

**From wartime Amsterdam to Toronto academe:  
In memoriam Henry Gilius Schogt  
(24 May 1927 - 12 April 2020)**

*David Smith*



*Figure 1. Henry Schogt in August 1995. Photo courtesy David Smith.*

Henry's last book, *The curtain*, opens with an idyllic scene. In the winter of 1954, he and a group of friends go skating north of Amsterdam. On the last 8-km stretch between Jisp and Purmerend he accompanies Corrie Frenkel, whom he had met only occasionally. On April 2, 1955, they marry in Amsterdam's City Hall. In his memoir Henry also narrates in great detail their earlier years, especially their

painful experiences during the German occupation of the Netherlands from 1940 to 1945. At considerable risk to their own lives, his Gentile family sheltered Jews. Her Jewish family was dispersed in various hiding places and her parents ultimately did not survive.

But to begin at the beginning, Henry was the youngest of the five children of Johannes Schogt and his wife, née Ida van Rijn, who were both mathematicians, the father teaching high school in Amsterdam. As for Corrie, she was the youngest of the three daughters of Philip Frenkel, an Amsterdam lawyer, and his wife, née Betsy Wiener. Both families weathered the Depression, but neither was complacent about the danger Hitler represented to Dutch neutrality and Dutch Jewry. In the pre-war years, refugees from Germany streamed into the Netherlands, some of them finding refuge with the Frenkels. The Germans invaded on May 10, 1940, reducing Rotterdam to rubble and occupying the country within five days.

By this time Henry was in the Barlaeus Gymnasium in Amsterdam, Corrie in high school in Haarlem. The Germans gradually imposed their anti-Semitic measures. In October, public sector workers were required to sign a declaration that they either were or were not Aryans; Henry's father reluctantly complied. In November, Jews were dismissed from educational positions; two of Henry's teachers disappeared. In January 1941, all Jews and part-Jews had to register. In February, the Jewish quarter was closed and in March, Jewish businesses were put under trusteeship. In April, hotels, restaurants, cafés, theatres, cinemas, libraries, pools and bathhouses were banned for Jews; some of their owners had already denied them access. As Henry was darker-skinned than most Dutch, he was sometimes assumed to be Jewish, notably by a policeman who tried to prohibit his use of a skating-rink. In August, Jewish students were transferred to Jewish schools; Corrie had to move from Haarlem to Amsterdam. At year's end identity cards became compulsory; those belonging to Jews were stamped with a black "J." In January 1942 more than 1,000 Jewish men were sent to labour camps in the north of the country. That same year, Jews were banned from driving their cars, owning and using bicycles, taking public transport, marrying Aryans, shopping in stores selling meat, fish and vegetables, and being outside after 8 p.m. They were also required to wear the yellow star. Dutch Nazi police openly attacked Jews and Jewish businesses. In July 1942 1,000 Jews aged 16-32 were deported, including Henry's friend Alex Rimini. *Afscheid van Alex* ('Farewell to Alex') (1988a) was an article he would devote later to their friendship. Henry's parents had offered him shelter, but Alex had refused for fear of endangering his family, all of whom perished in the Holocaust. In May 1943 no Jews were allowed in Amsterdam. Large-scale round-ups began and continued until late 1944. By August 1944 the Allied forces were pushing north towards the Dutch border,

Dutch Nazis started fleeing to Germany, and the Germans were in disarray, but after the British failure to capture Arnhem, the front stabilized, a famine began, and thousands of city dwellers died of starvation. The most densely populated provinces were not liberated until the Germans surrendered to the First Canadian Army on May 5, 1945.

Resistance to the occupation mounted slowly. When students dared to protest, their universities were closed. Attacks on the German army and the Dutch police and acts of sabotage were met with reprisals – execution of perpetrators and arbitrary deportation of Jewish “hostages.” There was a general strike in February 1941 in solidarity with the Jews. Contacts were established with England and the Dutch government in exile in London. Above all, the Resistance helped people in danger flee abroad, found safe houses, and provided food, ration coupons and false identity papers. Corrie’s future brother-in-law Herbert Rothbarth, a refugee from Germany, escaped with his brother via France and Spain to England, where he enlisted in a special detachment of the Dutch army. As the German eastern front collapsed and the Allied armies moved inexorably north, more people, including previous fence-sitters, joined the Resistance, but the persecution of Jews continued.

Henry’s parents quickly decided to shelter Jews. Their eldest son’s friend Johan Jacobs stayed for a while under their roof, with the father serving as go-between for letters to and from Johan’s girlfriend Betty. He soon acquired fake identity papers and moved on. (Betty survived Auschwitz, Johan probably did not.) When a fellow mathematics teacher called Rozenberg was barred from teaching, Henry’s father brought him and his wife food, returning with valuables for safe keeping, including many cigars. They stayed with the Schogts in 1942 but, like Johan, soon acquired false identity papers and moved to a lodging house. (They survived.) Henry’s sister Elisabeth, who worked to find shelter for Jews and to distribute a Communist leaflet, arranged for a 1-year-old Jewish baby, Marja, to be looked after by the Schogts. (Marja survived and was brought up by her grandparents.) In 1944 a couple called Jacobs (no relation of Johan) was sheltered by the Schogts for the rest of the war. The husband was principal of the Orthodox Jewish high school. His wife Bertha gave birth to a son in a clinic on December 6, 1944. (They eventually emigrated to Israel.) The Schogt household included seven members – one of Henry’s sisters had died in 1936, but his aged grandmother lived with the family; she died in 1944, her last words being: “I really enjoyed the kale” (54).<sup>1</sup> They shared their house with two adults who had Orthodox dietary requirements and with two small children, making a total of eleven. However, Henry’s two older brothers were not always at home; they were often on the run,

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<sup>1</sup> All page numbers are from *The curtain* (Schogt 2003).

were occasionally arrested and deported, but survived the war. Both of Henry's parents, Johannes and Ida, are listed among the Righteous Among the Nations at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, in honour of non-Jews who took enormous risks to save Jews during their persecution.

Hiding places were constructed in the house, but there were some scary moments. On December 5, 1944, German soldiers enter the house, demand the Rozenberg cigars and threaten to take away the Jewish baby if they don't get them; they leave with the cigars. Marja is quickly moved to a friend of Henry's sister Elisabeth until the danger passes. Sam Oly, a Dutch Nazi policeman (also an Olympic boxer!) visits, inspects, but goes away empty-handed. The whole family and their guests leave the house for a time. On December 28, 1944, Henry's maternal aunt Grie, who sympathized with the Germans and had a German boyfriend, visits unexpectedly, bumps into the Jacobs but seems unconcerned and does not denounce them. (After the war she was arrested and interned for three weeks but never put on trial.) German soldiers come in again in 1945 but are decent and apologetic.

As for the Frenkels, they were required to leave their house in Bentveld and live in an Amsterdam apartment with a cousin of Corrie's mother, Piet Wiener, and his family. On December 19, 1942, they were eating mussels, when the father arrived home late, having just talked his way out of arrest. All immediately dispersed and went into hiding, leaving the mussels unfinished. Corrie, aged 14, spent the first night of her underground existence in the house of her father's notary. Next morning, without her star, she took the train to Baarn, where she sought refuge with a former neighbor. She then moved to Eerbeek, a smaller village near Apeldoorn, where a former Frenkel domestic ran a grocery store and a barber shop. Through family contacts a home was finally found for her in Rotterdam with Nicolaas Johannes Bink, a lawyer, and his wife Berthe Élise Louise de Senarclens de Grancy. The latter's Huguenot family had fled religious persecution in France and settled in Brabant, where she had inherited a country estate. "Uncle Nico" arranged for fake identity papers for Corrie as Vili Cornelia Scherer. The official who produced the fake identity was a member of the Resistance and was later executed by the Germans. Corrie was even enrolled in the Rotterdam Montessori high school. She was visited just once by her mother and once by a sister, though such visits were discouraged by the Resistance.

The older of her two sisters, Katilie, known as Tilie, went from house to house in the east of the country, then found shelter in the home of a doctor in the south near the Belgian border, then moved to Brussels. She was fortunate to be blonde and unlikely to be seen as Jewish. She worked with the nuns as a nurse's aide in a hospital. After the war, she and her husband would take over the role of parents to Corrie. The middle sister Ernestine, known as Tineke, found refuge at

Zeist, a village outside Utrecht. She was virtually isolated, though her mother visited her once. All three sisters survived.

Their parents moved from one temporary shelter to another before settling in a village at the house of a friend, Van der Willigen, a doctor and pharmacist. They then were hidden in marshland where they lived in a tent and were visited by Corrie and Tineke. Facing the winter of 1943-44, they found refuge in a village in a house whose owner had to be paid. He was also a black-marketeer dealing in meat. In January 1944 the Dutch State Police surrounded the house in search of the owner and stumbled upon the two Jews. They were arrested and taken to Arnhem, where they joined Uncle Piet and many members of his extended family. All were deported to concentration camps and all survived except Corrie's parents who were taken to Auschwitz and perished there on or about October 24, 1944. Henry had never known his parents-in-law.

These wartime experiences could never be forgotten or forgiven. Henry states in his memoir, without further explanation, that they had "a lasting influence on our outlook on life," colouring "our contacts with friends and strangers, as well as our relations with our children" (x). Henry's elder daughter Barbara said at the age of 12 that however little her parents talked about their experience, "it was always there." In her short film *Zyklon Portrait* (1999) Henry's younger daughter Elida says: "My experience growing up was that you didn't talk about your memories or what you had gone through. You can't even find the words for it." Indeed, for Henry the Holocaust was "impossible to understand" (x). Of the 150,000 Jews living in the Netherlands, more than half of them in Amsterdam, 75% lost their lives in the Holocaust, an unusually high percentage for western Europe.

It should be noted that in *The curtain* Henry always refers to the occupiers as Germans, whereas some of his reviewers call them Nazis (Dierick 2002). Henry uses the latter term exclusively for Dutch collaborators. He subsequently found it hard to make friends with his German contemporaries, but occasionally surprised himself. Even during the war he had encountered good Germans – the soldiers who came for the cigars but did not come back for baby Marja; five of the six policemen who captured the Frenkels later testified that they would have left them in peace, had not the sixth, a Nazi, insisted on arresting them.

After the war, Corrie graduated in English, Henry in Russian (1951) and French (1952) at the University of Amsterdam. He wrote his doctoral thesis at the University of Utrecht on the causes of the two outcomes in French of the *e fermé tonique libre* ('tonic free closed e'), which was published in 1960. He taught Russian at the University of Groningen and French at the Montessori Lyceum in The Hague and at the University of Utrecht. In the year 1963-64 he was *maître-assistant* in linguistics at the Sorbonne and in 1964-66 visiting lecturer in French

and Russian at Princeton University. At some point in 1966, as his two-year American visa was about to expire, he was persuaded by Dana Rouillard, the chair of French at the University of Toronto's University College, to take a position as associate professor in the department, replacing Peter Dembowski. He was promoted to the rank of full professor in 1969 and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1977, serving from 1982 to 1984 on the selection committee of that body. After a half-century in Canada, he declared in *The curtain*: "Our ties with our country of origin have remained strong, yet we do not completely belong there any more" (29). The holidays celebrated in Canada are not the same as in the Netherlands, birthdays are less important, but chocolate initials can still be offered. He kept in close contact with his family, his contemporaries and his peers in the Netherlands and, when they visited Toronto, offered them hospitality in his own home.

Like his friend and colleague, Pierre Léon, Henry's linguistic background was European. He looked back to Ferdinand de Saussure, André Martinet, and Georges Mounin, whereas North American linguists tended to be disciples of Noam Chomsky and his TG or Transformational-Generative Grammar. It was for this reason that, when the Department of Linguistics at the University of Toronto was created in the 1970s, both Pierre Léon and Henry Schogt opted to remain within the Department of French, which offers programmes in French language and linguistics, as well as in French language and literature. They agreed, however, to be cross-appointed to the Department of Linguistics.

Other than *The curtain*, which was translated into French by his Glendon College colleague Claude Taton (2009), a translation into Dutch of Russian short stories by Vsevolod Mikhailovich Garshin with the title *De palm die door het dak breekt en andere verhalen* ('The palm that breaks through the roof and other tales') (1966), and a translation into English of the same author's *Four days* (2003), Henry's many publications are in the field of linguistics, more specifically semantics. But he was quite versatile, branching out into literary criticism and theories of translation, as the titles of his major works reveal: *Le système verbal du français contemporain* (1968); *Sémantique synchronique: synonymie, homonymie, polysémie* (1976); and *Linguistics, literary analysis and literary translation* (1988b). He also co-authored with Pierre Léon and Edward Burstynsky *La phonologie* (1977). He published over fifty articles, averaging more than one a year throughout his career. They mainly deal with linguistics, including one in a *Festschrift* (1968b) for his mentor André Martinet, and are written in several languages, but the earliest of them concern Russian novelists. One of them has the amusing title: "*Pas lonely pantoute?*" (1986). He gave numerous papers in Dutch, French, English or Russian at Canadian universities and elsewhere (in France and the Netherlands, of course, but also in Germany, Greece, Rumania,

Russia, Scotland, Switzerland and the U.S.A.). He directed at least ten doctoral theses, as well as sitting on many more thesis committees. Other departments called upon him to attend thesis defences, often as internal examiner, and various universities invited him to serve as external examiner. He sat on several committees tasked with evaluating manuscripts, including the Romance Series Committee and the Manuscript Review Committee of the University of Toronto Press (1971-79) and the editorial board of this journal, on which, as Gus Dierick (forthcoming) would write in the newsletter of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Netherlandic Studies/Association canadienne pour l'avancement des études néerlandaises, he was “appreciated for his keen judgment combined with a gentle manner and a subtle sense of humour.” He was twice asked by the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies to evaluate the graduate programmes in French of other Ontario universities. The esteem of his colleagues for Henry is shown by the appearance of *Significations: essais en l'honneur d'Henry Schogt / Significations: Essays in honour of Henry Schogt* (1997), edited by one of his former students, Parth Bhatt, who states in his *Préface*: “Ce recueil constitue un témoignage de reconnaissance et d'amitié de la part des amis et collègues d'Henry Schogt. La grande diversité des sujets traités reflète les domaines de recherche du professeur Schogt, dont les langues et les littératures slaves et romanes, la phonologie diachronique, la sémantique et la traduction.”<sup>2</sup>

Henry studied French and Russian, but as a Dutch academic he had to be conversant with two additional languages – English and German. As a linguist, he familiarized himself with still more languages, partly in order to use them, but also to examine how they functioned. When teaching translation, he found himself – like several of his students – dealing with two languages, neither of which was his native tongue. He felt confident enough in English to translate literary works into that language. In later life he undertook the study of Chinese. According to Basil Kingstone, Henry “advanced beyond the elementary textbook, and when ordering the follow-up text was told by the bookseller that he was the only person ever to order it” (Dierick forthcoming).

During most of his distinguished academic career, when he was primarily concerned with the study of linguistics and related disciplines, I rarely heard him talk about the German wartime occupation of the Netherlands, but this changed as he neared retirement and painful memories were recounted. He kept up with literature on the Dutch Holocaust and in 1990 wrote in this journal a review article on Dutch literature on this subject. In 1991, while in Prague, he and Corrie visited the town and the concentration camp at Theresienstadt (Terezin); they “felt like

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<sup>2</sup> ‘This collection shows the gratitude and friendship of Henry Schogt's friends and colleagues. The great diversity of the subjects treated reflects Professor Schogt's areas of research, including Slavic and Romance languages and literatures, diachronic phonology, semantics and translation.’

intruders” (123) and quickly left. In 1993 Henry reviewed in this journal Sem Dresden’s *Vervolging, vernietiging, literatuur* (‘Persecution, extermination, literature’) (Schogt 1993), which explores the historical development of the unspeakable; two years later he translated it into English (Dresden 1995).<sup>3</sup>

Henry was a secular humanist, rejecting religious belief as the basis of morality. He was a man of great integrity, totally trustworthy. Though not hostile to believers, he certainly wanted to keep religion out of politics and lamented the religious wars still affecting the world. In politics he was liberal with a small “l,” left of centre but no extremist. Bush *fills* and Trump made him despair of democracy, and the policies of Israel in this century often disappointed him. I once heard him speak favourably about having to pay income taxes. He deplored tax cuts even when he benefited from them. For him social justice mattered.

Though I knew Henry from about the time of his appointment, my close association with him and with Corrie began when I became chair of the French department at the University of Toronto in 1975. I was very anxious for Henry to serve out his term as chair of the graduate section or even start a new term, but he seemed reluctant to accept. Older and wiser than I and somewhat more sensitive, he was perhaps afraid I might tread heavily on his toes. Whatever his reservations, he agreed to continue in his position, and we worked together well. He ran the graduate section smoothly. I particularly admired his skill at dealing with difficult people, on one occasion providing coffee and cookies in his office while settling the grievance of a student against an astonished professor. He was an excellent teacher and his students were devoted to him. I once followed his course in *stylistique comparée* so that I could learn how to teach it the following year. Throughout our careers I appreciated him as a colleague and friend – warm, helpful, convivial, loyal and dependable. Not long ago, I needed his help in checking a translation into Russian of an article I had written. It referred to cultural aspects of English like “church and chapel,” which I suspected were difficult to translate into Russian; he made a few necessary changes which my Russian editor accepted. Later I treated him to a Thai lunch and recommended the sea bass, but he declined: he was an unusual Dutchman who had detested fish and seafood since childhood. Eventually, he came to enjoy *moules marinières* and found it socially easier to eat the fish he was served than to have to decline it.

Let me end with an anecdote told by Henry’s colleague Ed Heinemann, who had been his student at Princeton University.<sup>4</sup> When Corrie took out her Canadian citizenship, Henry did not, for fear of losing the pension he had built up in the Netherlands. However, the Dutch bureaucracy then allowed him to become a dual citizen and keep his pension rights, because he was married to a Canadian.

<sup>3</sup> The photo (see Figure 1) I took of him on one occasion, dates from this period.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Ed Heinemann and Frank Collins for their help with this article.



He was a lovely man and he will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

He leaves his widow Corrie, his three children, Barbara and Philibert, who were born in the Netherlands, and Elida, who was born in Princeton, and five grandchildren, Alexander, Daniel, David, Nina and Sofia.

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