²² the simplest the most, such as *The Old House* and *The Goblin and the Grocer*. Later, in year two of grammar school, when I received 'the prize' and was allowed to choose a book myself, I requested from the teachers and

¹⁷ Variant from the first version, fol. 2: 'She must have taught us history particularly well, in any case the Frisians, Saxons and Franks, lines of counts, Compromise and Pacification of Ghent, I lapped it all up, and it became and remained something to me.'

¹⁸ Recceswinth, King of the Visigoths from 649 to 672.

¹⁹ Huizinga added these two sentences in the margin of the final version, fol. 3. In the typescript, this note is at the very end. The German edition contains this remark, but it was overlooked in the Dutch edition.

²⁰ Jakob Huizinga (1809-1894), Mennonite preacher at Knollendam (1832-1835), Den Horn (1835-1844) and Den Burg (Texel) (1844-1879). After retiring, he settled in Groningen. In his diary he also gave a detailed account of the vicissitudes of his children's and grandchildren's lives.

²¹ Cf. Huizinga's recollection of one of his first primers: 'T is Timotheus, ondeugend en dom / De maan wou hij krijgen daar huilt hij nu om' ('T is for Timothy, ignorant and naughty / He wished to catch the moon, and that's why he's now bawling'). HA 74, envelope 'Naweeën van Tachtig'. Cf. van der Lem, *Johan Huizinga*, p. 25.

²² In August 1943, Huizinga and his wife read the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen (*Sprookjes van H. C. Andersen* [Amsterdam: Scheltema & Holkema's boekhandel, various editions], in the translation from the Danish by Martha van Vloten (see *Briefwisseling* III, no. 1512, p. 397).

trustees – to some amazement, I believe – Andersen’s Fairy Tales, and received a nice German edition, which I still hope to find again.²³

My interest in history was nourished in various ways in the years before I went to grammar school in 1885. Contributing to it were two hobbies in particular, which my elder brother Jakob – born in 1870, now a retired physician – and I pursued together. Owing to the vicissitudes of his school career,²⁴ my brother, by nature strongly inclined towards history, ended up in medicine, but deep down he always remained interested in history and a lover of books.²⁵ For a while we suddenly became immersed in heraldry, knew about crests, caparisons, inescutcheons, chiefs, cantons and labels; we had a little book about it from J. ter Gouw,²⁶ and became engrossed in such matters until the novelty wore off. I don’t know whether this hobby is partly to blame for a secret sin, which I have never completely abandoned and renounced, namely a certain weakness, developed already at a young age, for patrician descent and names, to the disdain of my own, all-too-conscious plebeian descent from Mennonite clergymen and Ommeland freeholders.²⁷

The other hobby was a loftier one: we had a coin collection. I no longer know how it came to be assembled, but it boasted ‘ship shillings’ and silver riders, as well as pieces from 1500 and earlier. We had a Sea Beggars’ medal in lead inscribed with ‘liever turcx dan paeps’ (‘Better Turkish than Papist’) and the paper emergency coin from the siege of Groningen in 1672,²⁸ a medal commemorating the second centenary of Groningen University in 1814, with the motto ‘dummodo monumentum adsit’.²⁹

²³ The volume in question has never been found, nor has it been determined which edition it was. The Leiden University Library is in the process of tracing all the books in Huizinga’s possession. See Van der Lem, *Een bibliotheek als wederopstanding: welke boeken bezat Johan Huizinga?* (Ruurlo: De Ammoniet, 2014).

²⁴ Jakob Huizinga twice failed his final exams (in 1882 and 1887) at Groningen’s Stedelijk Gymnasium (municipal grammar school), now the Praedinius-Gymnasium. Thanks to a special arrangement that made it possible to study medicine without a grammar-school diploma, he enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine on 20 September 1888. He worked as a physician his whole life.

²⁵ Since 2014 books have been appearing on the antiquarian book market that contain his ex libris, representing a man, seen from the back, seated at a table, poring over his books, and below this: J. Huizinga.

²⁶ Jan ter Gouw (1814-1894), historian, *Studiën over wapen- en zegelkunde* (Amsterdam: Brinkman, 1865).

²⁷ The ‘eigenerfden’ (‘freeholders’) are the Groningen ‘hereboeren’ (‘gentleman farmers’), who owned their lands themselves, in contrast to the poor ‘pachtboeren’ (‘tenant farmers’).

²⁸ In 1672, the Year of Disaster, the Dutch Republic was invaded not only by France and England, but also by the bishops of Cologne and Munster. The latter, Christoph Bernhard von Galen (1606-1678), laid siege to Groningen for more than two months, but was forced to give up on 28 August.

²⁹ Dummodo monumentum adsit (‘May this endure in commemoration’).

[ill. 3] In our view the greatest treasure was a denarius of Louis the Pious, with which the collection was enriched in the autumn of 1884.³⁰ Once again, festivities were held to mark another five-year anniversary. This time the masquerade featured figures from the time of Frederik Hendrik.³¹

Pieter Jelles Troelstra, wearing a simple black suit, represented Gysbert Japicx,³² [ill. 4] Gerrit de Jongh, the later juvenile court magistrate, was, I think, d'Estrades,³³ and if I'm not mistaken, De Marees van Swinderen, later our envoy in London, also played a part.³⁴ About ten days later, Jakob and I were home alone in the evening. Uncle Sam, that is to say, our half-cousin Dr Samuel Meihuizen, showed up, acting terribly angry.³⁵ Why hadn't we come to watch the procession with him, on his doorstep in Boteringestraat? It had been clearly agreed upon, surely, and he had even etc. etc. – all acted out with Uncle Sam's consummate skill. We were deeply shocked, but in the end he gave us a very old coin, which had emerged from an ancient mound somewhere in Hunsingo and which now instantly became the showpiece of our collection. That asset certainly owed something to the involvement of a friend of ours, Piet Hofstede de Groot,³⁶ the later director of the Amsterdamse Bank. From his father, Professor C. P. Hofstede de Groot († 1884),³⁷ we received the two beautiful

³⁰ Louis the Pious (778-840), Charlemagne's only son, co-emperor and successor, was Holy Roman Emperor from 813 until his death in 840.

³¹ Frederik Hendrik, Prince of Orange, Count of Nassau (1583-1547), succeeded Prince Maurits as stadholder of Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Gelderland and Overijssel in 1625 and became stadholder of Groningen and Drente in 1640.

³² Pieter Jelles Troelstra (1860-1930), Dutch politician and founder of the Social Democratic Workers' Party, was also a writer and poet in Frisian, his native language. Gijsbert Japicx (1603-1666), Frisian poet.

³³ Gerrit Tammo Jan de Jongh (1861-1949), a lawyer active in the judiciary, latterly as vice-president and juvenile court magistrate of the Amsterdam district court. He married Anna Catharina van Valkenburg (1867-1940), a sister of Huizinga's friend Van Valkenburg; Godefroy Louis, Comte d'Estrades (1607-1686), French diplomat and military officer, occupied, among other positions, the post of French ambassador to the Dutch Republic.

³⁴ Reneke (René) de Marees van Swinderen (1860-1955), studied law in Groningen. Diplomat and politician, Minister of Foreign Affairs 1908-1913 and subsequently Dutch envoy in London. He played the role, on horseback, of Lodewijk of Nassau (1602-1665), Lord of Lecke, Odijk and Lekkerkerk, a natural son of Prince Maurits.

³⁵ Samuel Meihuizen (1847-1925) studied at Groningen University, where he received his doctorate in medicine. He was a son of Jakob [Samuelszoon] Meihuizen (1823-1907), a younger brother of Aaltje Meihuizen (1817-1851), the wife of Jakob [Dirkszoon] Huizinga, Johan Huizinga's grandfather. Samuel Meihuizen was the Huizingas' family doctor.

³⁶ Petrus Hofstede de Groot (1870-1949) enrolled as a student of law on 27 May 1890. He remained a lifelong friend of Huizinga and became director of the Amsterdamsche Bank N.V.

³⁷ Cornelius Philippus Hofstede de Groot (1829-1884) was Professor of Religious Dogma and History of the Dutch Reformed Church at Groningen University from 1878 to 1884.

mahogany coin boxes with numerous little compartments, which came from the sale of the estate of Mello Backer.³⁸ My time frame is also tied to a large silver marriage medal from the seventeenth or eighteenth century, I no longer know for which bridal couple. On the reverse, near a garlanded column or something similar, were the words from I Corinthians 13, at the time completely unknown to me: *Charitas omnia suffert*, which always made me think: what is that ‘suffert’ doing there? [DW: the Dutch word *sufferd* means ‘simpleton’, ‘muddlehead’, ‘stupid person’] [ill. 5]³⁹ So this must have been before I learned Latin, meaning before the end of 1885. You see, by now I’ve pretty much got the hang of autobiographical detail.

What became of that coin collection? There came a time, several years later, when I was in one of the upper classes of grammar school, that my brother needed much more money than I, who was actually much too nice a boy. By this time I had lost interest in our coin collection. One fine day he came to tell me – with his habitual, disarming amiability – that he had gradually flogged the collection, every last piece.⁴⁰

Despite my childlike contacts with the world of things historical, by no means did my intellectual growth between the ages of twelve and eighteen impel me to study history at university. For many years, other interests pushed the strictly historical into the background. I can still recall vividly how it all began. At grammar school we had Dr Jan te Winkel, the later professor, for Dutch.⁴¹ He was not good at teaching languages. Only in the upper classes did he briefly catch my attention with a detailed and very scholarly lecture on Middle Dutch literature. In the lower classes he taught

³⁸ Mello Backer (1807-1883, lawyer and collector of books and porcelain. Cf. *Catalogus der bibliotheken nagelaten door ... Jhr. Mr. M. Backer en Jhr. W. Gockinga te Groningen* (Groningen: P. L. Folmer, [1883]). This sale catalogue contains only books, no other objects.

³⁹ This is not a marriage medal, but a birth medal, cast and engraved to mark the birth of Hindrickien Palten (1642-1665), silver, Amsterdam 1642. Obverse: Charity suckles a child; at left, two children play together; at right, another child plays with a dog. Inscription: CHARITAS OMNIA SVFFERT / HINDRICKIEN PALTEN Ao 1642. Reverse: Pallas Athena (Minerva) stands by the seated Apollo (?). Inscription: ARTIBVS QVISITA GLORIA. With thanks to P. A. M. Beliën, De Nederlandsche Bank, Amsterdam. See illustration.

⁴⁰ Variant from the first version, fol. 4: ‘I regret having to say it, but he gradually...’.

⁴¹ Jan te Winkel (1847-1927), from 1877 to 1892 preceptor at Groningen’s Stedelijk Gymnasium (municipal grammar school), now the Praedinius-Gymnasium; Professor of Dutch Language and Literature at the Municipal University of Amsterdam. Cf. P. J. van Herwerden, *Gedenkboek van het Stedelijk Gymnasium te Groningen* (Groningen: J. B. Wolters’ Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1947), p. 183: ‘A preceptor primarily taught ancient languages, or one of them, in addition to various other subjects.’

us ‘language’ from an impossibly erudite little book by Van Helten,⁴² which stuffed us full of grammatical textbook terms such as syncope, metathesis en synaloepha, and an even crazier, but at least entertaining book by Cosijn, titled *Cacographie*.⁴³ We did not fail to notice that the thoughts of the formidable night worker were elsewhere. He was constantly sucking on the stump of a cigar and rattling a bunch of keys in his trousers pocket. He set us against Vondel by reading Roskam in year two of grammar school and Lucifer in year three.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, Te Winkel gave me a boost. That was in year one, when we were busy learning Latin verbs. I asked him whether our Dutch word *hebben* (‘to have’) wasn’t the same as *habeo*. No, said Te Winkel: *hebben* corresponds to *capio*, and now he gave us – leaving aside the question of whether this was correct – a glimpse of the principles of the general Germanic sound shift: *pater* becomes *vader*, *caput* becomes *hovet*, *hoofd*, etc. That knowledge made a tremendous impact on me, and from that moment on, I was resolved to study linguistics. Oddly enough, even though Greek and Latin really suited me, I had never given a moment’s thought to studying classical languages. My heart and imagination were in the Middle Ages, about which I knew very little, but of which I had a kind of burgeoning and at the same time extremely vague vision, not primarily filled with knights and plumes. I recall a fantasy drawing of a harbour in a Hanseatic city, which I probably made as a boy of fourteen.⁴⁵ I no longer know what reading haunted it.

Our teacher for general history was Mr Hermans, theology candidate, who had done all kinds of Oriental languages, and rightly had the reputation of being a very erudite man.⁴⁶ We learned a great deal from him, just not a solid overview of history. Hermans maintained only a modicum of ‘order’, but he was so well liked that he

⁴² W. L. van Helten, *Kleine Nederlandsche spraakkunst. I: Rededeelen en spelling. II. Leer van den zin* (Rotterdam: Otto Petri, 1877-1878). The book in question was presumably the fourth edition, without subtitle, published by Wolters in Groningen, 1883.

⁴³ Pieter Jacob Cosijn (1840-1899), *Cacographie ten gebruike bij het middelbaar onderwijs* (Haarlem: Bohn, 1866).

⁴⁴ Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679), greatest poet of the Dutch Golden Age and author of the political-satirical poem *Roskam* (n.p., n.d., [1630]) and the tragedy *Lucifer: treurspel* (Amsterdam: A. de Wees, 1654).

⁴⁵ This drawing has not been traced. On Huizinga’s drawings in general, see Van der Lem, *Johan Huizinga*, ch. 4: ‘Huizinga als tekenaar’.

⁴⁶ Harm Hermans (1841-1911) enrolled as a student at Groningen University in 1861 and 1870. He was preceptor at the Stedelijk Gymnasium (municipal grammar school) from 1869 to 1903. Cf. H. Hermans, J. Woltjer, *Atlas der algemeene en vaderlandsche geschiedenis: in 70 groote en kleine kaarten* (Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1880).

wasn't pestered. He usually frittered away the hour with small talk about nothing in particular. If necessary, we got him to talk by asking seemingly naïve questions about some word or other. 'What is that, Sir: *mésalliance*?' 'Don't you lads know that? Well, that girl, for example... with that boy of...', and he mentioned a recently engaged couple from Groningen society. Sometimes Hermans's sense of history was rather unedifying. In year five he dictated a whole list of lovers of Catherine II,⁴⁷ which was still a lot better than his colleague for Dutch history,⁴⁸ who thought us old enough, in year six, for him to divulge to us the case of Onno Zwier van Haren and all its embarrassing details.⁴⁹

I am indebted to Hermans for one important thing, however. He also taught Hebrew, and when the aspirant theologians began to study that language in year five, I joined them: I simply had to get a grip on this language. We were still not so very advanced when Hermans said: 'Ach, lads, Arabic is actually much nicer, shall I teach you Arabic?' Three virtuous divinity students and I jumped at the chance, and an extra lesson was set for it. The students of theology, scared off by the script, slunk away almost immediately, but I enjoyed it, paid no more attention to Hebrew, and borrowed Socin's Arabic Grammar⁵⁰ in the *Porta Linguarum Orientalium* series, and threw myself into it with such zeal that after a time I could read the Fables of Luqmān⁵¹ and the story of King Solomon and the Hoopoe.⁵² Continuing, I advanced

⁴⁷ Catherine II the Great (1729-1796), Empress of Russia (1762-1796).

⁴⁸ Huizinga never mentions this teacher by name, but the list of teachers offers two possibilities: Klaas Meijer Wiersma (1859-1928), who taught Dutch and history from 1887 to 1894, after which he practised law; a more likely candidate is Gerhardus Albertus Johannes Franke (1845-1914), who taught history and geography from 1881 to 1911 and published several historical treatises on the eighteenth century as a supplement to the *Programma van het Gymnasium te Groningen*, published annually.

⁴⁹ Onno Zwier van Haren (1711-1779), Frisian noble and poet. His career as an administrator came to an abrupt end after he was accused of having sexual relations with his daughters.

⁵⁰ Albert Socin (1844-1899), *Arabische Grammatik: Paradigmen, Litteratur, Chrestomathie und Glossar* (Karlsruhe: Reuther, 1885) (*Porta linguarum orientalium*, pars 4).

⁵¹ Correct in the manuscript, but appearing incorrectly, as Logmân, in the typescript and printed version. For centuries the Fables of Luqmān have been required reading for students of Arabic. The text, the origin of which has never been discovered, was first published in Dutch in 1636 by the Leiden Arabist Thomas Erpenius (1584-1624) in his own printing establishment (Leiden, 1615). Between 1847 and 1925 the fables circulated mainly in the edition by Auguste Cherbonneau (1813-1882), 'Fables de Lokman' (Paris: Hachette), which was reprinted many times. With thanks to Arnoud Vrolijk, also for the following two notes.

⁵² The story of King Solomon and the Hoopoe comes from the 'Qisas al-anbiya' ('The Stories of the Prophets') by Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Tha'labi (died 1035). In the story, a hoopoe is responsible for the first meeting of King Solomon and Bilqis, Queen of Sheba. The story is included as translation exercise A-I in the *Chrestomathie* (anthology) in the first edition of Socin's above-mentioned book on Arabic grammar (see note 50, pp. 49-70).

to the point where, as a university student, I had private lessons in Arabic for a number of years at the home of the friendly Van den Ham,⁵³ and read something of the works of all kinds of authors, unfortunately without coming into any contact with Islamic studies.

Another significant signpost guiding my scholarly aspirations was planted by my father.⁵⁴ With his uncommonly versatile mind and open eye for all branches of study, he guessed, as it were, what my youthful yearning for study was seeking. From the University Library he first brought me a book by F. Max Müller. It was called *Biographies of Words and the Home of the Aryas*, two separate treatises.⁵⁵ I read and excerpted them, and accepted them as indisputable wisdom. This was followed by a couple of books on mythology and ethnology, one by a certain Fiske, *Myth and Myth-Makers*,⁵⁶ the other by Andrew Lang,⁵⁷ which already made me somewhat doubtful of Max Müller's infallibility, until E. B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture*⁵⁸ – this must have been in the winter of 1888-1889 – opened up prospects that have in a certain sense always remained horizons⁵⁹ of my scholarly thinking, even though Tylor's main

⁵³ Frederik Jacob van den Ham (1846-1912), Professor of Hebrew Language and Literature and Jewish Antiquities at Groningen University (1877-1912). In his inaugural lecture, 'Het belang van de studie der Arabische taal voor de behandeling van het Oude Testament' ('The importance of the study of the Arabic language for the treatment of the Old Testament') (Utrecht: Van Druten, 1877), he adhered to the traditional viewpoint that Arabic was related to ancient Hebrew, as handed down in the Old Testament. By this time the method of biblical criticism known as philological criticism (*Philologia Sacra*), expounded by such scholars as the Leiden professor Albert Schultens (1686-1750), had long made way for the historical criticism of the French philosopher Ernest Renan (1823-1892). This also manifested itself in, for example, the reforms in higher education implemented in 1876, whereby Arabic was dissociated from the other Semitic languages and given its own chair.

⁵⁴ Dirk Huizinga (1840-1903), Professor of Physiology and Histology at Groningen University (1870-1901).

⁵⁵ Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), *Biographies of Words and the Home of the Aryas* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1871). 'Aryas' is wrongly recorded as 'Aryans' in both the manuscript and the typescript of *Mijn weg tot de historie*.

⁵⁶ John Fiske (1842-1901), American philosopher and historian; *Myths and Myth-Makers: Old Tales and Superstitions Interpreted by Comparative Mythology* (Boston: J. R. Osgood, 1873).

⁵⁷ Andrew Lang (1844-1912), Scottish writer, poet and anthropologist, collector of folk tales and fairy tales; *Myth, Ritual, and Religion* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1887).

⁵⁸ Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917), English anthropologist, taught at Oxford (1884-1909); *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom* (London: John Murray, 1871).

⁵⁹ Here the Dutch typescript erroneously says 'kiemen' ('to germinate/bud' instead of 'kimmen' ('horizons')).

thesis of animism as the basis of all spiritual life has long been outdated and discarded.⁶⁰

When my final exams were in sight, there was the question, owing to my intense interest in Arabic, of whether I should study Semitic Languages and Literature, but the information obtained by my father suggested there was no future in it – materially speaking, that is – and on top of that it would have been a financial burden to let me study in Leiden, which did not really appeal to me, because I was very attached to Groningen.⁶¹ So I arrived in September 1891 at Groningen University as a student of Dutch Language and Literature, as everything was then called that was not Classical or Oriental.⁶² It was rather peculiar and very disproportionate intellectual furniture with which I began my studies. My Latin and Greek were run-of-the-mill school learning, imparted to us without much depth or inspiration. Unfortunately, I had instantly neglected Greek altogether and never brushed it up again, and since then classical Latin has never captivated or attracted me either; my Latin came to a standstill between Augustine and Erasmus (although I did read both of them, but only much later).

A great influence not only on my preference for post-classical Latin but also on my literary education in general was exerted by Remy de Gourmont's *Le Latin mystique*,⁶³ which I fervently read and enjoyed during one of my first years at university, at approximately the same time as J. K. Huysman's *Là-Bas*.⁶⁴

My literary baggage in general was actually quite meagre. It contained a bit of Shakespeare,⁶⁵ [ill. 6] but still not very much, then some German literature, but nothing off the beaten path: Schiller, some Goethe, Heine, a bit of lyric poetry, and practically nothing French. I wasn't a great reader and never became one either. Looking back on those years, what surprises me is the almost complete absence not

⁶⁰ A detailed characterization of these authors is to be found in Wessel Krul, 'Teleurstellingen en ontdekkingen: Johan Huizinga en Engeland, 1889-1914', pp. 145-48.

⁶¹ First version, fol. 7: 'not only that, but there was no future in it, supposedly'.

⁶² Date of enrolment: 17 October 1891.

⁶³ Remy de Gourmont (1858-1915), French poet, novelist and essayist; *Le Latin mystique: les poètes de l'antiphonaire et la symbolique au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1892) is an annotated anthology of post-classical, Christian Latin poetry from the third to the fifteenth century. In his presentation and free translation, aesthetic enjoyment prevails over credibility. Cf. J. Trapman, 'Le Latin mystique van Remy de Gourmont (1892) en zijn invloed in Nederland', in idem, *Het land van Erasmus* (Amsterdam: Balans, 1999), pp. 45-60.

⁶⁴ Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907), French writer; *Là-bas* (Paris: Tresse, 1890).

⁶⁵ On Huizinga and Shakespeare, see W. E. Krul, *Historicus tegen de tijd: opstellen over leven en werk van J. Huizinga* (Groningen: Historische uitgeverij, 1990), p. 116.

only of mathematical and philosophical interest, but also of any affinity for the natural sciences, even though I had friends who were full of Haeckel or Buchner, or discussed Lorentz and Maxwell,⁶⁶ and despite my father's predisposition towards both sides, the physical-biological, in which he had found his life's work, and the literary-historical side, from which he had never been completely alienated. I have never made up for these shortcomings and felt them to be a deficiency only to a small degree, and a lack of mathematical aptitude appears to run in my family. Should I call it a hereditary half-blindness of the mind? Ever since my childhood days, an indifference to knowledge of nature had been accompanied by a particularly strong susceptibility to impressions of nature, a feeling that, even before the years of puberty, took the form of lyric-sentimental raptures, which, however, never sought expression in words.⁶⁷

Translated by Diane Webb

⁶⁶ Ernst Heinrich Philipp August Haeckel (1834-1919), German philosopher and zoologist; Eduard Buchner (1860-1917), German chemist; Hendrik A. Lorentz (1853-1928), Dutch physicist; James C. Maxwell (1831-1879), English physicist.

⁶⁷ Variant in the first version, fol. 8: 'and I'd almost venture to say metaphysically tinged raptures'.