

Reception of Johan Huizinga in the USSR with a special focus on Yuri Lotman

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Today, when all the main books and articles of Johan Huizinga have been translated into Russian and published in many different editions, when his works are included in obligatory reading lists for students of humanities, when his ideas are not only discussed in academic journals but are widely used to support various authors' points of view on a vast range of topics (education, literature, politics, current affairs, to name but a few¹), when a group of characters in books by popular Soviet-Russian science fiction writers the Strugatsky Brothers is called *Homo Ludens*, it is hard to believe that the Dutch scholar's presence in Russian culture is comparatively short. The aim of the article is to outline the early reception of the philosopher's works in the USSR and in Russia and to designate points of affinity between Johan Huizinga's and Yuri Lotman's themes, approaches and ideas.

THE FIRST TRANSLATIONS INTO RUSSIAN. HUIZINGA'S RECEPTION IN THE USSR

Though Johan Huizinga's works were translated into Russian later than into other European languages and thus came to Russian readers only at the end of the 20th century, they immediately became popular with scholars in different fields and with Russian readers. *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, translated by Dmitry Silvestrov with a preface written by Alexander Mikhailov, was the first to appear in Russian – it was published in 1988 by the Nauka Publishing House in Moscow with a run of 45,000 copies. In 1992 it was followed by a volume that included two works by Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* and *In the Shadow of Tomorrow*, translated by Vladimir Oshis, and an article, *Johan Huizinga: The historian's creed* by Gayane Tavrizyan. The volume was published by Progress Publishers in Moscow with a run of 50,000 copies. In the 1990s, all the scholar's principal works were to be translated and become available in Russian.

There is little doubt, however, that Huizinga's rapidly spreading popularity with the Russian public was made possible, first and foremost, because his works and ideas had been known to Soviet scholars and students long before the first Russian translations appeared. His name was recurrently mentioned and his works and ideas were analysed as far back as the 1960s/70s. One of the first analytical articles, entitled *Johan Huizinga's Culture Studies*, was written by a young scholar Sergey Averintsev,

who later became one of the leading Soviet and Russian philologists and historians of culture. The article had been published in the Moscow *Problems of Philosophy* journal in 1969, 20 years before the Russian version of the Dutch scholar's works appeared. In his article, Averintsev gave a detailed account of Huizinga's views on cultural development. He also speculated on Huizinga's theories and their links with Christianity. Although the scholar belonged to a family of Mennonite priests, "his inherited Christianity was strongly secularized and lost its confessional features, turning into an addition (and an amendment) to the tradition of classic humanism" (1969, 170).

In 1974, an article on Huizinga written by Leonid Batkin was included in the *Soviet Historic Encyclopedia*. The author wrote:

The Autumn of the Middle Ages remains a talented contribution to contemporary historic psychology and typology of culture. Though Huizinga tended to underline concrete and unique features of the historic process and was sceptical towards cognition of universal historic laws, [...] his main work on philosophy of culture (*Homo Ludens*) is based on the so-called "play" category, where "play" is viewed as a principal feature of every culture and, what is more, of human society in general. The very singling out of the "play" element in culture subsequently resulted in the semiotic and systematic approach to culture. However, in Huizinga's works the "play" phenomenon is described in a way as if its role in different cultures was the same, as if it didn't evolve. A scholar of the traditional, liberal-humanistic school, Huizinga mused tragically upon the contemporary decline of bourgeois Western civilization (564).

It is worth mentioning, that, despite some critical overtones that were inevitable in the Soviet period with the predominance of Marxism-Leninism, where class struggle was declared to be a universal category and viewed as the leading force of history, the overall character of Huizinga's ideas and approaches seems to have found favour in Batkin's estimation.

Several works devoted to different aspects of Huizinga's intellectual heritage were written by Tavrizyan. In 1988, her book *Two Concepts of Culture Crisis: Oswald Spengler, Johan Huizinga* was published by the Iskusstvo Publishing House in Moscow. Comparing the views and approaches of the two leading cultural historians of the 20th century, the author dwells upon their pessimistic evaluation of contemporary Western culture. Much attention is given to the philosopher's views on cultural development and their descriptions of different cultural epochs and symbols. In her later article, *Johan Huizinga: The historian's creed* (1992) the author stressed the unique character of Huizinga's historiography, his "recreations of complex, bright canvases of the past, his interest in contradictory dramatic epochs: the late Middle Ages, Reformation, the Netherlands of the liberation war against Spain period. Huizinga is mainly a narrating historian. Another important role in his works is given to large-scale hypotheses concerning origins and development of the world culture" (406).

In her article, Tavrizyan also emphasized the importance of the mentality concept for Huizinga's historic approach, a concept that was further developed by a group of French cultural historians (the Annales School movement) and their Soviet-Russian colleague Aron Gurevich. All of them paid special attention to the everyday life of common people – thus, Huizinga and his followers were interested in the "morpho-

logical structure of everyday life of the late Middle Ages period in its real disorderliness, in its chaotic character and, simultaneously, in its cognitive expressiveness" (418). History, according to Huizinga, is visual and picturesque, that is why visual images and appeal to visual arts are not infrequent in his works. Tavrizyan compares Huizinga with the people of the European Renaissance; writing about *Homo Ludens*, she mentions that the author's message in the book "was full of Renaissance spirit – it shows in its powerful hyperboles and festivity, in the joy of life it radiates, in its fantastic exaggeration" (438). The scholar stresses the fact that the play phenomenon in Huizinga's interpretation has ontological status.

Huizinga's works and ideas were also mentioned and commented upon in a few other scholars' works and articles of the late Soviet period (Alexander Mikhailov, Natalia Kolodiy, Tamara Krivko-Apinyan). Two theses on different aspects of Huizinga's works were defended – *Johan Huizinga's philosophy of culture* by Apinyan (Leningrad University, 1977) and *Huizinga's cultural-historical concept* by Kolodiy (Tomsk University, 1988). Overall, his name and main ideas were not totally unknown to Soviet scholars and intelligentsia; moreover, their reception was generally highly enthusiastic and favourable, though not without minor criticism.

LOTMAN AND HUIZINGA: AFFINITIES AND SIMILARITIES

The field of the scholarly interest of the Soviet philologist, professor of Tartu University, expert in semiotics and culture studies and author of more than 800 works, Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman (1922–1993), was extremely wide and included Russian literature from the 18th to the first half of the 19th century, Russian-European cultural contacts, cultural history, semiotics, cinema and some other spheres. In his preface to Lotman's book *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (1990) Umberto Eco maintained that Lotman's ideas had been known to European scholars since the 1960s/70s mainly through translations of his theoretical works on semiotics. For obvious reasons, his works on the history of classical Russian literature and culture were less frequently translated. However, it was a part of his heritage that he started his academic research with and never set aside. In Lotman's works, Russian culture was viewed as a part of European culture that had its own identifying features. On the other hand, Russian cultural history was analysed with semiotic methods and viewed as a complex system of signs (see, for. ex., *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, Lotman – Uspensky 1984). Lotman's ideas and approaches achieved general popularity with the Soviet audiences after the *Kultura* TV Channel had made a series of his TV lectures under the general title *Talks on Russian Culture* – the first of them was made in 1986, others followed in 1987–1989. A part of the series created the foundation for the author's book *Talks on Russian Culture. Everyday Life and Traditions of the Russian Nobility (the end of the XVIII – the first half of the XIX century)* published in 1994, shortly after the author's death.

In 1989, when the Russian version of Umberto Eco's famous novel *The Name of the Rose* (translated by Yelena Kostioukovitch) was published in Moscow, the volume also included Lotman's article *Exit from the Labyrinth*. In this article, Huizinga's name is mentioned several times: according to the author, the Dutch philosopher's ideas

had clearly influenced the novel. What is more, Huizinga's name is linked with the Russian tradition, since it is mentioned along with M. Bakhtin: "Eco is well aware of M. Bakhtin's carnival theory and its great impact not only upon scholarly studies, but also upon public imagination. He is also aware of Huizinga's works and clearly takes them into consideration" (Lotman 1989, 477). Besides, Lotman states that the novel's protagonist, William of Baskerville, William of Ockham's friend, "could be easily imagined, if he had lived two centuries later, as Erasmus of Rotterdam's friend" (478), since his mindset, as the scholar sees it, is closer to that period of European history.

In the same article, the author refers to the works of Gurevich. His book *Categories of Medieval Culture*, in which Huizinga's works are widely quoted, is often referred to not only in the article under discussion, but in Lotman's different works. The very concept of mentality was first introduced to Russian scholarly investigation by Gurevich, and it clearly goes back to Huizinga (through Jacques Le Goff et al.). Following Gurevich, Lotman also uses it in Huizinga's understanding (1994).

Speculating on mirrors and their role in the text of Eco's novel (both physical and symbolic), the scholar mentions Eco's works on the semiotic role of mirrors and reflections, but adds that the novel's author bases his descriptions on other scholars' works as well – the attentive reader can easily recollect the series of Lotman's works where the problem under discussion is investigated (e.g. *Semiotics of Mirrors and Reflectivity*, 1988), among other things, on the basis of Dutch paintings. Thus, his detailed analysis of Jan van Eyck's *Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his Wife* is given in the chapter *Iconic Rhetoric* of his book *Inside the Thinking Worlds*. All the facts mentioned – direct references, as well as Huizinga's ideas, topics and characters' (Erasmus's) presence in the article and in his other works – demonstrate the Huizinga context and sub-context in Lotman's works.

Though Huizinga never wrote special works on Russian history, culture or literature, his interest in these spheres was wide – as his biographers write, he studied Russian and knew classical Russian authors well. What is more, as could be understood from allusions scattered in his works, his knowledge of Russian literature and history was detailed and profound – e. g., in Chapter III of *Homo Ludens*, speculating about prognostications as play elements, he quotes a minor character (one of the judges) from *Resurrection*, a novel by Leo Tolstoy. Other examples can be added. On the other hand, Lotman's works show his deep and thorough understanding of European history and culture – works by historians, scholars, philosophers, as well as literary texts are quoted in German, in Italian, in French, in Latin and in Old Slavonic.

What are the topics and themes where correlation between the works of the two scholars are most noticeable? How are the Dutch philosopher's ideas reflected in Lotman's works?

The most obvious correlation is the role of play, investigated by the two researchers.

In Huizinga's interpretation, the role of play in human civilization is all-embracing, since play is older than culture, but some epochs demonstrate it more vividly than others (see chapter XI "Western Civilization *Sub Specie Ludi*" from *Homo Ludens*). From his point of view, the European 17th and 18th centuries belong to this

category, when music, painting, dress and even accessories, etc., as well as behavioural patterns (etiquette) were regulated mainly by play elements.

18th-century Russia, a special field for Lotman, was a unique period for Russian cultural development. The openness-to-the-West policy proclaimed by Peter I and followed by his successors resulted in huge transformations in many spheres of the country's life. "Petrovian reforms changed the everyday behaviour of the Russian nobility: native things and patterns were replaced by foreign and alien, spontaneous – by conscious and normative. Everyday behaviour demanded textbooks and instructions, as well as the ritual one, and regulations, as military service" – Lotman wrote in his article "Voyage to the Isle of Love by V. Trediakovsky and functions of literature in translation" (1985c, 224). In a new cultural environment, every printed text was viewed and used as an instruction, and every text of fiction in translation – as a model for behavioural patterns. Being transplanted into a new culture, Western models were mixed with Russian native patterns, thus creating a unique mix of languages, fashions, attitudes etc. Imitation was often regarded as play, funny and serious at the same time. This cultural mix is analysed in several of Lotman's works – a series of articles devoted to Pushkin's correlations with French literature, *Russian Literature Written in French* (1988), to name but a few. What is more, Lotman discloses the mechanisms of European culture transplantations and adaptations in Russia and shows that a problem of meaning is a problem of translatability.

One of the most interesting examples is Trediakovsky's novel, a free translation of Paul Tallemand's novel *Le voyage a l'île d'Amour*, which became the first contemporary Western novel translated into Russian and published in 1730. It was also the first secular book of fiction in Russia. A book of modest merits and one of many in French literature, it became unique in Russian: "Being transplanted from its French cultural context and put into Russian, it [...] changed both its meaning and cultural function [...] It was torn apart from its natural cultural context, [...] and became an isolated text, closed in itself" (Lotman 1985c, 225). At the same time, both Trediakovsky himself and his Russian readers took it as an instruction, since it described the "normative behaviour of a person in love, [...] lover's roles" (222), and presented its readers with the language of feelings. The French chivalric culture was, as Huizinga wrote, a form of art, an artificial form – having been transplanted into Russian life, it made a powerful impetus to develop new cultural forms. Having analysed the situation and the role of Trediakovsky's novel in Russian culture, Lotman makes the following conclusion: "In the original situation of French gallantry, the very cultural environment gave rise to novels of a certain type, while in translation the novel's text was called to create an adequate cultural environment" (227). The reading public eagerly appropriated Western modes – in the middle of the 18th century Russian readers were eagerly reading many European novels in translation; by the end of the 18th century, the first Russian books of fiction became popular. Very quickly, during the first decades of the 19th century, Russian literature reached its heights.

Not only the general concept of play but a more detailed picture of its forms and variants was analysed and classified in *Homo Ludens*, and also in several of Lotman's works. "Studying the entertainment culture of the beginning of the XIX century, we

can't avoid military actions of a mass character, just like one can't avoid the circus from the entertainment of ancient Rome, or bull fights – from that of Spain” (1992, 279).

Duels were considered by Huizinga to be forms of military play (chapter V *Play and War*): in some historic periods, where war and nobility customs were strong, duels could take serious forms and lead to the rivals' and even their seconds' deaths. He also stressed that concepts of honour and revenge were closely associated with dueling. Though never mentioned in the chapter, the Russian XIX century, especially its first half, was the period when duels were very frequent and often led to tragic outcomes – thus, the two leading poets of the period, Alexander Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov, were killed in duels in 1837 and 1841, respectively, and the outstanding poet and diplomat Alexander Griboyedov had his hand badly wounded during a 1817 duel when he was a second. Russian literature of the period abounds in duel episodes: Pushkin's, Lermontov's, Marlinsky's characters, even Pierre Bezukhov in Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, etc. Lotman was an expert in the duel code – he wrote about it in his commentaries to *Eugene Onegin* by Pushkin and in some other works. But Russian duels of the period were considered by him not as signs of pointless cruelty, but as vivid signs of the Russian nobility's changing role and, most importantly, of its newly developed self-awareness (1994). Thus, duels are viewed by the two scholars from different points of view – as a war game by Huizinga and as a symbolic action, a sign of Russian historic development by Lotman.

Since, according to Lotman, culture embraces all spheres of life, nothing is irrelevant in cultural semiotics, which is why details of everyday life are paid much attention in his works. Here, again, Huizinga's influence (mediated by the works of Gurevich) can be traced. Several important works are devoted to the everyday life of the Russian people in the late 18th/early 19th century. That was the period when representatives of the Russian nobility and civil servants found themselves in a peculiar situation: they were “foreigners in their own country”, since they had to acquire artificial modes of behaviour alien to them; “Cultural inversion of this type didn't mean ‘Europeanization’ of everyday life in its direct meaning, since transplanted-from-the-West modes and foreign languages, when they became normal means of communication in Russian [...] environment, changed their function” (Lotman 1985b, 68). Being natural in the West, after transplantation these features stressed non-European features of Russian everyday life: “To some extent, acquisition of European ways didn't cancel, but often enhanced antagonism towards foreigners” (68).

Indeed, the scholar writes about the split mentality of the Russian nobility of the period – it was “life-play, when everybody was constantly on the scene” (68) and the very “image of European life was doubled in a ritualized play of European life” (69), conscious and unconscious at the same time. After the Napoleonic wars, when the future Decembrists started their activities, they opposed themselves to the existing modes of behaviour by working out their own behavioural code of everyday life (Lotman 1985a). So, Lotman considers modes and traits of everyday life to be a significant semiotic problem, where minor details of seemingly insignificant actions signify vast ideological, historic and cultural processes and provoke further development.

There are other affinities in the works of the two scholars that we would like only

to mention without going into greater detail. The gambling as a play phenomenon is discussed in Chapter III of *Homo Ludens* and as a cultural phenomenon and literary topic in Lotman's works (e.g. *Cards and Card Games in Russian Literature of the Early XIX century*, 1975), just like theatre and theatricality, knights and knighthood, and language plays and their role, humanism and totalitarianism in history and in the contemporary world are given much attention in the works of Dutch and Soviet scholars. What is more, they both regarded history as, first and foremost, national identity, and both stressed strong connections between history and literature, where literature was created according to (or, rather, because of) certain historic circumstances, and literature often triggered historic processes and interpreted them.

The two researchers approached the material they studied from different methodological standpoints, though even here certain similarities can be clearly seen – despite the sociological emphasis that is obvious in his works, Huizinga seems to have made almost no use of Marxian ideas; neither did Lotman, who clearly rejected Marxian and Leninist ideology, though his attitude to Marxism in general was complicated and formed partly by certain facts of his personal biography. On the other hand, both scholars based their studies of mentality on similar theoretical sources – Huizinga was very interested in the work of the group headed by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch, to be found in the periodical *Annales d'histoire economique et sociale*, with its self-conscious use of social materials and sociological method, while Lotman based his conclusions mainly on the works of their followers and disciples, Le Goff and Gurevich. Being an adherent of structuralist and semiotic methods, Lotman successfully applied them to cultural studies. Overall, both Johan Huizinga and Yuri Lotman drew a vast and bright picture of West European and Russian cultural development and disclosed their peculiarities and meanings.

NOTES

¹ We have checked Huizinga's quotation index in "Zhurnal'nyj Zal" (Magazines' reading room) – Russian literary internet project where serious literary magazines are presented. During the last five years, his name was mentioned more than fifty times.

RUSSIAN TRANSLATIONS OF HUIZINGA'S WORKS

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Russian translations. Reception. Play in culture. Mentality. Everyday life. Similarity.

The article is devoted to Johan Huizinga's reception in the USSR and in Russia. Though his works were translated into Russian only at the end of the 20th century, his ideas had been known to Soviet scholars and discussed by them before the translations appeared – works by Sergey Averintsev, Leonid Batkin, Gayane Tavrizyan are referred to. Yuri Lotman, a famous philologist and semiotician, studied the West European impact on Russian cultural development. Huizinga's context of his works is a complex system that includes references, allusions, common topics and characters, as well as some common sources. The most obvious correlations of themes and ideas that are discussed in the article are the play elements of culture and the everyday life phenomenon which are disclosed and studied by the two scholars, though from different methodological standpoints. Different correlations are also mentioned, but not studied in detail.

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