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Theun de Vries (1907-2005): a Dutch Author in the Communist World – Texts, Contexts and Translations

Abstract: Theun de Vries (1907-2005) was one of the most prolific Dutch writers in the 20th century: he was the author of over 100 novels, essays and historical biographies.

Since 1936 he was a member of the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN, Communistische Partij van Nederland). He remained that also after the war; he accepted the Cold War politics of the USSR and its invasion in Hungary (1956). But after the Soviet invasion in Czechoslovakia (1968) he left the CPN in 1971 – still being a Marxist.

De Vries was one of the most translated Dutch authors in all countries of the “Eastern Bloc”. His social and historical novels (including *Rembrandt*, 1931, *Stiefmoeder aarde*, 1936, *De vrijheid gaat in 't rood gekleed*, 1945, *Het meisje met het rode haar*, 1956, *Moergrobben*, 1964, *Vincent in Den Haag*, 1972) were often translated in Russian, Polish, Czech, Hungarian...

He himself translated in 1963 in the Netherlands, being still member of the Dutch Communist Party, the novel *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Aleksandr Solshenitsyn. And: he got the highest literary award of the Netherlands, the P.C. Hooft Award.

In this paper I want to show the complicated life and the complex contexts of the oeuvre of de Vries, mirrored in the translations of his novels in the countries of the “Eastern Bloc”.

Keywords: Communist World, Translation, Dutch Author

Theun de Vries – (almost) 100 years of biography

Theun de Vries, born in 1907 in Veenwouden, a village in Frisia, a Northern province of the Netherlands, was one of the most prolific Dutch writers from the 20th century. He had written more than 100 works: novels, novellas, poems, essays and historical biographies. He was also one of the best known Dutch communists in the Cold War era: starting before the Second World War, and continuing in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s of the 20th century.

The *writer* de Vries had received for his literary achievements several literary prizes in the Netherlands, including the Resistance-Prize, and the most prestigious Dutch literary prize: the P.C. Hooft Award in 1962. In 1979, he became also the *Doctor honoris causa* in history of the University of Groningen, as the author of many historical novels.

The *communist* de Vries supported with conviction the politics of the Soviet Union, both in the Stalinist era and after the death of Joseph Stalin. From 1936 he was member of the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN, Communistische Partij van Nederland) – and accepted all Soviet ‘developments’: the Great Terror in 1937-38, the treaty with Nazi Germany in 1939, the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948, the Cold War under Stalin, the crushing of the Hungarian Uprising against the Communist regime in 1956 under Nikita Khrushchev... Therefore he was expelled from the Dutch PEN-club. Only the Soviet invasion (officially: the operation of the Warsaw Pact) in Czechoslovakia under Leonid Brezhnev during the Prague Spring in 1968, the democratization wave of the Czechoslovak communists, he could not accept – he then criticized the Soviet authorities, and few years later, in 1971, he officially left the CPN. And after he left the Party, he was again included into the Dutch PEN-club. There was more: in 1972 he became its chairman.

The Polish historian of Dutch literature Bożena Czarnecka examined de Vries’ novels in her dissertation *Refleksja historyzoficzna w niderlandzkojęzycznej powieści historycznej XX wieku – na przykładzie wybranych dzieł Theuna de Vriesa* (Historiosophical Reflection in the Dutch Historical Novel from the 20th Century – on Selected Works by Theun de Vries, Wrocław 2000). She had looked at de Vries’ novels from the point of the ‘Socialist realism in literature’, and came to this conclusion:

Proza historyczna Theuna de Vriesa (...) moim zdaniem już bardzo dawno temu odeszła od realizmu socjalistycznego, o który nawet teraz [= 2000] bywa posądzana. Wprawdzie nie ulega wątpliwości, że utwory de Vriesa

wydane do końca lat pięćdziesiątych rzeczywiście stanowiły mniej lub bardziej udaną próbę zastosowania dyrektyw socrealizmu (choć nawet i w nich można doszukać się niekiedy znacznych odstępstw od tej linii). Natomiast całkowitym nieporozumieniem i nadużyciem interpretacyjnym wydaje mi się używanie określeń ‘komunistyczny’, ‘socrealistyczny’ czy ‘marksistowski’ w odniesieniu do późniejszego dorobku prozatorskiego tego autora.

The historical prose by Theun de Vries (...) has, in my opinion, a very long time ago departed from socialist realism, of which it is imputed even now [i.e. in 2000]. Well, there is no doubt that de Vries' works published until the end of the 1950s were indeed a more or less successful attempt to apply the directives of socialist realism (although even in them one can find significant derogations from this line). On the other hand, it seems to me a complete misunderstanding and misinterpretation to use the term ‘communist’, ‘social realist’ or ‘Marxist’ in reference to this author's later prose output. (7)

But, yes, also after leaving the CPN in 1971, in the next decades he still called himself – a Marxist. And, yes, he was a good writer... And a very fruitful writer, as was said: author of more than 100 works.

The Dutch journalist Hans van de Waarsenburg at the end of the 80s of the 20th century made an interview with de De Vries, and asked him: “Je schrijft nog iedere dag en hebt weer een nieuw project onder handen? You are still writing every day and you have are now working on a new project? De Vries answered”:

Tot mijn grote genoegen ben ik altijd bezig. Ik heb een soort gevoel dat ik daarmee mijn leven bescherm. Zo lang ik bezig ben, kan me niets overkomen. Daarvoor heb ik geen tijd. Ook niet om dood te gaan. Het klinkt heel raar natuurlijk. Het is een soort bijgeloof. Ik moet dus bezig zijn. Ik wil ook bezig zijn.

To my great pleasure, I am always busy. I have a kind of feeling like I'm in this way protecting my life. As long as I'm busy, nothing can happen to me. I don't have time for that. Not even to die. It sounds very strange of course. It's a kind of superstition. So I have to be busy. And I want to be busy. (*Mijn hele werk is één grote liefdesverklaring* 9).

A communist writer, being till the end of his life a Marxist, author of Socialist realism literature, winner of the P.C. Hooft Award, chairman of the Dutch PEN-club... Always busy... An intriguing personality...

Theun de Vries died in 2005 in Amsterdam.

Theun de Vries – communist politician

Although Theun de Vries did not call himself a politician, in fact he was one. In 1936, at the age of 29, he joined the Communistische Partij van Nederland. In 1937 he moved to Amsterdam and became here an editor of the Communist newspaper *Tribune*. Soon it changed its name into *Het Volksdagblad* (People's Gazette). And in 1940 the newspaper again changed its name. From now on it was *De Waarheid*, just like the Soviet newspaper *И́дèâää* (Pravda = The Truth; cf. Galesloot, Legêne and Morriën, *De Waarheid in de oorlog. Een bundeling van illegale nummers uit de jaren '40-'45*).

The name changed, to be precise, in November 1940 – six months after the invasion of Nazi Germany in the Netherlands. Shortly after the day of the invasion on 10th May the Commander-in-Chief of Dutch army, Henri Winkelman, had officially forbidden *Het Volksdagblad* – this was one of the defense steps of the Dutch army. After the capitulation of the Netherlands the CPN decided to operate illegally.

The first issue of *De Waarheid*, on 23rd November 1940, opened with the editorial “De weg naar vrede en vrijheid” (The Road to Peace and Freedom):

Wij bevinden ons thans midden in de vreselijkste en grootste volkerenslaching die de wereld ooit heeft gekend. De imperialistische roofoorlog woedt en ons land gaat gebukt onder de nood en de ellende van de Duitse nazi-heerschappij, terwijl de bevolking bovendien getroffen wordt door de Engelse luchtbombardementen.

We are now in the midst of the most terrible and gratest human slaughter the world has ever known. The imperialistic robbery war is raging and our country suffers from the distress and misery of the German nazi rule, while the population is also affected by the English arial bombardments. (*De waarheid* 23 nov. 1940, Delpher)

In the editorial fell no word about the “Führer”; even the name ‘Adolf Hitler’ was absent. As well as that of Joseph Stalin. The Dutch communists (after the example of the German communists!) did not want to attack Stalins’ policy and his newly cooperation with Hitler, bearing in mind the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact from 23rd August 1939. In fact, it was this treaty, signed one week before Germany invaded Poland from the West, and some three weeks before the Soviet Union attacked Poland from the East, that had started this ‘imperialistic’ war.

This treaty is till today (after the example of the Soviet propaganda) called the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact (in English and in German: Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, in Russian: Пакт Риббентропа-Молотова, in Polish: Pakt Ribbentrop-Molotow) – after the names of the then foreign ministers of Germany and the Soviet Union. But: this is a misleading name – this was the *Hitler-Stalin Pact*; these two dictators were the real initiators of it. *De Waarheid* did not want to show that Hitler and Stalin were friends now... And – the first issue of *De Waarheid* appeared just ten days after the official visit of Molotov in Berlin and his talks with Hitler.

De Vries was in this time an ‘onderduiker’: a person in hiding. He was not the only one in the Netherlands; thousands of people did it. But – this is interesting: while hiding before the Germans, what did he think about the Hitler-Stalin Pact? What did he think about the war developments in 1940: Germany attacking Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, then the capitulation of France; the Soviet Union fighting against Finland, invading Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, annexing parts of Romania... Well, after several months, in June 1941, he had learned about Hitler’s invasion on the Soviet Union, his beloved Communist land. And now: he became active in the Dutch Resistance. In July 1944 he was arrested and later brought to Kamp Amersfoort (*Polizeiliches Durchgangslager Amersfoort*); in March 1945 he was liberated from there by the Dutch Resistance (De Vries, *Doodskoppen en kaalkoppen* 14-31).

And after the war – he was again active in the CPN. He was member of the city council of Amsterdam – and so: he *was* a politician. In 1946, the CPN gained the most votes here: more than 32%, becoming the strongest party (cf. Kiesraad – verkiezingsuitslagen). In the same year de Vries was an official (unsuccessful) CPN candidate in the elections for the Dutch Parliament (Tweede Kamer). So he *was* a politician.

He himself, however, felt that he was *not*. After decades he said:

De Haagse Post beschouwde me als een echt politieke figuur. Het is niet karakteristiek voor mij, ik ben in de eerste plaats schrijver.

[The Dutch journal] *De Haagse Post* considered me a truly political figure.

This is not characteristic for me, I am in the first place a writer (Van Vliet, *Contouren van de schrijver en communist Theun de Vries* 12).

Well, that can be true; but de Vries was a very *political* writer, surely in the 30s and 40s of the 20th century. And also: a *political* poet. When in December 1939 Joseph Stalin celebrated his 60th birthday (he was in fact

born in 1878, but the officially proclaimed date was 21st December 1879), de Vries had written a poem for him with the title „1879 – Stalin – 1939”:

horizon hun ernst en zwaar gebaar
om de grijze hemelen te dragen
van het oude ondergaande jaar. (...)

Trek nu, woorden, rustig en geladen
met de windkracht van dit zeegebied
tot den grootsten aller kameraden,
groet hem, zing voor hem dit Hollands lied: (...)

“Leiders gaan, het volk blijft eeuwig leven” –
Maar in ’t hart der nieuwe orde staat
bij de onuitwisbaren geschreven:
S t a l i n , – leider, broeder, kameraad!” (PenC_1940_01.pdf (rug.nl))

Holland’s mills, in sombre weighty movement
cast their view upon a low
to carry the grey skies
of the old and passing year. (...)

Speak now, words, quietly and charged
with all the power of this wind-swept land
greet the greatest of all comrades
Sing for him this melody of Holland (...)

’Leaders go, but the people live forever’ –
But in the heart of the new order it is
indelibly inscribed:
Stalin, – leader, brother, comrade! (Transl. Vic Ratsma; Theun De Vries:
Poems on Stalin revolutionarydemocracy.org)

One should not forget: the communist de Vries had written this poem in December 1939, and published it in January 1940. This was four months after Hitler’s – and Stalin’s – invasion in Poland, and five months before the Wehrmacht attacked the Netherlands...

Five years later the Red Army captured Berlin, and the British, American, Canadian and Polish armies liberated the Netherlands. A note in the margin: the last battle was that between the Wehrmacht and – a

Georgian Infantry Battalion (a part of the Wehrmacht itself!) on the Texel island; it ended on 20th May 1945.

And now Theun de Vries became, as was said, active again. As member of the CPN (in later years even a member of the Central Committee) and of the “Nederlandse Vredesraad” (Dutch Peace Council) he developed contacts with Soviet officials. In 1948 he was a member of the CPN delegation at the “World Congress of Intellectuals in Defence of Peace”, organized by Polish officials in the now Polish (and till 1945 German) city of Wroc³aw / Breslau (Czarneka, *op. cit.* 94).

In October 1950 he was leading, as chairman of the “Vereniging Nederland-USSR” (Association the Netherlands – the Soviet Union), a delegation to Moscow, for the celebration of 33rd anniversary of the October Revolution. *De Waarheid* had placed a photograph of members of the delegation and their relatives, “cordially waving on the first stage of their journey, to Prague”.



De Waarheid, 3.11.1950, the CPN delegation leaves to Moscow (source: *De waarheid* » 03 nov 1950 – Art. 87 | Delpher).

And when, in March 1953, Joseph Stalin died, de Vries came to Moscow for the funeral of the Soviet “Generalissimus”. He had again written a poem – this time for the funeral: “Uitvaart”.

In het grote grijze zwijgen van het eeuwenoude plein
Wachtte hem voor 't laatst de garde, wachtten makkers, groot en klein. (...)
Op de schouders van zijn naasten werd hij eens nog opgeheven
Die hun had geleerd zich vrij te vechten, vrij te leven.
Hem, in zware jaren eenmaal Lenin's leerling en genoot,
Droeg men weer aan Lenin's zijde in de vriendschap van de dood.
(PenC_1953_04.pdf (rug.nl))
“Farewell”

In the mournful silence of the ancient square
Old guards waited, for the final time, comrades, young and old (...)
On the shoulders of his nearest he was carried one more time
He, who taught them liberation and to live in freedom
He, Lenin's pupil and comrade through the difficult years
Was taken again to Lenin's side in the comradeship of death. (Transl. Vic
Ratsma; Theun De Vries: Poems on Stalin revolutionarydemocracy.org))

After decades, de Vries admitted that he had a great admiration for Joseph Stalin – and that he was absolutely wrong:

Ik heb in mijn leven een grote verering voor Stalin gehad. Dat is bedrog geweest, een verschrikkelijk, utopisch zelf-bedrog. Ik zocht een groot volksleider, een man met de meest verheven gedachten over het mensdom en ik bleek in een oosterse despoot te hebben geloofd. Ik wist het al een tijdje, maar ik durfde de illusie niet op te geven. (...). O ja, ik heb spijt gehad, zeker. Ik heb mij soms geschaamd. Maar het beroerde is: voordat je je politieke desillusie aan de wereld bekend maakt, moet je nog wel een aantal hobbels nemen. Niet mijn geloof, maar de praktijk waarin ik geloofde was onecht. Ik vond het ook moeilijk om afstand te moeten nemen van de communistische kring waarin ik leefde. Ik had er zoveel vrienden, ik voelde mij opgenomen.

I have had great reverence for Stalin in my life. That has been a deception, a terrible utopian self-deception. I was looking for a great people's leader, a man with the most lofty thoughts about humanity, and I turned out to have believed in een Eastern despot. I had known it for some while, but I was afraid to give up the illusion. (...) Oh yes, I felt sorry, sure. Sometimes I've been ashamed. But the bad thing is: before you show your political disillusionment to the world, you still have to overcome a number of

hurdles. Not my faith but the practice in which I believed was false. I also found it difficult to distance myself from the communist circle in which I lived. I had so many friends there, I felt included. (Visser *Theun de Vries*)

Is this not, one could ask, like the feeling of some priests who all their life long were living within their church, and after years realized that this church was often wrong in its activities... They realized that – but they did not want to leave the church. On the one side it was: faith. On the other side – they felt a strong bond with other priests. And when it happened that they were banned from the church – they felt thereafter lonely...

De Vries realized this feelings step for step. In 1963 he made a great step to distance himself from the party: he translated the famous anti-Stalinist book of Aleskandr Solzhenitsyn *Один день из жизни Ивана Денисовича* (One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich). His translation, *Een dag uit het leven van Ivan Denisovitsj*, appeared shortly after the publication of the Russian original in the Soviet Union. But the Communist Party of the Netherlands – was absolutely not content about it. Because – it was still a Stalinist party... And when a year later, in 1964, Stalin's successor Nikita Khrushchev was overthrown by Leonid Brezhnev, Stalin again was seen as a hero of the Soviet Union.

So de Vries moved further and further away from the CPN. And after the Soviet invasion in Czechoslovakia – he finally decided to say “Farewell” to his comrades.

Theun de Vries – prolific author; Eastern Bloc translations

In all this time de Vries stayed very active as writer. He was indeed a very prolific author. Almost each year he published a book. He made his debut, when he was 18 years old, with the *Friesche Sagen* (Frisian Sagas, 1925). His most known novels from before the war were *Rembrandt* (1931) and *Stiefmoeder aarde* (Stepmother Earth, 1936). Those written after the war included *De vrijheid gaat in het rood gekleed* (Freedom is Dressed in Red, 1945), *Sla de volven, herder!* (Beat the Wolves, Shepherd!, 1946), *Het meisje met het rode haar* (The Girl with the Red Hair, 1956), *Vincent in Den Haag* (Vincent in the Hague, 1972, firstly published in 1963 as *Ziet, een mens!*, Look, a man!), *Moergrobben* (Devilish Monsters, 1964), *Spinoza* (1972), *Marx* (1989), *Het hoofd van Haydn* (The Head of Haydn, 1989).

The books listed above were very often translated in foreign languages. And mostly: after 1945, in the countries of the so-called Eastern Bloc. The

leading country of this bloc, the Soviet Union, was the ‘driving force’ for the translations of de Vries in Russian, and also Ukrainian, Georgian or Lithuanian. It led also the ‘translation politics’ in the GDR, Czechoslovakia (here both in Czech and in Slovak), Poland, Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria. There were also two translations in Yugoslavia (*Rembrandt* in 1956 and *Stiefmoeder aarde* in 1958; cf. Novaković-Lopušina, *Dutch Translations in Yugoslavia* 56); this country, however, from 1948 on formed a part of the Non-Aligned Movement.

There were, however, also translations made before the war, but: just a few. His *Rembrandt* was translated into German in 1934 (in the eyes of Eva Schumann, the later translator of de Vries’ works in the GDR, this was a “very freely” translation, see Grave 2018, p. 70). In 1938 *Rembrandt* appeared in Czechoslovakia (in the Czech language). There were also plans made for a translation of *Stiefmoeder aarde*, but after Germany’s invasion in March 1939 they failed (Engelbrecht, *Theun de Vries in Czechoslovakia* 80-82). There was more: *Stiefmoeder aarde* was also not published after the war, in 1948, due to internal rivalry of two Communist publishing houses (Engelbrecht, *A Good Way to Propagate Communist Thought* 208).

Therefore the first novel written by de Vries after the war, *De vrijheid gaat in ’t rood gekleed* (1945), telling about a revolution in Haiti at the beginning of the 19th century, was published in Czech translation, as *Svoboda chodí v rudém šatě*, quite soon, in 1948 (*Ibid.* 207). *Stiefmoeder aarde* was not that lucky; also not by a third try to publish it in Czech, in 1971-1972, because of the fact that “the intended translator Olga Krijtová received a publication ban in 1971 due to having resigned her party membership in protest against the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops in 1968” (*Ibid.* 208).

In the same time de Vries leaved the CPN – this could have been another influential factor. Olga Krijtová was the most important translator of Dutch literature in Czechoslovakia. She played the same role here as Eva Schumann in the GDR. She translated almost 100 works from the Dutch and Flemish literature, which made almost 40% of all translations (*Ibid.* 203).

Krijtová translated the till today most known novel of de Vries (in 2015 the twentieth edition appeared!): *Het meisje met het roode haar* – as *Dívka s rudými vlasy*. This was a story about Hannie Schaft, a young communist fighter in the Dutch Resistance. In 1943, at the age of 23 years, she joined actively the communist “Raad van Verzet” (Council of Resistance). In

March 1945 she was arrested during a razzia, with a pistol and copies of *De Waarheid*, and had been recognized as “the girl with the red hair” who was sought by the Gestapo. In April 1945, three weeks before the end of the war, she was executed. For de Vries, and not only for him, Hannie Schaft became a symbol of heroic resistance fighter.

The Czech version of de Vries’ book was published in 1959 in Prague (there was not a Slovak translation; cf. Engelbrecht 2018, p. 88). Characteristic: the full title in Dutch read also *Roman uit het verzet 1942-1945* (Novel from the Resistance 1942-1945); de Vries ‘forgot’ the years 1940-41 of the Hitler-Stalin Pact)... And so the Czech title had also the same time limits: *Román s odboje 1942-1945*.

In the same year translations of this work were published in Hungary (*A vöröshajú lány*, translated by Erzsébet F. Solti) and in the Soviet Union – twice, first in Moscow, then in Tbilisi. The Russian title was *Рыжеволосая девушка*, both in the Russian Soviet Republic (here as translator: A. I. Kobetskaya) and in Georgia (here as translator: Elene Kaduasi). One year later it appeared in the GDR as *Das Mädchen mit dem roten Haar* (translated by Eva Schumann). In 1962 the Romanian translation, *Fata cu părul roșu* was published (by H.R. Radian). And in 1966 there was another translation in the Soviet Union: the Lithuanian *Rudaplaukė mergina* (by P. Cebelienė and D. Lenkauskienė).

There were also translations (e.g. in Czech) of his *Sla de volven, herder!*, as *Bij vlky, pastýři! Román z babylonského starověku*, in 1952, or *De vrouweneter*, as *Ženojed*, in 1979.

After de Vries in 1967 published his *Balans van 50 jaar Russische Revolutie* (Balance of 50 Years of the Russian Revolution), his works were forbidden in the Soviet Union. Because – he expressed here “scherpe kritiek op alles wat er na de Russische Revolutie scheef was gegaan en wat er half gerealiseerd of achtergebleven was” (sharp criticism of everything that went crooked after the Russian Revolution and what was half realized or left behind; Van de Waarsenburg 1984, p. 140). He himself was, as he said, “op een ontzettende manier in de Sovjet-pers aangevallen” (attacked in a terrible way by the Soviet press; Van de Waarsenburg, *op. cit.* 141).

Also in the GDR he was banned from the literary market. Interestingly – this was not so in Czechoslovakia, and not so in Poland. His *Moergrobben* from 1964 were translated here in 1973 as *Diabelskie poczwary*, his *Vincent v Haagu* (Czech) and his *Vincent w Hadze* (Polish) appeared respectively in 1975 and in 1980. And then – his *Rembrandt* was published in 1985

in Ukrainian: in Kyiv, still in Soviet times, but now under Mikhail Gorbatshovs Perestroika.

Translations of Theun de Vries from Eastern Europe

But after 1989 the wave of translations stopped. The last one was that by Olga Krijtová in 1990: *Haydnova hlava*; the original was published just one year before. And no more novels of de Vries were translated; not *De bergreis* from 1998 about the painter from the Dutch Golden Age Hercules Seghers, not the novel about another Golden Age painter Johannes Torrentius (from the same year), not *De wilde vrouwen uit Pella* from 1999 about Euripides...

Yes, de Vries was a very prolific author who's many novels were very often translated in the countries of the communist Eastern Block. But today his personality *and* his literary oeuvre are covered by a kind of a shadow.

In the second part of the newest Russian history of the Dutch literature, *История нидерландской литературы*, from 2013, a volume of more than 500 pages, de Vries does not deserve an 'own' chapter (like the almost 30 other Dutch and Flemish writers and poets). No, he is (as Тён де Врис – or: Тейн де Фрис) only 'good' for one – yes: one page. In the chapter “Литература между двумя мировыми войнами. Историческая ситуация и общая характеристика литературных тенденции / Общий обзор” (Literature between the two world wars. Historical situation and general characteristics of literary tendencies / General Overview), the Russian literary historian Irina Michajlova mentions him as 'writer-communist' – “писатель-коммунист” (25). She adds that

В 1950-е гг. В Советском Союзе многотысячными тиражами были напечатаны две его книги: в 1956 г. «Рембрандт» (Rembrandt, 1931) и в 1959 г. «Рыжеволосая девушка» (“Het meisje met het rode haar”, 1956) – о героине Сопrotивления Ханни Схафт.

In the 1950s his two books were printed in thousands of copies: in 1956 *Рембрандт*, and in 1959 *Рыжеволосая девушка* – about the heroine of the Resistance Hannie Schaft (*Ibid.*).

Michajlova is aware that the main reason for publishing these books of de Vries in the Soviet Union was his membership in the Communist Party of the Netherlands:

Не вызывает сомнения, что эти книги были изданы только потому, что их автор был коммунистом и «другом Советского Союза», ведь

с 1949 по 1963 г. Он являлся председателем общества «Нидерланды – СССР».

There is no doubt that these books were published only because their author was a communist and “a friend of the Soviet Union), as from 1949 to 1963 he was the chairman of the Netherlands-USSR Association (*Ibid.*).

But, Michajlova writes, his books were not read, because he was a communist – but because of his mastership and talent:

Но русских читателей привлекали, разумеется, не его политические убеждения, а мастерство и талант писателя, яркие образы и увлекательные сюжеты.

But Russian readers were attracted, of course, not by his political convictions, but by the skill and talent of the writer, vivid images and fascinating plots (*Ibid.*).

And she concludes: “Эти произведения продолжали охотно читать и после того, как Тейн де Фрис впал в немилость у советской власти, оттого что в 1971 г. вышел из коммунистической партии. – These works continued to be read with pleasure even after Theun de Vries fell out of favor by the Soviet regime because in 1971 he left the Communist Party” (*Ibid.*).

A Nobel Prize for a Hitlerist? A Nobel Prize for a Stalinist?

One can ask: how can a communist get the highest literary award for his clearly communist literary oeuvre in a democratic country? It is unthinkable that a Hitlerist would become a laureate of the Nobel Prize for Literature. Is it thinkable that a Stalinist – and de Vries *was* a Stalinist – could become one?

Theun de Vries achieved it, of course in the Dutch dimensions: he got the P.C. Hooft Award, the most prestigious literary prize in the Netherlands. This prize was for his until then written novels, including *Het meisje met het rode haar*. For many people in the Netherlands this was not a *communist* novel – but a *national* novel. Hannie Schaft became the symbol of *all* Dutch Resistance. When in November 1945 she was reburied with military honour, there was also an official ceremony for her in the St. Bavo Church in Haarlem, with the presence of Queen Wilhelmina. In 1946 Hannie Schaft received posthumously the Dutch Resistance Cross (*Verzetskruis*) and the American *Medal of Freedom*.

But the Cold War changed it all. Five years later, in November 1951, the annual commemoration of Schaft was officially forbidden by the Dutch minister of interior under prime minister Willem Drees. The same Drees who started his political career as member of the Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij (the Social Democratic Workers Party) – where the CPN came from. The gathered people were confronted with police units...

De Vries got the P.C. Hooft Award in 1963. In his official speech, he firstly thanked Theo Bot, the Dutch minister of education, culture and science, not only for his decision to accept the verdict of the award jury, but also to hand over the P.C. Hooft Award to him personally. He did it in very elegant words:

Mijn erkentelijkheid gaat in de eerste plaats uit naar U, Excellentie Bot, die het besluit getroffen hebt het eindoordeel van de jury inzake de P.C.-Hooftprijs, de Staatsprijs voor Letterkunde, over te nemen, en die zo vriendelijk bent geweest deze persoonlijk aan mij te willen uitreiken.

In the first place, my gratitude goes to you, Excellency Bot, who decided to accept the jury's final verdict on the P.C. Hoot Award, the State Prize for Literature, and who kindly presented it to me personally. (De Vries, *Als mens en als schrijver* 425)

This was indeed a special moment: a minister of a centre-right government handed over the most prestigious literary prize of his country to a member of the Central Committee of the communist party that was politically bound with the greatest enemy of the Western world: the Soviet Union. But in his speech de Vries did not once mention the communist party; he felt here and now as a Dutchman and as writer:

U hebt mij met uw woorden vol waardering en begrip een grote eer en een grote voldoening bereid, die ik *en* als Nederlander *en* als auteur op hoge prijs stel.

You have prepared me with your words of appreciation and understanding a great honour and a great satisfaction, which I, both as a Dutchman and as an author, highly value. (*Ibid.*)

He did not use the word 'communism', but yes, he mentioned his perspective as Marxist:

Bij de beoordeling van mijn schrijvende person, in beschouwingen of recensies tref ik soms de verwondering aan over het feit, dat iemand van mijn 'uitgesproken individualiteit', een wereldbeschouwing huldigt, de Marxistische, die zich in zo sterke mate op de collectiviteit schijnt te richten. De discrepantie van het geval is schijnbaar. (...) Voor mij hangt dat

feit ten nauwste samen met een ander, voor een schrijver vital verschijnsel – de inspiratie.

In assessing my writing person, in reflections or reviews, I sometimes find the amazement that someone of my ‘outspoken individuality’ holds a worldview, a Marxist, which seems to focus so strongly on the collectivity. The discrepancy of that case is apparent. (...) For me that fact is closely related to another phenomenon that is vital for a writer – the inspiration. (*Ibid.* 427)

Back to Hannie Schaft: she is also today an inspiration for many people. In 1981, a film about her was made, with the most known Dutch actress Renée Soutendijk in the title role.

And in 1986 another film, based on the novel *De Aanslag* (The Assault) from 1982 of another well known author, Harry Mulisch, used motives of Schaft's life. In 1987, *The Assault* won the Oscar Award as the best foreign language film. A communist symbol amid the American culture – Theun de Vries had seen it...

„Der Sieger hat das Recht” vs. „Наше дело правое – Оно победило”

Theun de Vries wrote in 1939, and repeated it in 1949: “Stalin, – leader, brother, comrade!” – at the beginning of the war, and the end of it. The Hitler-Stalin Pact opened the doors to this. So, what would one think when similar words would be written – and printed! – about the other ‘Leader’ – the ‘Führer’ Adolf Hitler? Well, if *he* had won the war, it surely would have happened. There is a German saying: „Der Sieger hat das Recht”; the winner is always right.

Joseph Stalin formulated another motto, on the Medal for the Victory over Germany in the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945 (За победу над Германией в Великой Отечественной войне 1941—1945 гг.), established on 9th May 1945: *Наше дело правое – Оно победило* (Our Cause is Right – He have won). Because: he had won.

He was – not only in his own country, but also in other countries – the *Great Hero*. Also in the Netherlands. The Dutch Communists had much influence in the Dutch politics, they had ten deputies in the lower chamber of the Dutch parliament, the Tweede Kamer, they were the strongest party in the Amsterdam city council.

And Stalin – got on 8th May 1946 his own lane in Amsterdam, one out of three that came all together to the Victorieplein. The other two were Churchill-laan and Rooseveltlaan.

Stalin ‘held’ his lane ten years long, even in the first years of the Cold War. Only in 1956, after the Soviet invasion in Hungary the name “Stalinlaan” was changed into “Vrijheidslaan” – Liberty lane. Was the intention of that act to show that Stalin means Liberty? Surely not...

In Braunau am Inn a memorial stone (Mahnstein) was placed in front of Hitler’s birth house. There is an inscription on it: “Für Frieden, Freiheit un Demokratie. Nie wieder Faschismus. Millionen Tote mahnen” (For Peace, Freedom and Democracy. Never Again Fascism. Millions of Dead Warn). In Gori a monumental museum was built next to Stalin’s birth house. In front of it a railway wagon is placed; Stalin used it at the Yalta Conference.

Considering all aspects of the history, also that of the Communism, that of the Nazism, that of the Stalinism – one can surely say that history is not always the *Magistra Vitae*.

But still: this is history. And there are many signs of the Stalinist history too. For example in Poland: in the city called Boles³awiec in Polish, and Bunzlau in German.

In this city, where Field Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov died in 1813, there is till today a monumental cemetery. Not only for Kutuzov – also for the soldiers of the Red Army, fallen here in 1945.

Among them there is a young Georgian junior lieutenant lying in the neighbourhood of a Soviet monument with the inscription: Мы победили под великим знаменем Ленина-Сталина (We Have Won under the Great Banner of Lenin-Stalin). And far right an obelisk for Kutuzov is standing.

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