whereas - Van Eyck went on - Dutch literary journals had acclaimed the appearance of *Herfsttij* with warm applause.[15] Why the reserve of the historians?

In 1919 Dutch mediaeval studies were still in their infancy, even though archivists and professors such as Fruin, Blok and later on Gosses had made individual contributions in the field. It was only shortly after 1900 that in Utrecht the first Chair of Mediaeval History was established; it was held by the German Otto Oppermann, who had been trained in the rigorous German school. After that, the Catholic University of Nijmegen also appointed a professor of mediaeval history but before 1940 no other university in the Netherlands followed suit. The technique of scientific diplomatics had not yet been used for systematically examining Dutch mediaeval documents, still largely unpublished. Diplomatic studies constituted the major interest of the Utrecht school and it was necessary that it should be so. In comparison with other countries, Dutch mediaeval scholarship was very much behindhand, particularly in institutional, political and economie history. A great deal of work was now done, pioneering work with the one-sidedness that often accompanies it, but important results were obtained. It soon became evident, however, that such an almost fanatic application of the rules of diplomatics could lead to a hypercritical attitude. Thus a number of charters were adjudged to be false, which, it turned out later, were in fact perfectly authentic. Furthermore, this preoccupation with diplomatic material and, through it, with politico-institutional history led to an extremely one-sided evaluation of the narrative sources. These were seen as for the most part highly unreliable, and were therefore to all intents and purposes rejected as historical sources. This was an attitude which mediaevalists elsewhere had adopted too, for instance in Germany in the middle of the nineteenth century, but there this stage in the development of mediaeval studies had long since been left behind. The very late development of Dutch mediaeval scholarschip was due to the fact that the nation's most glorious history lay not in the Middle Ages but in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The less spectacular history of the Middle Ages, which were, moreover, Catholic in their spiritual climate, held little attraction for Dutch nineteenth-century historians.

This was the situation in which Huizinga lived and worked. Through various circumstances his first publications in the historical field (1905-6) were related to a subject which in the perspective of his previous as well as of his later preoccupations may be considered rather eccentric and unexpected: the early history and institutions of the town of Haarlem. On the suggestion of the archivist S. Muller of Utrecht, he also edited, in 1911, the legal source material pertaining to this town.[16] To pass from ancient Indian literature to the history of mediaeval Haarlem was a

15. M. ter Braak, *De Stem,* X (1930) 822-839; P. N. van Eyck, *Leiding,* I (1930) 203-222.
16. J. Huizinga, *Rechtsbronnen der stad Haarlem* (The Hague, 1911) (Werken der Vereeniging tot uitgaaf der bronnen van het Oud-Vaderlandsche Recht, 2e reeks, XIII).

very big step indeed, but, if we may believe his own words, the subject intrigued him. In the context of this investigation, Huizinga could not avoid pronouncing a judgment on the authenticity of Haarlem's town charter, but in arriving at a conclusion Huizinga had merely his intuition and common sense to guide him. In retrospect we may say that his reasoning was perfectly sound. Yet the 'real', that is, the trained mediaevalists used other instruments for this type of investigation: a thorough knowledge of diplomatics, of sigillography and of other auxiliary sciences, in which Huizinga had never been trained and which he had never taken up. Huizinga concluded that Haarlem's town charter was genuine. In 1923 he had the courage, or naiveté, to defend his opinion in a lively but nonetheless dignified article against the contentions of a pupil of Oppermann who in his doctoral thesis of 1921 attempted to prove that in the light of thorough diplomatic research the charter could not be regarded as genuine. Oppermann then took up the defence of his pupil. He did not refrain from drawing attention in a somewhat disparaging manner to what he saw as the amateurism of Huizinga's method. In his opinion Huizinga was not a mediaevalist but an old-fashioned dilettante.[17] Since in these years almost all mediaevalists belonged to the Utrecht school, Huizinga's place was clear: outside the circle of his professional colleagues. Insiders will not be unacquainted with the fact that the young doctor whose views were attacked by Huizinga, Dr. C. D. J. Brandt, later came to oppose the excessive scepticism of Oppermann's school with regard to the authenticity of mediaeval charters and no longer supported the conclusions of his own dissertation. It is equally well known that, much later, the dissertation of H. P. H. Camps removed practically all doubts (apparently for good) as to the authenticity of the Haarlem charter.[18] This, of course, does not vindicate Huizinga's somewhat questionable methods of investigation - it merely indicates the accuracy of his intuition.

This was the climate of opinion in 1919 when Huizinga published his *Herfsttij*. *Herfsttij* was based on chronicles, not on charters, it was a book not about politics, economic history or institutions, but about - as was stated in the subtitle - 'forms of life, thought and art'. The small circle of Huizinga's colleagues was shocked that a professor of history, including mediaeval history, could write a book so clearly opposed to the spirit of modern scholarship. But could one have expected anything different from a man whose inaugural lecture of 1905 had dealt with so elusive a subject as 'The aesthetic element in historical thought'? (VII, 3-23)[19] In short, the

17. C. D. J. Brandt, *Bijdrage tot de kritiek van Hollandsche stadsrechten der XIIIe eeuw* (Utrecht, 1921); J. Huizinga, 'Noodwendig vertoog' (II, 22-34); O. Oppermann, *Opmerkingen over Hollandsche stadsrechten der XIIIe eeuw* (Utrecht, 1923) 18-26.
18. H. P. H. Camps, *De stadsrechten van graaf Willem II van Holland en hun verhouding tot het recht van 's Hertogenbosch* (Utrecht, 1948).
19. English translation in: J. Huizinga, *Dutch civilisation in the 17th century, and other essays* (London, 1968) 219-243.

reactions published were not enthusiastic. The work was seen as rather unscholarly and not up-to-date, in fact as old-fashioned.

In the Netherlands another interesting objection was raised. In a long article, published in the general magazine *Onze Eeuw* ('Our Century'),[20] the Utrecht archivist Muller praised Huizinga's achievement but rejected his results, on the grounds that the sources he used were one-sided and were responsible for the fact that the political and economic aspects of the period had been passed over. He also issued a stern warning to Huizinga: the practice of scientific inquiry, he wrote, and the attempt to give a literary form to the outcome of such an inquiry are two things which it is dangerous to combine. To quote him: 'Literary laurels are always somewhat dangerous for an historian.' Thus Huizinga's book was a failure as a scholarly historical work and it was literary in form. Was it then indeed - as evil tongues would have it - no more and no less than a novel?

It will have become evident by now that Franz Arens was right in thinking that Dutch historians were not sympathetic to *Herfsttij* and that in the Netherlands it might be necessary to break a lance for the value of narrative sources. Naturally Huizinga did not publicly respond to the many reviews of his work, certainly not to the reviews of the various translations. But in a letter to his publisher, H. D. Tjeenk Willink in Haarlem, dated January 10, 1920, Huizinga made a short comment on Muller's article in *Onze Eeuw:* 'Yesterday I read Muller's article. It was really rather silly'. This is not the reaction of a deeply shocked man. What Huizinga probably thought was so silly about Muller's views and those of all the other Dutch historians as well, was that they simply overlooked the fact that the subtitle of the book had set very definite limits to the subject. In his preface to the second Dutch edition Huizinga emphatically drew attention to this subtitle, since it also explained the one-sidedness of his source material.

More than ten years later, Ter Braak and Van Eyck put forward the hypothesis that, indirectly, the rather indifferent or hostile tone of the Dutch reviews exercised a major influence on Huizinga's development. They surmised that Huizinga was deeply shocked by the fact that *Herfsttij* was so coolly received by Dutch historians and so loudly praised by literary critics. According to Van Eyck this had two consequences. After this time Huizinga increasingly emphasized the cultural value of critical, scholarly historiography. Secondly, Van Eyck says, Huizinga started to attack pseudo-history with ever-increasing bitterness. All this meant that 'the sifter of facts' had overcome 'the creator of forms'. I am personally very sceptical about this interpretation which I do not think corresponds to the facts, and I can find no indication whatever that Huizinga ever, then or later, saw his *Herfsttij* as a work that it would be fair to compare in any respect with the pseudo-history or 'histoire parfumée' he despised.

20. S. Muller Fzn., *Onze Eeuw,* I (1920) 78-104.

If the Dutch historians totally failed to understand the greatness of *Herfsttij,* did the historical profession outside the Netherlands immediately perceive its real value? Not at all. The Belgian historians, for instance, paid very little attention to Huizinga; the *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* mentioned the second Dutch edition only in the list of new books and in a later volume also the Spanish translation was merely catalogued. In the *Revue du Nord* (partly Belgian), which was founded in 1940, Huizinga's name was never mentioned, neither through any discussion of his books nor through an obituary. When I studied at the University of Ghent during the academie year 1947-8, I noticed that the students had no knowledge of Huizinga and had not read any of his works. They explained this by saying that their professors did not consider the reading of his works at all necessary. I do not know if this was true, but certainly the more advanced students with whom I had contact found it very strange that I had spent a good deal of time preparing the bibliography of Huizinga printed in the last volume of the *Verzamelde Werken* and correcting the proofs of several other volumes.

In England two reviews of *Herfsttij* were published in 1925. They probably did not stimulate English interest in the book. The *English Historical Review* published a review of two and a half pages by Kingsford,[21] which is so confused and incoherent that the reader of today is unable to make out what the author was trying to say. Kingsford started by suggesting that a work like *Herfsttij* could not have been written about the English fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, since neither the fine arts nor the literature of the period could be compared with their Burgundian counterparts. I must say I have my doubts about this, but I do not pretend to know better. Then he contends that a human being of the fifteenth century probably felt the same passions as we do today. Huizinga would have discovered this, he says, if he had seen more private letters and archive material. Our immediate question here is: where would one be able to find such private correspondence? But although Kingsford does not seem to have grasped the full significance of his own remark, it must be emphasized that he drew the attention to a vital problem which - as I shall indicate later - it was the merit of Lucien Febvre to explore further. Finally a direct quotation from Kingsford's review:

> Dr Huizinga, in his protest against the methods of the scientific historian, who is in risk of neglecting the difference of tone in the life of the fifteenth century and makes a craze of economie causes, has somewhat obscured the political and social evolution which was the real moving force of the times.

Huizinga, according to this reviewer, did not see 'the real moving force'; this, of course, was a fatal flaw. But was it really true that Huizinga had placed himself explicitly in opposition to the scientific historian? What kind of historian did Hui-

21. C. L. Kingsford, *English Historical Review,* XL (1925) 273-275.

zinga consider himself to be then? Kingsford probably did not contribute to Huizinga's fame in England.

More sensational, and therefore undoubtedly more stimulating for the sale of the book, must have been Crump's conclusion in *History* in the same year 1925:[22]

> And yet it leaves on the mind a curious impression,- a sort of suspicion seizes the reader that if Professor Huizinga is right, most men who lived in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries must have been practically insane.

In a sense he is right, A psychiatrist told me, when I asked him about it, that, if the *Herfsttij-people* were walking around in Europe today, they would very quickly be shut up in a mental institution. Insanity, however, is a time-and-culture-bound concept, and certainly on this point we should not apply modern standards to persons living in the fifteenth century. Here again, the reviewer raises an essential point, but, as it were, without realizing it. And again, it was Lucien Febvre who later recognized the real significance of the problem, that is the problem of historical psychology.

One gets the impression that the American historical journals were much more sympathetic towards *Herfsttij*. Doubtless this was a consequence of their own brand of mediaeval scholarship which allowed for the use of chronicles rather than of archive material, which was not easily available. Nevertheless an anonymous reviewer[23] describes the book as somewhat extravagant and therefore ultimately unsatisfactory. In the *American Historical Review,* however, appeared a fairly enthusiastic review. Although the conclusion of *Herfsttij* is considered disappointing because 'the advent of the new form' was not sufficiently developed, there is on the other hand so much praise that the review as a whole may be characterized as laudatory. It is interesting that the reviewer notices that Huizinga made use of psychological and sociological 'laws'. About the first two chapters he says: 'This seems altogether too sweeping and sociological'. In 1925, apparently, this was not good form, at least not in the *AHR.*[24]

Let us now turn to the German reviews, which - whether or not they ultimately influenced Dutch opinion - are distinctly positive, although here too there is no lack of criticism. The essential difference between the reviews we have discussed earlier and these German reviews is that the German historians and art historians were perfectly aware that they were criticizing a fundamentally important book. This is not apparent in the Dutch, Belgian, British or American reviews.

Some art historians refused to accept unquestioningly Huizinga's thesis that the painting of the brothers Van Eyck did not herald any kind of Renaissance. Richard

22. C. G. Crump, *History,* X (1925) 163-164.
23. *The Nation,* CXXII (1926) 262.
24. G. C. Sellery, *American Historical Review,* XXXI (1925-1926) 113-114.

Hamann,[25] for instance, compared *Herfsttij* to Burckhardt's *Cultur der Renaissance,* and attempted to prove, chapter for chapter, that the new form that was coming was far more important than Huizinga suggested. His criticism sounds somewhat strained. But Huizinga had, of course, been conscious of the fact that art historians in particular would contest his position on this subject. His intuitive conviction that the Van Eycks did not belong to the Renaissance was one of the main premises of his description of the late Middle Ages.

The *Historische Zeitschrift*[26] described *Herfsttij* as an important book and stated - unlike the Dutch reviewers - that the work combined strict scientific investigation with a very readable style. It is worth noticing that the *HZ* reviewed *Herfsttij* before the German translation was published. The *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik,* however, is disappointing because in the review on *Herfsttij* which it printed, no socio-political, socio-historical or even sociological comment is to be found.[27] The reviewer rejected, as the art historians also did, Huizinga's judgment on Jan van Eyck. In the *Archiv für Politik und Geschichte* Franz Arens[28] praised *Herfsttij* exuberantly, but raised a fundamental question. If one agrees, he wrote, with Huizinga's dictum that dreams are more important than census and tax figures, must one then necessarily conclude that reality outside such dreams consists exclusively of these figures? Were not the dreams of the *Herfsttij* people an anachronism, and did not a very important primary reality exist beside those dreams, a reality certainly not made up of facts and figures alone?

Finally, in the *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen*[29] appeared a seven-page review of *Herfsttij* by A. Hessel. There, at last, it is approvingly stated that thanks to its psychological analysis of late mediaeval men, the book is modern. This is a remark with which I heartily agree. If an uninitiated reader happens to look at this paper he may well come to the conclusion that I am dealing with an old-fashioned book, and indeed this was exactly what in some circles it was considered to be. I was delighted when at last I found a review in which a professional historian emphasized its modernity.

But Hessel had some critical remarks to make as well, one of them being that in his view *Herfsttij* was too vague a book. He hardly elaborated this, but I have the impression that he intended to express the feeling formulated with rare precision by Huizinga's son Leonhard:

> Even in that masterwork, *Herfsttij,* I sense that curious inability to bring the whole to a good conclusion, which for me typifies some of his works. At the beginning I have

25. Richard Hamann, *Repertorium der Kunstwissenschaft,* XLVI (1925) 151-152.
26. See note 9.
27. Hans Huth, *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik,* LIV (1925) 252-254.
28. See note 11.
29. A. Hessel, *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen,* CLXXXVI (1924) 81-87.

> the feeling: Here is a perfect work of art being created. Here he is building a bridge which, in one mighty span, in superb harmony and symmetry, will reach the other side. But, later, doubts arise. Does not the almost completed bridge stop short in the scaffolding when its builder loses himself in ever new examples of his thesis, and thus in repetition?[30]

I know of no other evaluation that combines so much basic criticism with so much justified sympathy.

The last German reviewer I mention here is Hans Günter, who in 1926 wrote a very extensive article in the *Historisches Jahrbuch der Görresgesellschaft.*[31] Günter probed deeply into the psychological aspect of *Herfsttij* and he expressed serious criticism:

> Problems are described for which the explanation that such behaviour is universally human is adequate. The tension which the book discusses in chapters one and thirteen is not mediaeval but universally human, and indeed modern too, as long as good and evil, passion and conscience exist side by side and opposite each other.

This brings us to the interesting question of how modern French historiography, whose greatest contribution I consider to be the discovery of the 'histoire des mentalités' or psychological history, reacted to *Herfsttij.* The French history of *Herfsttij* contains an element of tragedy. Very soon after 1919 Gabriel Hanotaux was already trying, through the Dutch and French Academies, to have the work published in France. It was translated at once, but Hanotaux could not find a publisher. It was only in 1932 that *Herfsttij* at last appeared in French, with a preface by Hanotaux himself.[32] This preface may be partly responsible for the fact noted by Lucien Febvre,[33] that the book was so little known in France. It may not have been too stimulating to read in the preface: 'The state is order; law is its measure; work is salvation; and finally: let us gather from this book many an edifying lesson'. Perhaps it is not fair to be so sceptical now about statements made thirty years ago, but Hanotaux was already 79 years old in 1932 and although he was an honoured member of the Academy, it is doubtful if he was still very influential. And surely, he was not the right propagandist for *Herfsttij.*

Although the French are sometimes criticized with some justification for ignoring foreign publications, I know at least five French reviews of *Herfsttij* written even before the French translation was published. Four reviewers discussed the first German edition, one, Marc Bloch, the second. One of these early reviews is more comical than important, for us at any rate. The *Revue Bénédictine* was irritated by the fact that Huizinga showed little appreciation for the simple beliefs of the Catho-

30. Leonhard Huizinga, *Herinneringen aan mijn vader* (TheHague, 1963) 194.
31. H. Günter, *Historisches Jahrbuch der Görresgesellschaft,* XLVI (1926) 622-630.
32. J. Huizinga, *Le Déclin du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1932).
33. Lucien Febvre, 'Comment reconstituer la vie affective d'autrefois. La sensibilité et 1'histoire' (1941), *Combats pour l'histoire* (2nd ed., Paris, 1965) 226.

lic faithful: 'Is there not a tendency toward a Protestant or Jansenist spirit discernible in his criticism of certain kinds of worship of the Virgin Mother and the Saints ?[34]

Marc Bloch's review[35] was the first of real importance in France. He described *Herfsttij* as 'a capital book', and as 'one of the most original and suggestive historical works that have been written for a long time.' One recognizes the founder of the *Annales* when he writes: 'It is a study of historical psychology, which is collective psychology, of course.' But in the *Annales* itself the first French edition of *Herfsttij* was not reviewed and this makes it somewhat difficult to ascertain what in those early years of its existence the members of this group thought about Huizinga's book. According to the testimony of younger members of the *Annales* Huizinga's work undoubtedly exercised a certain amount of influence in the sense that it was considered to be stimulating and in line with the preoccupations of the group. In a personal letter Robert Mandrou kindly told me that Lucien Febvre always spoke of Huizinga with the utmost respect and admiration, an attitude also apparent in his preface to the French translation of Huizinga's *Erasmus.* In other passages Febvre wrote about Huizinga in the same way. In 1935 he described *Herfsttij* as an admirable psychological monograph,[36] in 1938 as 'a highly suggestive book' in which, however, - and this was a fundamental critical note - much was stated without being explained; explanation, he thought, called for more systematic research.[37] In 1941 Febvre wrote[38] that in France the book had not had the success it deserved. Trying to account for this he sought for other than merely external factors and asked himself whether weaknesses in Huizinga's own conception might have been one of the causes of French indifference. Indeed, *did* the late Middle Ages constitute 'a special and distinct period in the affective history of man?' According to Lucien Febvre, Huizinga's starting point was questionable. He should first have realized that humanity generally is characterized by an 'ambivalence des sentiments', and thereafter he should have asked himself if in some periods particular elements in the spectrum of human sensibility are more prominent than in others. Only then would he have been able to approach the subject from the right angle.

Although both Mare Bloch and Lucien Febvre continued throughout their life to give *Herfsttij* the full measure of their admiration, in the course of the years they came nevertheless to formulate increasingly critical reservations. Small wonder! In the beginning they were delighted to discover a kindred spirit, but the more refined their own research methods in the 'histoire des mentalités' became, the more sharply aware they themselves became of Huizinga's shortcomings in this

34. P. Rox, *Revue Bénédictine,* XXXVIII (1926) 87-88.
35. See note 10.
36. Lucien Febvre, 'De Sluter à Sambin', *Combats,* 300.
37. Lucien Febvre, 'Une vue d'ensemble. Histoire et psychologie', *Combats,* 215.
38. See note 33.

respect. It is a great pity that *Herfsttij* was published so late in the only country in which, through its approach and its method, it could have exerted influence in 1919 and in the years immediately thereafter. When it finally was published, it was regarded as a work related in spirit to the *Annales* but lacking the precision of method which the *Annales-group* was trying to establish.

Let me summarize. In surveying the whole corpus of reviews of *Herfsttij* the reader cannot help being surprised by the fact that only very few authors were able to understand what was so unusual about a book which some of them greatly admired. Comment upon Huizinga's use of source material remained superficial. The reviewers failed to recognize that Huizinga was exploring what was to become a totally new field of historical research, the 'histoire des mentalités' or psychological history. Only the French at that moment would have been able to see it. All reviewers, with one exception, missed another important point which to us is obvious: the connection between *Herfsttij* and Burckhardt's work. One has the impression that in his studies on the Renaissance Huizinga himself was the first to draw attention to this. It is equally striking that none of the reviewers made any comment on Huizinga's aristocratie attitude or his cultural pessimism. When many years later *Herfsttij* was often mentioned in discussion of Huizinga's conception of cultural decline, this was due to his *In the Shadow of Tomorrow*. Before the publication of that book no one had ever done so.

This, then, was *Herfsttij in* the years when Huizinga was not yet a European figure; this was *Herfsttij* without the later Huizinga: an unusual book that, notwithstanding its sales figures, became influential much more slowly than one might have supposed, a book that was not old-fashioned in 1919 but, on the contrary, in several important ways too modern to be immediately understood.

Probably the author, working and studying all by himself in a somewhat isolated situation, did not anticipate the influence of his approach and method. As far as I know he did not notice that in the 1930s Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, both of whom he admired, were starting a school and a periodical in which some of his own preoccupations were more fully and systematically developed. Huizinga had little interest in methodology. Yet he wrote a book that gives much more than a brilliant portrait of a period. It inspired historians to look at history generally in a totally new manner.

6. Huizinga et les themes macabres

PHILIPPE ARIÈS

I. LA POSITION DU PROBLÈME

Des recherches en cours sur les attitudes devant la mort m'ont amené à relire, longtemps hélas après la première découverte, au temps ancien de mes études, le *Déclin du Moyen Age,* et j'ai été surpris par sa merveilleuse fraîcheur. Il faut se rappeler que ce livre a paru en France il y a quarante ans, en 1932, à une époque où 1'histoire événementielle ou historisante n'avait pas capitulé et où la nouvelle histoire, celle d'aujourd'hui, se voulait d'abord, malgré quelques grands livres pionniers, économique et sociale: rappelons nous le premier titre des *Annales* de L. Febvre et de M. Bloch. C'est seulement depuis une décennie que 1'histoire des mentalités fondée justement par Huizinga, Febvre, Bloch, auquel j'ajouterai M. Praz,[1] a recruté bon ou mal an un contingent de chercheurs et de thésards suffisant pour faire bonne figure scientifique. C'est pourtant alors, en pleine innovation de 1'histoire économico-sociale, que Huizinga dénoncait ses insuffisances - ou sa suffisance: 'Les historiens modernes qui, dans les documents, essayent de suivre le développement des faits et des situations a la fin du Moyen Age accordent en général peu d'importance aux idees chevaleresques, qu'ils considèrent comme un monde sans valeur réelle'. Le but de 1'historien socio-économique n'aurait-il pas dû être justement, de chercher par-dessous des apparences jugées insignifiantes, les motivations profondes? Certes, reconnaît Huizinga: 'Les hommes qui firent 1'histoire de ces temps-là, princes, nobles, prélats ou bourgeois, ne furent pas des rêveurs, mais des hommes publics et des marchands froids et calculateurs'. Au XVe siècle 'la puissance commerciale de la bourgeoisie étayait la puissance monetaire des princes'. Toutefois il ajoute: 'sans doute, mais 1'histoire de la civilisation doit s'occuper aussi bien des rêves de beauté et de 1'illusion romanesque que des chiffres de la population et des impôts'. Et en 1930 1'histoire démographique n'avait pas encore envahi nos bibliothèques! Pour la connaissance de la civilisation d'une époque, ajoute-t-il enfin: '1'illusion même dans laquelle ont vécu les contemporains à la valeur d'une vérité'.[2] Phrase qu'on dirait d'aujourd'hui,

1. Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (Londres, 1933).
2. J. Huizinga, *Le déclin du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1932) 98.

qui revendique le droit d'écrire 1'histoire des illusions, des choses inaperçues, imaginaires: 1'histoire dite aujourd'hui des mentalités.

C'est 1'une de ces 'illusions', l'illusion macabre, que je voudrais étudier ici, en restant fidèle à 1'esprit de Huizinga, même quand je m'écarte un peu de sa lettre et en hommage à sa mémoire. Les données macabres du XIVe-XVe siècle, Huizinga les a situées dans une série de faits constitués de données synchroniques, c'est-à-dire datées toutes d'une même époque, du XIVe au XVIe siècle. Dans une telle série, dans le corpus ainsi formé, les données macabres étaient des éléments parmi d'autres, comme les allégories, la sensibilité aux couleurs, 1'émotivité etc. Le but de Huizinga était en effet de saisir les caractères originaux de cette époque, prise dans sa totalité et considérée comme une totalité homogène. On sait qu'il est parvenu à une représentation dramatique, pathétique de cette époque. Aujourd'hui cette version noire est toujours admise. M. Mollat et J. Glénisson trouvent même dans les grandes pestes et dans les crises économiques sa confirmation.[3] D'autres historiens au contraire comme J. Heers[4] contestent ce caractère de catastrophe: *Grammatici certant.* De plus savants fairont mieux que moi le point de ce débat. Qu'il suffise ici de constater que les faits macabres sont situés par Huizinga et par les auteurs qui le suivent dans une perspective de crise.

De nos jours, A. Tenenti a de son côté apporté une autre contribution.[5] Il n'est pas facile de ramener à une formulation trop simple la diversité des analyses de Tenenti. Est-ce que je trompe beaucoup en balisant dans son oeuvre les deux directions suivantes? D'une part, 1'opposition d'un Moyen Age finissant où la vie terrestre est considérée comme 1'antichambre de 1'éternité, et d'une Renaissance où la mort n'est plus 1'épreuve qu'il faut gagner à tout prix, et n'est même plus toujours le début d'une vie nouvelle. D'autre part, 1'opposition d'un amour passionné du monde d'ici-bas, et du sentiment amer et désespéré de sa fragilité, que traduisent les signes de la mort physique. Dans tous ces systèmes de pensée, les donneés macabres sont situées dans leur temps et reliées aux autres données de leur temps, afin d'atteindre une meilleure compréhension de ce temps.

Le but que je vous propose ici sera différent de celui recherché par Huizinga ou Tenenti. Ces mêmes données macabres, je tenterai de les situer dans une série de faits organisés autrement. La série de Huizinga était synchronique, la mienne sera diachronique, c'est-à-dire constituée de données ressemblant aux données macabres du XVe siècle, mais les unes antérieures, les autres postérieures. Disons plus sim-

3. M. Mollat, *Genèse médiévale de la France moderne, XIVe-XVe siècles* (Paris, 1970); J. Glénisson, e.a., *Textes et documents d'histoire du Moyen Age, XIVe-XVe siècles,* I, *Perspectives d'ensemble: les 'crises' et leur cadre* (Paris, 1970).

4. J. Heers, *L'Occident aux XIVe et XVe siècles. Aspects économiques et sociaux* (Paris, 1970) 118-121, 231-233, 321-326 *et passim.*

5. *A.* Tenenti, *La vie et la mort à travers l'art du XVe siècle* (Paris, 1952); *Idem, Il senso della morte e l'amore della vita nel Rinascimento* (Turin, 1957).

plement que je voudrais esquisser une histoire comparée des thèmes macabres dans une longue durée, du XIIIe au XVIIIe siècle. Nous partirons néanmoins toujours du XVe siècle. Quand on parle de thèmes macabres, on se reporte spontanément au XVe siècle, un peu avant, un peu après, parce que c'est à cette époque que les historiens les ont repérés et analysés, c'est pour comprendre cette époque qu'ils les ont interprétés. Il suffira donc de rappeler brièvement les éléments du corpus déjà réuni par les historiens. Nous le compléterons ensuite en amont vers Ie XIIIe siècle, en aval vers le XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle, avant de revenir au XVe siècle pour présenter un essai d'explication, et enfin nous nous reporterons au début du XIXe siècle pour en saisir 1'évolution à son terme.

Le corpus de base a été constitué à partir de deux sortes de sources: les sources iconographiques et les sources littéraires. Les sources iconographiques sont d'abord les plus connues, quoique peut-être pas les plus significatives: les tombeaux à transis, où les défunts sont représentés mangés par les vers, en cours de décomposition. Notons, cela est important, que de tels monuments sont peu nombreux et assez localisés. La majorité des tombeaux suivaient d'autres modèles, d'autres canons. Ensuite les danses macabres et les triomphes de la mort, des fresques destinées à la décoration des charniers, c'est-à-dire des cimetières. Elles ont été tres etudiées. Enfin les illustrations de l'office des morts, dans les 'Heures'. On rattachera à ces peintures de manuscrits souvent très frappantes, les gravures de bois des *Artes Moriendi,* manuels de préparation devote à la bonne mort.

Après les sources iconographiques, les sources litteraires. Sermons et poèmes comme ceux de Deschamps, de Chastellain, de Villon jusqu'à Ronsard. Parmi ces poètes, les uns pourraient être considérés comme des illustrateurs de 1'iconographie macabre, car ils ne lui ajoutent rien. D'autres vont plus loin parce qu'ils établissent une relation impressionnante entre la décomposition du corps après la mort, et les conditions les plus habituelles de la vie. Ils montrent sous la peau du vivant qui se croit en bonne santé, les organes horribles, les liquides infectes, les 'puces et cirons' qui, le jour de la mort, triompheront du corps et le feront disparaître. Ces poètes donnent une importance particuliere aux descriptions de la maladie et de 1'agonie.

Mais il est remarquable qu'ils ne seront pas suivis, ni imités par les artistes, peintres ou sculpteurs. Ceux-ci hésitent au contraire à représenter les signes extrêmes de la souffrance et de 1'agonie. Le gisant au lit malade des *Artes Moriendi* ne montre pas qu'il est à la dernière extrémité. Ce n'est donc pas l'homme en train de mourir que retient d'une maniere générale 1'imagerie du XVe siècle. Le caractère original qui est commun à toutes ses manifestations, iconographiques et litteraires, et qui est essentiel, est la décomposition. C'est-à-dire qu'on veut alors montrer ce qui ne se voit pas, ce qui se passe sous la terre et qui est le plus souvent caché aux vivants. Bien entendu les écrivains spirituels du XIIe et XIIIe siècle, les auteurs ascétiques

du *contemptus mundi* n'avaient pas manqué d'évoquer la destruction à laquelle étaient destinés les corps les plus beaux, les carrières les plus glorieuses: *ubi sunt* ... Mais jamais encore 1'image du 'sac d'excréments', n'avait eu un tel retentissement dans la sensibilité. La thématique, à 1'origine pieuse, a changé de caractère; Huizinga reconnaît qu'elle est 'tres éloignée d'une véritable aspiration religieuse'. Il est donc hors de doute que nous nous trouvons alors devant un trait nouveau de mentalité: 'profond découragement causé par 1'humaine misère', écrit Huizinga. Il nous met sur la voie; nous y reviendrons après avoir comparé les données macabres du XVe siècle à celles qui 1'ont précédé et suivi. D'abord à celle qui 1'ont précédé.

II. LES REPRÉSENTATIONS DE LA MORT AUX XIIe ET XIIIe SIÈCLES

Laissons de côté les précurseurs religieux anciens du *contemptus mundi,* du *memento mori,* et attachons nous plutôt à la représentation habituelle de la mort et au réalisme de cette représentation. Deux observations s'imposent. La première est suggérée par un grand changement de la coutume funéraire qui doit se situer vers le XIIIe siècle et un peu avant. Jusqu'au XIIe siècle, et encore longtemps après dans les pays méditerranéens comme la France méridionale et l'Italie, le mort était transporté directement au sarcophage de pierre où il sera déposé, le visage découvert, même si, quand il était riche et puissant, il était enveloppé dans un tissu précieux. Or a partir du XIIIe siècle, le visage du mort est dérobé aux regards, soit que le corps soit cousu dans le linceul, soit qu'il soit enfermé dans un 'sarceu' de bois ou de plomb: un cercueil. On prit 1'habitude, prévue depuis déjà longtemps dans les rituels, mais certainement rarement suivie dans la pratique commune, de déposer le corps devant l'autel pendant au moins une des trois hautes messes prévues pour le salut de son âme. Le cerceuil déjà fermé était encore dissimulé sous un tissu ou *pallium* (poëlle) et en outre sous un échafaud de bois qui n'a guère changé jusqu'à nos jours et que depuis le XVIIe siècle nous appelons catafalque (de 1'italien *catafalcó),* mais qu'on appelait auparavant ou chapelle ou plus souvent représentation. Chapelle, parce qu'il était entouré d'un luminaire comme l'autel d'une chapelle. Représentation, parce qu'il avait été dans le cas des grands de ce monde, surmonté d'une statue de bois et de cire qui représentait le défunt, à la place de son cadavre. La statue est restée en usage jusqu'au début du XVIIe siècle, dans les cas des funérailles royales. Ailleurs, dans les funérailles plus simples le catafalque en tenait lieu, et encore à la fin du XVII siècle, le mot 'représentation' est utilisé dans les testaments ou dans les textes de fondations pieuses comme synonyme de catafalque.

On a donc, autour du XIIIe siècle, reculé devant la vue du cadavre, et devant 1'exposition du cadavre dans 1'église. Notons en passant que les pays où le corps

est resté longtemps découvert, comme 1'Italie, ont été aussi les plus réfractaires aux courants macabres du XVe siècle, c'est-à-dire à la représentation du transi ou de la momie.

La seconde observation est suggérée par la pratique des masques mortuaires qui apparaît au XIIIe siècle. Elle est d'ailleurs liée à celle de la représentation. On prélève le masque sur le visage du mort pour que la représentation soit tout à fait ressemblante. Il servait aussi à obtenir la ressemblance du portrait du défunt sur son tombeau. Après la mort de Saint Louis, pendant le retour en France des croisés, la reine Isabelle d'Aragon mourut d'un accident de cheval en Calabre. Sur son tombeau de chair (ses os furent transportés à Saint Denis) elle est représentée en priante, à genoux, les mains jointes, aux pieds de la Vierge; quoique son attitude appartienne à la vie, sa figure est celle d'une morte, laide, la joue déchirée par la chute et mal racommodée par un point de suture parfaitement visible, les yeux fermés. Cette oeuvre montre à 1'évidence que les traits cadavériques n'étaient pas reproduits pour faire peur, comme un objet d'horreur, un *memento mori,* mais qu'ils étaient reproduits comme la photographie instantanée et réaliste du personnage. Nous disons encore aujourd'hui qu'un portrait est pris sur le vif. On le prenait alors sur le mort, et on ne voyait pas de différence: c'était toujours pour faire vivant.

L'époque dite macabre des XIVe-XVe siècles n'a rien changé à cette pratique. Il existait à Saint Sernin de Toulouse des statues de terre cuite représentant les anciens comtes de Toulouse. Elles dataient du début du XVIe siècle, et les figures sont obtenues à partir de masques mortuaires. On les appelait 'les momies des comtes', mais en pleine période de danses macabres et de transis, elles ne sont pas destinées à faire peur, seulement à rappeler le souvenir des anciens bienfaiteurs de l'église.

Il en a été de même dans les siècles suivants: ni les macabres des XVe-XVIe siècles, ni les baroques du XVIIe siècle, auteurs de pompes funèbres emphatiques, n'ont cherché à revenir sur le parti adopté au XIIIe siècle d'enfermer le corps dans une boîte et de le dérober aux regards. Il n'existe peut-être pas autant de contradiction qu'on croirait entre le refus de voir le cadavre réel, et la volonté de représenter le vivant avec les traits de ce même cadavre, car ce n'est pas le cadavre qu'on reconstitue, mais le vivant a 1'aide des traits du mort, et enfin on demande à 1'art de se substituer à la réalité brute.

III. EROS ET THANATOS DU XVIe AU XVIIIe SIÈCLE

Complétons maintenant notre corpus avec les données macabres postérieures au XVe siècle. Disons d'abord qu'un grand fait apparait tout de suite: cette évocation de la mort réaliste et vraie, cette présence du cadavre lui-même, que le Moyen Age, même a son automne macabre, n'a pas tolerée, la période suivante du XVIe au