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STUDIE A MATERIÁLY

„The Beautiful Days in Aranjuez“. A Dutch History Student in Czechoslovakia 1966–1967*

NICOLETTE MOUT

Prologue

For the spring of 1964 the society of history students ‘Kleio’ at the University of Amsterdam had planned an excursion to Prague. This was exciting news for me, a history student in my first year and eighteen years old, and surely for many other students as well, as Central Europe and its history were largely *terra incognita* to us. Two of our teachers would be in charge of this excursion: Jacob (Jacques) Presser, Professor of Modern History, and Co van der Kieft, Reader in Medieval History. What little I knew about Prague and Czechoslovakia I had learned from my parents. Both my parents were great music lovers and therefore the works of particularly Smetana and

NICOLETTE MOUT: „The Beautiful Days in Aranjuez“. A Dutch History Student in Czechoslovakia 1966–1967

Nicolette Mout came to live in Prague in 1966 and again in 1967 on an academic exchange program as the first Dutch research student after the Second World War. The subject of her research for a MA in history (University of Amsterdam) was Comenius’s relations with the Dutch Republic. In Prague, her supervisor was Professor Josef Polišíenský (1915–2001). In these reminiscences her contacts with the Czechoslovak academic world are described against the background of changes leading up to the Prague Spring.

Key words: History, Dutch-Czech relations, Charles University of Prague, University of Amsterdam, J. A. Comenius, Josef Polišíenský, late 1960’s



Dvořák were known to me. A (rather imperfect) Dutch translation of the *Good Soldier Švejk* was to be found among our books, but we were more familiar with German literature from Prague: Franz Kafka, the young Rainer Maria Rilke. In 1962, I was given the poems of Guillaume Apollinaire as a birthday present and I read the famous lines about Prague in the poem *Zone*. I had no idea, however, that French and Czech artistic life had been closely intertwined during the interbellum.

As a lawyer in The Hague my father Arie Mout¹ was regularly representing Czechoslovak export firms in Dutch civil law cases. Calendars showing romantic photographs of Charles Bridge in winter or Karlštejn in spring were sent by these Czechoslovak firms to my father as New Year's gifts and passed on to me. In 1955 my parents followed an invitation of a director of such a firm and visited Prague, attending not only concert and opera performances but also the Spartakiada of that year. My parents were never affiliated to any political party, but in the Netherlands they would count as leaning towards social democracy. On the one hand they had not forgotten the treachery of Munich, on the other hand they were well aware of the crimes of Stalinist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe, including the Prague show trials of the late forties and early fifties. One strong conviction, however, was always present in their minds: the necessity to restore, after 1945, the fundamental historical unity of Europe, including in these efforts not only post-Nazi Germany but also Communist Central Europe. The Iron Curtain did not deter them. Although my parents were well aware of the fact that political cooperation between Western powers and Central Europe was out of the question during the Cold War, cultural ties should be reestablished if at all possible, albeit perhaps only on a personal level. So they travelled to Prague in 1955, and in the same spirit I went on the student excursion in 1964.

In Prague we stayed in Oldřich Tyl's former YWCA hostel on Žitná, a remarkable building I thought, although I had not yet an inkling of the city's functional architecture of the interbellum and its famous architects. Our host turned out to be Josef Polišíenský, assisted by a few of his students.

* These reminiscences are mainly based on a diary of my stay in Czechoslovakia, written in the form of letters to my parents, and on letters to a few friends. I wish to thank Dr. Noel Malcolm (All Souls, Oxford) and Dr. Carlos Reijnen (European Studies, University of Amsterdam) for their comments.

1 Pierre H. DUBOIS, *Arie Mout, 's-Gravenhage 17 september 1900 – 's Gravenhage 14 september 1978*, Jaarboek van de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde te Leiden 1980–1981, Leiden 1982, pp. 191–197; also http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_jaa003198101/_jaa003198101_01_0023.php.

Polišenský, since 1957 Professor of Modern History at Charles University (katedra obecných dějin) had many international scholarly contacts, also in Western Europe. Among his contacts were Jacob Presser² and the late Jan Romein,³ both *marxisant* historians at Amsterdam University. The beauty of Prague and its surroundings made a profound impression on me, but I was even more intrigued by some archival material Polišenský showed us: sixteenth-century letters in Spanish from the Lobkovic archives. I did not quite grasp the historical importance of those letters, but I did understand that early modern Bohemia had been an integral and most interesting part of Europe.

Back in Amsterdam I entreated Presser to help me obtain a research scholarship for Czechoslovakia. Slightly irritated he replied that this was next to impossible, and that in any case I should first receive my Bachelor's degree before he – or I – could consider any research scholarship abroad for a Master's thesis in history. Nevertheless Presser conveyed my wish to Polišenský, when the latter was visiting the Netherlands in the summer of 1965. Polišenský immediately suggested a subject for my Master's thesis: Comenius and his stay in the Dutch Republic 1657–1670, maybe focusing on Comenius's efforts to promote peace between England and the Dutch Republic (1666–1667) through his pamphlet *Angelus Pacis*.⁴ As I was basically interested in early modern European history and not so much, to Presser's regret, in contemporary history, this suited me fine. The subject itself seemed appropriate both from a scholarly and a political point of view: Comenius's contacts with the seventeenth-century Dutch had not yet been studied in depth. Moreover, Comenius, the 'teacher of nations', was regarded as a national figurehead in any political situation,

2 M. E. H. N. MOUT, *Presser, Jacob (1899–1970)*, Biografisch woordenboek van Nederland 1, The Hague 1979, pp. 474–477, also <http://www.historici.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/BWN/lemmata/bwn1/presser>.

3 I. SCHÖFFER, *Romein, Jan Marius (1893–1962)*, Biografisch woordenboek van Nederland 1, The Hague 1979, pp. 496–500, also <http://www.historici.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/BWN/lemmata/bwn1/romein>.

4 My Master's thesis was partly published as Nicolette MOUTOVÁ and Josef POLIŠENSKÝ, *Komenský v Amsterodamu*, Prague 1970. For Polišenský's manifold contributions to Comeniological studies cf. Vladimír URBÁNEK, *Josef Polišenský – Early Modern Historian and Comenius Scholar*, Acta Comeniana 15–16 (XXXIX–XL), 2002, pp. 465–470. In the end, research on *Angelus Pacis* was postponed until much later: Nicolette MOUT, *Comenius, Pamphlets and Politics. Angelus Pacis and Dutch Pamphlet Literature on the Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665–1667)*, in: Jaroslav Pánek ed., *Comenius in World Science and Culture. Contributions of Scholars from European Countries for the 17th International Congress of Historical Sciences in Madrid, August 1990*, Prague 1991, pp. 107–116.

as he had safely lived long before twentieth-century ideologies could have confused him. The Communist regime propagated Comenius's ideas, particularly his patriotism and love of peace, while playing down his religious fervour.

There was, however, one great difficulty: official academic ties between the Netherlands and the ČSSR were virtually nonexistent. Shortly before I obtained my BA in the spring of 1966 Presser had discovered that there existed a dormant academic and cultural exchange agreement with the Netherlands, dating from the time of the first Czechoslovak Republic, which had never been terminated by either party.⁵ With the help of both the cultural section of the Dutch Foreign Ministry and the Czechoslovak Ministries of Education and Culture and Foreign Affairs this agreement was revived. I was granted a five months research scholarship in Czechoslovakia. In return, a Czechoslovak student would receive a Dutch scholarship to be spent at the Agricultural University at Wageningen. Once in Prague, I found that my scholarship of 1200, later 1300 Kčs was paid out monthly by the Czechoslovak Ministry of Agriculture. As a consequence, I had to talk about interesting but from my point of view quite remote subjects such as the milk yield of Dutch cows every time I collected the money at this Ministry. In the summer of 1967 I again received a scholarship for three months in order to finish research for my Master's thesis.

It was agreed that Polišíenský would act as supervisor of my research in Czechoslovakia, but the eventual result, my Master's thesis, would be submitted to the history faculty of Amsterdam University only. This explains why I was not enrolled as a visiting student of Charles University once I arrived in Prague on 16 May 1966. I was given a room in Comenius College (Kolej J. A. Komenského, formerly Alexandrova Kolej for Yugoslav students) in Prague 6, at the time housing students of the now defunct University of the Seventeenth of November (Univerzita 17. listopadu), founded in 1961 for students from developing countries. The Prague Ministry of Education and Culture had arranged not only my room and my extended visa but also a general permission to work in libraries and archives throughout the country. It was tacitly understood that my research had to be limited to historical periods before 1918.

⁵ Dr. Václav Čihák, at the time 'referent' for the Netherlands of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs, located the text of this agreement in the archive of the Ministry, ADO č. L 1.324 a). It was ratified by the President of the Czechoslovak Republic on 22 June 1958 after having been registered with the League of Nations on 27 August 1937.

Languages

So far, so good. Unfortunately, I had come to Prague without a sufficient knowledge of Czech. Polišíenský, who had a great gift for languages himself, had rather insouciantly told me that my Latin, German, English and French would suffice for my research, but once in the country I naturally wanted to learn the language as quickly as possible. This I did with the help of the popular textbook for English-speaking students by the linguist Miloš Sova, whom I met later in the year.⁶ Sova had spent the Second World War as an exile in London and stayed on teaching Czech at the London School of Slavonic and East European Studies. He and his wife had often taken care of Czechoslovak scholars in Britain, among them the young Polišíenský in 1945–1946, before returning to Prague.⁷ In order to further my knowledge of the language Sova presented me with a rare product of Czech literature in exile, a children's story printed in London during the war.⁸ Another older friend of Polišíenský's I was introduced to in those early days was Antonín Škarka,⁹ Professor of Older Czech Literature at Charles University. Škarka, who was also involved with the edition of Comenius's Complete Works, helped me to buy the best Czech dictionaries available. He also introduced me to the formidable Dr. Emma Urbánková, head of the manuscript department at the State Library (now National Library). Urbánková was the author of a bibliography of Comenius's works.¹⁰ Her book was my first guide to Comenius's publications in the Dutch Republic.

I started to translate Comeniological and other historical articles from the Czech into Dutch in the hope of enriching my Czech scholarly vocabulary. My spoken Czech was much helped along when I accompanied Polišíenský and his family in July to Kroměříž for a holiday spent in the home of Dr. Marie Červinková, sister of Polišíenský's wife Anna, and Director of a School of Health Studies. Later on, I attended language and history courses at the Summer School of Slavonic Studies of Charles University. Unfortunately, I never became fluent in spoken Czech, one of the reasons being that

6 Miloš SOVA, *A Practical Czech Course for English-Speaking Students*, 2 vols., Prague 1962.

7 Josef POLIŠENSKÝ, *Historik v měnícím se světě*, Prague 2001, pp. 116, 121, 160.

8 *Proč visí slunce na nebi a proč jsou bílé děti a černé*. Napsala česká studentka a ilustroval polský letec Kazimierz Z. na lodi NEURALIA cestou z Francie do Anglie v létě 1940, London [1940?].

9 Milan KOPECKÝ, *Antonín Škarka (1906–1972)*, Acta Comeniana 4 (XXVIII), 1979, pp. 422–428.

10 Emma URBÁNKOVÁ, *Soupis děl J. A. Komenského v československých knihovnách, archívech a muzeích*, Prague 1959.

every scholar I encountered wanted to speak other languages with me. Polišíenský, who anyway was too impatient to listen to my halting Czech and usually spoke English with me, wanted me to teach him some spoken Dutch, in anticipation of possible lecture trips to the Netherlands.

Another glaring deficiency in my preparation was my ignorance of early modern palaeography in general, not only of the German and Czech language. Polišíenský gave me a textbook to start with,¹¹ but the best remedy was my participation in a seminar for history students in their fourth year at the state archive of Litoměřice, branch archive at Žitenice. There, the archivist Josef Křivka put letters from the Lobkovic archive before me: letters by Ludwig van Beethoven, Ferdinand Paer, Luigi Cherubini and Luigi Bassi, the Don Giovanni in that opera's first performance in Prague in 1787. I was impressed by the apparent richness of these archives, the more so as they also contained a few letters in Czech about the sixteenth-century Revolt of the Netherlands, which I tried to transcribe and translate.

In 1967 I was invited to Hungary by Professor Tibor Wittman, Director of the Institute of Medieval Studies at Szeged University, so I started to learn Hungarian, using a very thorough but, alas, also very Communist-orientated textbook. I did not get very far and the vocabulary I acquired was hardly fit for scholarly discussions. Wittman was interested in the history of Spain and the Netherlands in early modern times. Unfortunately nothing came of my planned visit until much later, and by then Wittman had already died.¹²

The presence of a Dutch student in Prague did not go unnoticed at the Department of Germanic Studies of Charles University. Dutch Studies could be taken as a minor course there and was taught by Dr. Olga Krijtová,¹³ well-known for her many translations of Dutch literature, and Dr. Přemysl Janota,¹⁴ a distinguished phonetical scientist who had studied in Amsterdam in the late forties. Only in 1968 did Dutch become a major course. I was introduced to Olga Krijtová by Polišíenský, who for many years taught Dutch history at the Department.

11 Heribert STURM, *Unsere Schrift. Einführung in die Entwicklung ihrer Stilformen*, Neustadt an der Aisch 1961.

12 Josef POLIŠENSKÝ, *Tibor Wittman (1923–1972)*, Acta Comeniana 4 (XXVIII), 1979, pp. 417–419.

13 Olga KRIJTOVÁ, *Geschriften eener bejaarde vrouw uit 1997*, Prague 2011, pp. 63–78 for a bibliography of her publications and translations.

14 Wilken ENGELBRECHT, *Přemysl Janota 10 mei 1926–25 september 2008*, Jaarboek van de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde te Leiden 2009–2010, Leiden 2011, pp. 160–168.

My parents regularly sent me daily and weekly papers from the Netherlands which usually reached me in good order, despite censorship of incoming post. Also the *Times Literary Supplement* was habitually delivered to me, and passed on to Czech scholars. At a time when the only Dutch daily paper allowed as study material at Charles University was the Communist *De Waarheid (Truth)*, my stack of non-Communist daily and weekly Dutch papers was naturally very welcome at Dutch Studies. Unfortunately, it was impossible for me to deliver them directly there, as this would perhaps compromise the teachers. So I gave the papers to Polišínský who, after perusing them himself, surreptitiously passed them on to Krijtová. A good thirty years later, in March 1997 at the symposium *75 let nederlandistiky v Praze*,¹⁵ Janota thanked me for this service to Dutch Studies, remarking how glad he was to meet me at last. As Janota had never been a member of the Communist Party it had not been deemed sensible for us to meet back in the sixties, with or without my Dutch daily and weekly papers.

Research and travelling the country

Clearly Polišínský was determined to make my research scholarship a success and therefore did his utmost to put his extensive network of friends and colleagues at my disposal. Right at the beginning of my stay he introduced me to the Director of the National Museum, Dr. Karel Švehla, and to the two institutions in Prague which would turn out to be most important to me: the Strahov Library and the Comeniologists of the Pedagogical Institute of the Academy (Pedagogický ústav J. A. Komenského ČSAV). At Strahov, I was put under the wings of Dr. Jiří Hruběš, who taught me much about doing research in that wonderful library, and in the Pedagogical Institute everybody was immensely helpful, especially Dr. Josef Brambora¹⁶ and Dr. Marta Bečková, and so was the young František Xaver Halas at the Pedagogical Museum J. A. Komenský. I was also introduced to Dr. Jan Patočka, at the time by all accounts the most interesting Czech philosopher. He was working at the Philosophical Institute of the Academy (Filosofický ústav ČSAV) but I was told that he was not allowed to teach at Charles University. In memory of his time as a student in Paris Patočka preferred to talk French with me and gave me much helpful advice.¹⁷

15 Zdenka HRNČÍŘOVÁ and Hanny VISSER eds., *Handelingen Symposion 75 jaar neerlandistiek in Praag*, Prague 1997.

16 Marta BEČKOVÁ, *Josef Brambora (1904–1980)*, *Acta Comeniana* 5 (XXIX), 1983, pp. 180–183.

17 For Patočka's interest in Comenius and his relations with Comeniologists cf. Jan PATOČKA, *Sebrané spisy*, vols. 9–11, *Komeniologické studie*, Prague 1997, 1998 and

My supervisor Polišíenský taught me by not teaching me, but by being an example of dedicated scholarship and setting challenging tasks before me, usually concerning the interpretation of early modern Dutch source material in the Czech collections he knew so well. I admired the sure methodological touch as well as the fabulous bibliographical and archival knowledge of this born historian. Apart from my work for my Master's thesis on Comenius and the Dutch Republic, Polišíenský requested me to prepare, together with him, a partial translation into Czech of Comenius's pamphlet *Basuyne des ghenaden jaer voor de Bohemische natie* (*Pozoun milostivého léta pro český národ*, Kampen 1632) which had only been preserved in a version in seventeenth-century Dutch.¹⁸ At the same time Dr. Stanislav Králík was planning to edit the Dutch text for the critical edition of Comenius's collected works.¹⁹

I accompanied Polišíenský to a number of archives, libraries and museums all over the country, at first with a predilection for Moravian institutions connected with Comenius's life and work, but soon our trips were extended to many other places in Bohemia, Silesia and Slovakia as well. The beauty of the scenery as well as the history of the towns we visited I found captivating. I was moved by the *genius loci* of, for instance, Řehoř Mendel's modest birthplace at Hynčice, or the road from the railway station to the town of Hranice, which inspired the first pages of Robert Musil's *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless*. As Polišíenský had just finished collaborating on an anthology of translated texts and letters by Giacomo Casanova,²⁰ we visited the museum and castle of Duchcov where Casanova had written his *Histoire de ma vie*. In Slovakia I had the opportunity to have a look at the very interesting holdings of several libraries of the Protestant Church,

2005; vols. 21–22, *Korespondence s komeniology*, Prague 2011. Cf. also Jiří BENEŠ, *Ein verspätetes Andenken: Jan Patočka (1907–1977)*, Acta Comeniana 9 (XXXIII), 1991, pp. 189–191.

18 Jan Amos KOMENSKÝ, *Pozoun milostivého léta pro český národ*, in: Vybrané spisy Jana Amose Komenského 6, Spisy historické a politické, Prague 1972, pp. 117–226; the pamphlet is part of the Thysius Library, Leiden, sign. THYSPF 3739, and can be studied at Leiden University Library.

19 Martin STEINER, *Stanislav Králík (1909–1987)*, Acta Comeniana 8 (XXXII), 1989, pp. 206–208; *Bazuine des genaden jaar voor de Bohemische natie*, in: Stanislav Králík, Amadeo Molnár and Roland Willemyns eds., *Dílo Jana Amose Komenského 3*, Prague 1978, pp. 565–589.

20 Giacomo CASANOVA, *Historie mého života. Výbor z paměti literárních a odborných prací a z korespondence*, Prague 1968. Much later Polišíenský published his *Casanova a jeho svět*, Prague 1997, for which book he was collecting material already in the sixties.

testimony of long-standing relations of that part of the world with Western Europe. Near Sobrance, on the ancient trade road between Poland and Hungary, Soviet borderguards, obviously very bored with their job, tried to persuade me to cross to their side, which I wisely did not. Only decades later I made it to Užhorod on the other side of that border. In 1966, my guide to this fascinating part of the country was Michal Danilák, Professor of History at the Pedagogical Faculty at Prešov University, specialist in the history of the Western Ukraine. Together we visited not only the museums in Eastern Slovakia, but also a pub deep in the woods which to my inexperienced eyes looked like a local romantic version of Wilhelm Hauff's *Wirtshaus im Spessart*. In Southern Bohemia, the theatre in the castle of Český Krumlov delighted me, as I had taken theatre studies as a minor in Amsterdam. The archivist František Navrátil allowed me to search through the intriguing collection of theatre plays and opera libretti in several languages kept in the castle's library. Back in Prague I visited Dr. Jiří Hilmera of the National Museum, an outstanding historian of theatre architecture and scenography in Central Europe, in order to learn more about the early modern history of the theatre in Bohemia.

During my travels I discovered the truly European range of the contents of many Czech and Slovak archives and libraries. Moreover, I became very much aware of the gaps in my training back at Amsterdam University, where archival research was only practised and taught by medievalists and, to a lesser degree, by socioeconomic historians, but unfortunately not by modern historians such as Presser and his staff. In Czechoslovakia, however, I could not have wished for better guides than Polišíenský and the many archivists and librarians I met. Polišíenský had acquired his immense knowledge of archives, particularly those previously belonging to noble families or ecclesiastical institutions, in the years after 1945 when these were put under state control.²¹ He was always keen to be of professional assistance to students and colleagues regardless of their background or nationality, and I was one of those who profited enormously from this.

Apart from my Comeniological studies I was developing a general interest in the early modern history of the Kingdom of Bohemia. Rightly supposing that Dutch university libraries would not be very well stocked with Czech history books, I started to buy them. Škarka and Brambora guided

21 Cf. Josef POLIŠENSKÝ, *Otázky studia obecných dějin*, I. Prameny k obecným dějinám v českých archívech a knihovnách, Prague 1957; Josef POLIŠENSKÝ, *Otázky studia obecných dějin*, II. Prameny k obecným dějinám v slovenských archívech a knihovnách, Prague 1963.

me to the best modern and antiquarian bookshops of Prague, with the result that I soon sent voluminous parcels of books home, containing antiquarian finds such as Bílek's *Dějiny konfiskací v Čechách po r. 1618*, Pekař's *Kniha o Kosti*, Chlumecký's *Carl von Zierotin und seine Zeit* and of course Palacký's *Dějiny národu českého*, but also recent publications. I acquired recently published literary works as well, by Bohumil Hrabal and František Hrubín for example, together with a few classics. To Polišenský's amusement I found his *History of Czechoslovakia in Outline* (Prague 1947) in an antiquarian bookshop (it was reprinted only in 1991) together with the well-known volume *Co daly naše země Evropě a lidstvu* (Prague 1939), published by the distinguished Prague linguist Vilém Mathesius after the Treaty of Munich. The young Polišenský had assisted Mathesius in editing the book. When he saw it in my hands he laughed and told me that because of the bad times a few of its authors had had to hide behind foreign-sounding aliases: Roman Jakobson had become Olaf Jansen, Dmytro Čyževs'kyj (Dmitrij Tschizewskij) Fritz Erlenbusch, and Závíš Kalandra Jan Albert.²²

Scholars and politics

Before I started living in a Prague student hostel in 1966, I did not have a clear picture of what life in the ČSSR would be like. I was aware, of course, of the fact that the country was governed by a Communist regime, but I had no idea what this meant, in practice, for Czechoslovak scholars, their teaching and their research. My Czech friends did their best to enlighten me, as some were exceptionally outspoken on this and other subjects. Particularly Polišenský never minced his words in my presence. I was told that, although reading daily papers or *Literární Noviny* was undoubtedly good for my Czech, important political news and interesting gossip about Party, government or anything else would primarily reach me by word of mouth. I was warned to mind my words in popular restaurants and cafés as there might be eavesdroppers about: my favourite café Slavia was said to be full of (Arab) spies, hotel Jalta was famous for its Czechoslovak secret servicemen sitting around in the café. Of course I had no way of knowing whether this was true or not, but I quickly understood the power such rumours exercised over the imagination. I did not notice any spies in Slavia, but I did meet interesting persons there, for instance the *auctor intellectualis* of the famous conference on Franz Kafka in Liblice (1963), Eduard Goldstücker, Professor

²² Jakobson fled Prague in 1939, Čyževs'kyj had left Prague for Germany in 1932, Kalandra was executed in 1950 after a Prague show trial.

of German at Charles University.²³ I heard stories about scholars who for many years had been forced to do manual work before they were allowed to take up an intellectual profession, about intellectuals as political prisoners working the uranium mines and ruining their health there, but also about university staff cheerfully going ‘*na brigádě*’ hop-picking, or – slightly less cheerfully – building footpaths. After meeting in a wine cellar Jaroslav Charvát, Professor of General History at Charles University, Polišenský gave as his opinion that this dogmatic Marxist historian and influential Party member had not published anything of worth for years, that moreover he was a drunkard and only fit for delivering burial speeches.²⁴ Another leading Marxist historian in a prominent position, Oldřich Ríha, was given an only marginally better press. Polišenský considered Václav Husa, who had died by then, the best historian of this group of dogmatic Marxists and enthusiastic Party members. Before coming to Prague in 1966, I was given Husa’s *Geschichte der Tschechoslowakei* (Prague 1963), not without the warning, however, that the text was mediocre but the illustrations very well-chosen.

From time to time Polišenský hinted at the political problems he had had during the fifties, problems in which a few of his colleagues from the Institute of History of the Czechoslovak Academy had played a role.²⁵ An old family friend whom I repeatedly met at Polišenský’s home, the historian Dr. Otakar Dorazil, had worked for the Czechoslovak Red Cross with Alice Masaryková, its founder. A photograph showing Dorazil in the company of Alice’s father President Tomáš Masaryk was kept in Polišenský’s home. That home was the only place where the Masaryks and the First Czechoslovak Republic were mentioned in my presence, except that walking by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Černín Palace on the Hradčany, another Czech friend told me the story of Jan Masaryk’s death in 1948.

On my third day in Prague I was taking part in a day excursion of history students to Litoměřice. On that occasion I was told that the local bishop

23 The conference volume *Franz Kafka aus Prager Sicht*, Prague 1966, was on sale in the Prague bookshops at the time.

24 Jaroslav PÁNEK, *Historik mezi „mocí“ a „slušností“ (Na okraj knihy Bohumila Jirouška o Jaroslavu Charvátovi)*, *Český časopis historický* 109, 2011, pp. 674–684. I wish to thank Dr. Bohumil Jiroušek (Historický ústav Filosofické fakulty Jihočeské univerzity v Českých Budějovicích) for information about Charvát’s position at Charles University in 1966.

25 Josef POLIŠENSKÝ, *Historik v měnícím se světě*, Prague 2001, pp. 194–197; R. J. W. EVANS, *A Czech Historian in Troubled Times: J.V. Polišenský, Past & Present*, 2002, nr. 176, pp. 265–266; M. E. H. N. MOUT, *Josef Vincenc Polišenský: 16 december 1915 – 11 januari 2001*, *Levensberichten en herdenkingen* 2002, Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen (Amsterdam 2002), p. 69.

(later cardinal *in pectore*) Štěpán Trochta had first been jailed and was now interned, like other members of the Roman Catholic clergy such as the Prague Archbishop Josef Beran. Later, I visited Professor Bohumil Ryba, a distinguished classical scholar and medievalist. I was interested in his edition of the epical poem *Rosa rosensis*, written by the Netherlandish humanist Jacobus Canter Frisius at the Rožmberk court in Český Krumlov at the end of the fifteenth century.²⁶ I had been told that in the fifties Ryba had been framed as an enemy of the state because his name had appeared, or so the rumour went, on a list of influential political figures in a future „counterrevolutionary“ government. As a consequence, he had been accused of high treason and given a long prison sentence.²⁷ Ryba graciously lent me his edition, discussed the impact of Netherlandish humanism on Bohemia with me, and when I was back in the Netherlands delighted me with a letter in Latin.

During the late sixties the international situation of historical scholarship in Czechoslovakia improved a little, in the sense that foreign publications became better available and more colleagues from Western countries came visiting, for research or lectures. Most Czech and Slovak historians, however, were seldom given the opportunity to travel abroad or even to order photocopies or microfilms from Western European archives and libraries. Polišínský was one of the exceptions. He travelled widely, especially to Western Germany, France and the Netherlands, and received an endless stream of foreign visitors in Prague. From my own country Presser came to lecture on his *magnum opus* about the fate of Dutch Jewry during the German occupation 1940–1945.²⁸ Wim Schulte Nordholt, who had been my history teacher at school and had recently been appointed Professor of American History at Leiden University, came to visit me as a tourist and shocked my Czech friends by remarking that he preferred Poland to Czechoslovakia. From Vienna came Richard Plaschka, not yet Professor for Eastern European History, who was born in Southern Moravia and whose excellent Czech I envied. Plaschka's unremitting efforts, then as well as later, to further close scholarly cooperation between historians divided by the Iron Curtain were an inspiration to me. Visitors from Paris included the

26 Iacobus CANTER FRISIUS, *Rosa rosensis*, Bohumil RYBA (ed.), Budapest 1958.

27 Věra DVOŘÁČKOVÁ, *Profesor Bohumil Ryba, mezi vědou a vězením*, Sborník Archivu bezpečnostních složek 7, 2009, pp. 227–274. I wish to thank Dr. Dvořáčková (Ústav pro jazyk český AV ČR, Prague) for making the article available to me.

28 J. PRESSER, *Ondergang. De vervolging en verdelging van het Nederlandse Jodendom, 1940–1945*, 2 vols., The Hague 1965; English abridged translation: *Ashes in the wind: the destruction of Dutch Jewry*, London 1968.

historians Robert Mandrou and Pierre Bonnoure, from Germany came Günther Stökl, Professor of Eastern European History at Cologne, and also Golo Mann made an appearance, who was preparing his Wallenstein biography.²⁹ Oszkár Paulinyi, an economic historian from Budapest, delighted me by speaking the most elegant old-fashioned Austrian-German imaginable. In the summer of 1967 I met Peter Brock from Toronto, specialist in the history of Russian pacifism, and William V. Wallace, soon to be appointed Professor of History at the New University of Ulster and later author of a general history of Czechoslovakia.⁵⁰ From Israel came Ruth Kestenberg-Gladstein, in order to work on her book on the history of Bohemian Jews.⁵¹ I met her again in the Prague home of Erich Kulka, together with Erich's son Otto Dov Kulka. There, the conversation turned to recent historical publications on the Holocaust, as Erich Kulka was interested in Presser's book. He had already published several such works, in Czech but widely translated, and was working on more books.⁵²

At the beginning of October 1966 Robert Evans arrived from Cambridge, in order to do research for his book *Rudolf II and his World*.⁵³ We became friends, and I silently envied him for two reasons: firstly because he was living in a much better student hostel than the unbelievably grimy Comenius College where I lived, and secondly because he was sometimes invited by the British ambassador, whereas the embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands ignored my existence completely. Czech friends consoled me by explaining that the current Dutch ambassador was, according to Prague gossip, only interested in hunting bears in Slovakia. How very different from the British ambassador. From 1960 until his retirement in October 1966 the post was filled by Sir Cecil Parrott, translator and biographer of Jaroslav Hašek.⁵⁴ I met him in 1966 on my first day in Prague, at the occasion of the opening of an exhibition of sculptures by Henry Moore in the garden of the magnificent Thun-Hohenstein Palace.

In September 1966, the deputy Minister of Education and Culture, František Kahuda, spoke favourably about an increase of cultural and academic

29 Golo MANN, *Wallenstein. Sein Leben*, Frankfurt am Main 1971.

30 William V. WALLACE, *Czechoslovakia*, London 1976.

31 Ruth KESTENBERG-GLADSTEIN, *Neuere Geschichte der Juden in den böhmischen Ländern*, Tübingen 1969.

32 Two of these books were published in 1966: Erich KULKA, *Soudcové, žalobci, obhájci*, Prague 1966, and *Útěk z tábora smrti*, Prague 1966.

33 R. J. W. EVANS, *Rudolf II and his World. A Study in Intellectual History, 1576–1612*, Oxford 1973.

34 Cecil PARROTT, *The Serpent and the Nightingale*, London 1977.

exchanges between Czechoslovakia and the Netherlands in the near future, upon which Polišenský and I drafted a letter to the Ministry containing proposals. We did want to strike while the iron was still hot as we could not be sure how long this lenient mood at the Ministry would last. The following month the Dutch daily paper *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant* printed a letter to the editor in which Polišenský and I protested against an exceptionally ill-informed article about general cultural and educational conditions in Czechoslovakia, written by the paper's correspondent in Vienna. It had seemed a good idea to us to try and divulge more realistic images of life in Czechoslovakia for the benefit of Dutch readers.

An international conference on Comenius's *De Rerum Humanarum Emendatione Consultatio Catholica* was planned for September 1967 in Olomouc. From the Netherlands Ivo Schöffler, Professor of Dutch History at Leiden University, and Dr. Philip de Vries, Reader of Modern History at Amsterdam University, were invited. De Vries cancelled his attendance because of, as he wrote, the current anti-Israel policy of the ČSSR, a writer's trial⁵⁵ and his general unwillingness to commemorate „the great humanist and pacifist Comenius“ together with Communists. I was slightly puzzled by this last statement, as back in Amsterdam De Vries had expressed to me his view that Comenius was a totally uninteresting historical figure. His letter could have become a hindrance to the budding Czechoslovak-Dutch academic relations, but he had only written to the conference secretariat which simply put the letter *ad acta*. Ivo Schöffler, who in 1970 would chair the international Comenius conference organized under the auspices of the Royal Netherlands Academy in Amsterdam, did come to Olomouc. In the course of the summer of 1967, however, another Dutch student with a manifest interest in Comenius's life and works turned up in Prague: Wim Rood, a priest of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts who for many years had worked as a teacher of classics. He was planning a PhD dissertation focusing on Comenius's theology, which he would eventually defend at Utrecht University.⁵⁶

55 This must have referred to the trial of the young writer Jan Beneš, who was sentenced to five years in prison for having sent material to Pavel Tigrid's émigré journal *Svědectví*, cf. Martina VOJTKOVÁ, *Spisovatel, publicista a politický vězeň Jan Beneš*, magisterská diplomová práce, Masarykova univerzita, Brno 2009, http://is.muni.cz/th/163110/ff_m/Diplomka.pdf.

56 Wim ROOD, *Comenius and the Low Countries; some Aspects of Life and Work of a Czech Exile in the Seventeenth Century*, Amsterdam etc. 1970. Cf. also Josef POLIŠENSKÝ, *In memoriam Wim Rood (1925–1993)*, *Acta Comeniana* 11 (XXXV), 1995, pp. 243–244.

A year earlier, in September 1966, the Fourth Congress of Czechoslovak Historians took place in Brno. I had gone to Brno too, in order to do research in the State Archives, but I was naturally interested in the congress as well. The Minister of Education and Culture, Jiří Hájek, whom I had met before as he was an old friend of Polišínský's, personally gave me permission to attend the meeting of the section dealing with the history of 'late feudalism' (or, as we would say now, early modern history). The discussions in that particular section focused on methodology: how to write the history of the class struggle. Under the thin veneer of these Marxist terms a politically important struggle was going on between historians siding with the prevalent state ideology and those who would prefer to break these shackles, pleading for more intellectual freedom in both research and publications. Polišínský and his younger colleague Josef Válka from Brno defended the latter position.³⁷ It was clear to me that the fact that it was at all possible to have this kind of debate in the context of an official conference was very meaningful in itself. I had heard enough stories about the heavy hand of a Party ideologue, Jiří Hendrych, who tried to make sure that the freedom of intellectuals and academics was curbed. But at that congress in Brno, change seemed to be in the air, or so I thought.

I had also observed a certain relaxation of the rules in other spheres. Together with my mother, who had come to celebrate my twenty-first birthday with me, I had attended a now legendary performance of Bohuslav Martinů's *Otvírání studánek* as part of the program *Variace 66* at *Laterna Magika*. Later on, I was present at performances of Martinů's operas *Julietta aneb Snář* and *Řecké pašije* in the National Theatre. Even as recently as the early sixties, so I was told, it had been inconceivable that works by the anti-Communist émigré Martinů would have been staged in Czechoslovakia. In a bookshop I had found Josef Škvorecký's novel *Konec nylonového věku*, published at last in 1967. Written in the fifties the novel was banned from publication by the authorities because of its description of a western-oriented *jeunesse dorée* after February 1948. Maybe things were changing after all. During the years 1966–1967 my Czech friends, historians and others, and I, too, were full of hope, and blissfully unaware of the things to come, in August 1968.

37 As far as I remember. There may have been others siding with Polišínský and Válka in these discussions; I did not describe this meeting in detail in letters to my parents, as I could not be entirely sure that the outgoing post was not censored.



Epilogue

At the beginning of October, 1967 I flew back to Amsterdam and only returned to Prague at the end of February 1968, after I had obtained my MA, in order to discuss with Polišenský a possible partial publication of my thesis in Czech as well as further research topics. Both in 1966 and 1967 Polišenský had written official reports to the Czechoslovak authorities about the progress of my research, and had warned me that the *Sbor Národní Bezpečnosti* (SNB) would certainly also have files about me in its archive. When I met him again in 1968, I told him about the letter I had just received from the Board (*Presidium*) of the University of Amsterdam. The Board expressed its profound regret that against all regulations it had provided the Dutch Secret Service (*BVD, Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst*) with certain data about my study results and membership of student associations in Amsterdam. Unfortunately for the *BVD*, I had never been a member of one of the politically active student associations there but had restricted myself to playing the trumpet in various student orchestras. So the *BVD* had no choice but to turn to the politically impeccably right wing father of my best friend and question him about my political beliefs.

When I left Prague in October 1967, however, I was unaware of all this. I went to say goodbye to Antonín Škarka, who from my first days in the country had been such a great help to me. Škarka opened the door and, on seeing me, exclaimed: „The beautiful days in Aranjuez are now at an end!“³⁸ How true.

³⁸ „Die schönen Tage in Aranjuez / sind nun zu Ende“: the first lines of Friedrich Schiller's tragedy *Don Carlos*.



„Překrásné dny v Aranjuez“.

Nizozemská studentka historie v Československu v letech 1966–1967

NICOLETTE MOUT

V roce 1964, aniž by věděla příliš mnoho o českých dějinách nebo o současném životě v ČSSR, přijela Nicolette Mout na zájezd studentů historie (Amsterdamská univerzita) do Prahy. Její rodiče navštívili Prahu v roce 1955 a neodradila je ani železná opona ani studená válka, protože byli přesvědčeni o existenci základní historické a kulturní jednoty západní a střední Evropy. V roce 1964 zapůsobilo na Nicolette Mout jak hlavní město Praha, tak české dějiny, že s pomocí profesora Jacoba Pressera (Amsterdamská univerzita) a profesora Josefa Polišenského (Univerzita Karlova) získala výzkumná stipendia na roky 1966 a 1967, aby mohla napsat svoji závěrečnou univerzitní práci (MA) o J. A. Komenském a Nizozemské republice.

Když se ocitla v Praze, musela se rychle naučit česky a osvojit si detailní znalosti raně moderní německé a české paleografie. Později se také začala učit maďarsky. Vypomáhala při výuce holandštiny na Univerzitě Karlově a tajně předávala nizozemské nekomunistické noviny a týdeníky učitelům tohoto jazyka.

Školitelem Nicolette Mout byl Josef Polišenský, který se jí maximálně snažil zprostředkovat přístup do svého rozsáhlého okruhu přátel a kolegů a pomohl jí i mnoha jinými způsoby. Seznámila se s mnoha vědeckými pracovníky a obdržela od nich užitečné rady. Nejenže pracovala pravidelně na výzkumu v mnoha knihovnách v Praze, ale také cestovala po celé zemi ve společnosti prof. Polišenského a přitom navštívila mnoho českých a slovenských knihoven a archivů. Krásy krajiny a její historie na ni hluboce zapůsobily, přičemž také odhalovala výraznou evropskou dimenzi obsahu těchto archivů a knihoven. Rozvíjel se u ní obecný zájem o raně moderní dějiny Českého království. Protože nizozemské knihovny neměly ani mnoho knih o české historiografii, ani mnoho současných literárních děl, zakoupila hodně knih, aby si je mohla poslat domů.

V jejích kontaktech se svými přáteli v Praze hrála velkou roli současná politická situace v ČSSR. Někteří z jejích přátel a také Polišenský byli velice otevření, co se týče této a další problematiky. Podali jí vysvětlení nejen o minulém a současném útlaku intelektuálů a dalších osob, ale také o všeobecné situaci historického výzkumu ve své zemi. V průběhu pozdních šedesátých let se situace trochu zlepšila v tom smyslu, že mnoho kolegů ze západních zemí přijíždělo na návštěvy, ať už na výzkum nebo přednášet a některým českým historikům bylo dovoleno vycestovat na západ. V říjnu 1966 přijel další student-badatel ze západu, Robert Evans, aby provedl výzkum o Rudolfovi II. v rámci svého doktorátu na Univerzitě v Cambridgi. Pražské ministerstvo školství a kultury nahlíželo příznivě na pokračující kulturní a akademické výměny mezi Československem a Nizozemskem, také s ohledem na nadcházející vzpomínkové oslavy J. A. Komenského (1967 a 1970), a Polišenský a Nicolette Mout se v tomto směru snažili pokračovat.

V září 1966 tehdejší ministr školství a kultury Jiří Hájek povolil Nicolettě Mout, aby se zúčastnila zasedání sekce o „pozdním feudalismu“ (raně moderní dějiny) na IV. kongresu československých historiků v Brně. Tam probíhal politicky důležitý boj mezi historiky, kteří obhajovali převládající komunistickou ideologii, a těmi, kteří volali po větší intelektuální svobodě. V té době bylo možné pozorovat určité uvolnění pravidel ve sféře literatury a divadla. Během let 1966–1967 si mnoho lidí dělalo velké naděje, že se věci konečně začaly měnit.



Již v Nizozemí, v roce 1968, obdržela Nicolette Mout dopis Rady Amsterodamské univerzity, který vyjadřoval jejich hlubokou lítost nad tím, že o ní poskytli určité informace Nizozemské tajné službě. Avšak pro ni „překrásné dny v Aranjuez“ skončily, když opustila Prahu v říjnu 1967, ale podobně jako její čeští přátelé si naštěstí nebyla vědoma věci, které se měly stát v srpnu 1968.

Z angličtiny přeložila Alena Linhartová

