

Frisian-Dutch Lyricism

The poetry of Tsead Bruinja

In his debut collection *De wizers yn it read* Bruinja revealed himself as a tender lyrical poet who is often able to transmute extremely personal experiences into verse that is rich in imagery and highly musical. By joining together sentences or parts of sentences without punctuation as well as by an effective use of enjambement, he proved able to turn his poems into forceful, intense wholes. A fine example is his poem 'fjouwerjend kaam er út syn lêste dream' ('He galloped out his final dream'). The images in this poem, which in themselves bear witness to an inventive spirit, tumble over each other with great agility, together forming an extremely fragile and sensitive portrait.

In his recent work, Bruinja reveals to an increasing extent just how adventurous his writing is. He seems to break language down into its primary elements and then to join them together in his own wilful way. In this way, poems emerge that create a highly suggestive and spontaneous impression. The reader imagines himself in a smithy: he sees how the iron is forged into new shapes. It has been said about Bruinja's recent poetry that with its fragmentary composition, it bears witness to the age of television. You could also say that it is created out of a deep realisation that our experience has become fragmented.

Contemporary Dutch Poets

This brochure is part of the *Contemporary Dutch Poets*-series, featuring a choice of today's most interesting poets from the Netherlands. The series is published by the Dutch Foundation for Literature. If you would like to receive more information or other brochures from this series, please contact Thomas Möhlmann (t.moehlmann@letterenfonds.nl).

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Tsead Bruinja Abroad

Bruinja has performed on many international stages, among others in Nicaragua, Germany, Indonesia, Scotland, Zimbabwe and Macedonia. His poems have been translated and published in reviews and anthologies in France, Germany, Iraq, Nepal, Slovenia, South-Africa, the UK and the USA.

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Photo: Roeland Fossen

Tsead Bruinja (b. 1974) is a poet living in Amsterdam. He made his debut in 2000 with the Frisian-language collection called *De wizers yn it read* (The meters in the red). Bruinja's debut in the Dutch language, *Dat het zo hoorde* (The way it should sound), was published in 2003, and was nominated for the Jo Peters Poetry Prize the following year. Bruinja compiles anthologies – including the famous *Kutgedichten* (Twat Poems) and the anthology *Droom in Blauwe regenjas - nieuwe Friese dichters* (Dream in a Blue Raincoat - new Frisian poets) –, writes critical reviews, hosts literary events and performs in the Netherlands and abroad, often with musician Jaap van Keulen and occasionally with the flamenco dancer Tanja van Susteren.

His most recent collections are *Overwoekerd* (Overgrown; 2010), and *Angel* (Hook; 2008). The latter was published in newspaper form and appeared as a free download on a Dutch literary blog. Within a month it had been downloaded 2000 times. At the end of 2008 Bruinja was nominated as the new poet laureate for the Netherlands for the period 2009-2013. Bruinja came in second.

Even on paper his poems remain effortlessly powerful. He does not adhere to one single form. There are long prose poems and short lyrical songs. His technique of dovetailing sentences by omitting punctuation thus realizes a consistently different effect. Bruinja explores just how far he can go with associative leaps and schisms, without allowing the coherence to fail.

Hans Groenewegen in Information for Libraries

He is a poet who can sing tenderly and lovingly, but also knows how to make the best use of robust, rough images and sounds. He is soft-hearted and tough. Has a caressing touch and an iron fist... Tsead Bruinja is a sensitive singer who can erupt hard and rough when least expected.

Willem Thies at poetry blog Poëzierapport

He recognizes the chaos of the world and acknowledges the ruthlessness of time, but refuses to submit in advance. Without bitterness or grimness, purely in the realization that life's deck of cards has been shuffled this way. It does not stop him from orienting himself to 'our everyday lives', full of commitment and with playful vitality.

Eppie Dam in Dutch daily De Leeuwarder Courant

Sample translation

Poems by Tsead Bruinja **(Amsterdam: Cossee)**

Translations of Frisian poetry by David Colmer

From: *De wizers yn it read* / The meters in the red (Bornmeer, 2000)

darling no one knows about the previous lives

Cellar

Don Quixote

From: *De man dy't rinne moat* / The man who has got to march (Bornmeer, 2001)

Bridgemaster

Burning house

Self-portrait

From: *Gers dat alfêst laket* / Grass that is already laughing (Bornmeer, 2005)

Grass that's already laughing

Sun on the bunker

Goose

Translations of Dutch poetry by Willem Groenewegen

From: *Dat het zo hoorde* / The way it should sound (Contact, 2003)

Buying apples

After the party

I said I see the rose

From: *Batterij* / Battery (Contact, 2004)

Peaceful

From: *Bang voor de bal* / Afraid of the ball (Cossee, 2007)

so she says

Specialist in the field of window frames

Guestspeaker and chairman in the mess hall

Four Henry's

From: *Overwoekerd* / Overgrown (Cossee, 2010)

I drank until I was simple enough to be loved

Unpublished and translated by the author

Bed

Grave

Big pond

Followed by **'I set out to get as many readers as possible'**: an interview with Tsead Bruinja

For additional information on Tsead Bruinja and other Dutch poets, please also visit:

- The poetry pages at the foundation website: www.nlpvf.nl/p/

- The Dutch domain of Poetry International Web: <http://netherlands.poetryinternationalweb.org>

darling no one knows about the previous lives
in which we passed each other by or missed the bus
one of us was on or you were my sister my mother
and it was doomed between us because too many

years or a faith loomed up between us
sometimes the distance must have been as solid
as a continent with me for instance busy
inventing fire while you and your lover

were lighting candles on the other side of the ocean
am I holding you too tight again I don't want
to crush you but I'm scared and glad at once that

nothing will ever come between us again beyond
this universe where we can't come together because
it's much too small for the sorrow of two becoming one

darling let time tear us apart as we die one by one
we will fight back with bridges of words

Cellar

when she hears the hand on the handle behind her
the spring in the cellar door stretches the blue
mouthful of meths splashes back in the plastic
belly of the bottle still not mixed with her spit

her heart falls again her face blushes red
she screws the lid tight and wipes the wrinkled
back of her left hand over her mouth and only
starts to breathe in the gentle eyes of her daughter

who sent her boyfriend home with a last kiss
and missed her mother in the chair the black
lid of the stove heavy cast-iron unused

warmth probing the awareness of her fingers
a cautious creaking on the cellar stairs mother
is still up she thought and goes there

Don Quixote

he galloped out of his final dream
like a rusty knight on a white-washed horse
with a rigid dick and tidings for his wife
of the joy he'd found in fantasies of her

lovingly she washed his screeching suit in a bath
of coke with whalebone brushes in callused hands
she massaged the white from his open stallion's body
helped him panting onto his horse and showed him the way

his sharp bones almost poking through the frail skin
beneath his paunch rattling against the inside
of his gleaming suit of armour like a spoke-
driven peg on a shoe-polish tin

a ripe apple rolled in the box over the bacon sandwich
from one side to the other his lance was sanded smooth
the points sharp he sucked the peppermint on his tongue
and rubbed oil into his saddle

until the sails broke him I didn't want to hear
a word about a world around us I wanted to walk
together with his fiercely spinning mills

until the hot horizon

Bridgemaster

no total stranger she who brought the news
of your impending death I thought
I'll sing then sing to salvage all
the things I know as yours before

the gates of hell I take the book
of forgetting on my lap and start
to fish you up from this dead script
more foreign still than any tongue

just like the time you tried to pull me out
of a hole in the ice under a bridge
panicked and ended in the drink yourself
I can't escape this song

*come father strap my skates on now
I've almost got my boyhood wellies on
come strap my skates on now
the ice is thin like your exhausted face
you stare at me through watering eyes
rise up from that thick woollen grave
and strap on my skates
the water will see us fly above it*

mother brought us happy to the shore
where our first trip began with her
in our thoughts over transparent black
over careful watch out snags sticking up

frozen bream fish fingers I joked
trying to break the ice with
childish humour with childish hands
but you were with your wife sick at home

and almost in your place of birth the farms
blanketed winter-white over dumbstruck
grass green grass which once had known
the soft soles of the feet that now

alone with me without a girl raced over sad water
better than anyone else even mother

these ditches and fields knew you
this village with its churchyard full of familiar faces

the golden cock the sharp steeple
close to the farm where you
taught yourself short-wave and snare drum
where your father saw you galloping

no saddle bareback on the horse
the spade cut the ground early for him
who leant me his name three times
when I was too young to be called a father

*come and strap on my skates
I've got the tight green wellies on
strap on my skates
the ice is thin as the temporary distance between us
now that I can look at you dry-eyed across the line
strap my skates on one last time
or climb once more into the pen
and let the paper see us flying racing
howling over ice*

tell me again about the time you kicked
your music teacher who'd hit you hard
and gutless on the ear with a bunch of keys
right between the legs a so-called fainting fit

refused point-blank to apologise
authorities always pissed you off
at home where between the crooked and the straight
you ploughed your own deep path of pity

heavy as stone the lack of forgiveness balled
in your gut when you couldn't wear the cross
round your neck and your mother no longer
had a heavenly home to wait for you in

*strap on my skates father
this world is what's real*

*between her and me you were the bridgemaster
summer has set in now my skates
are greased in the cellar*

*before us whirligig beetles dance on the water
the water is blue like slate
so beautiful so dark*

Burning house

she lives in a burning house
every storm takes a tile from the roof
it's cold her teeth chatter
someone outside thinks up new rules for traffic
an old man cycles on
newspapers stuffed under his clothes
she walks out with a basket full of washing
black sheets black blankets black
pillowcase she sees the fields are burning too
no point in going out
it's better back inside the walls
flames dancing on his portrait
letters fall unasked through the door
rustling down not reaching the mat her cat
jumps onto her lap with a vegetable desire
to be stroked she pours more meths
over the photo albums wipes
the ash from her glasses and reads
and reads and reads

Self-portrait

a blessing the drizzle on his nose
the sleep that gives him time to grow
the glistening row of barbs to catch him
the three-cornered rip will reap him dirty looks
he'll take those blocks of wood for boats
green slime running through the frogspawn
no now he's dipped it up and taken it to school
behind glass and once again the teacher sees
the patch on his knee his ears like sails
the self-portrait closer to a monkey's face
the colour he calls skin
the smell of dung that rises from his clothes
once a week on friday night a bath
sucking the sherbet fountain in his desk
liquorice straw soggy cardboard
words spilling over the floor
singer singer sewing machine
mother's fingers show the needle where to stab
the thread into apple patch denim jeans
apple patch denim jeans chewing-gum ball
in the ice-cream sputnik
launched for a guilder on the ride
at the chippy if she's feeling chirpy
if his mother's feeling chirpy they won't dawdle
at the haberdasher's he'll be quick to choose
an apple patch not barnaby bear
the pastor's no stranger at a house
that hasn't got religion
but with the pastor he sticks to his orange kreidler
frets about preconditions acceptance
within a group how to receive
apple patch denim jeans apple patch denim jeans
the needle that stabs past mother's fingers
is a blessing

Grass that's already laughing

each word I lay down before you
on the ground and at your feet
is a word too many

the cold grass beneath
fresh mown just wet
by the moon
it lies a day

now waiting for the sun
a hand covering its mouth
a hand hiding the joke

waiting for how

fresh mown grass
 laughs
looks at me
sits up
 laughs laughs laughs

each word
 true word laughs
laughs
 in delight

like a bed you have to
make

laughs
 fresh
mown and smooth

fresh mown and glad
the grass laughs with a hand
 over its mouth

and each word I later apparently gently
lay down before you on the new grass at your precious feet
is a word too many that laughs and will laugh

Sun on the bunker

undress a man in a bunker
and say

conjure

conjure without hands
conjure without lessons or practice
conjure without tricks
conjure without clothes and
conjure without devices

the man a smile

smile smile smile
smile smile smile

dry eyes

guards who look at each other
and suddenly two bowls

under their noses
his hands fill with fluid

he looks at them now

angry

like dogs they lick
his hands clean

I haven't said I thought
this is true or cannot be
I haven't said the man
was sent or likeable

conjure

the man laughs
the guards look at each other
and his hands stay empty
or

the man laughs
the guards look at each other
his hands stay empty
the guards close the door
with the bars

and while the man looks
at his hands they fill

the man laughs
and the guards'
nervous fingers
pull the triggers

the water falls to the floor

the guards see the water
and try to bring
the man around

their fingers dig for bullets
in the wounds

or one of them
does this
while the other walks
out of the door

buys a big
rusty container ship
and a cat

to scour the seas
together

once he was a man
who as a boy came home
proud from the dodgems
never hit once

the other one cut down
the rest of the trees
in the forest

and became a wise man

Goose

hare in the field thinks
the hare is all finished
the hare is all gone like
geese flying over winter

hunters' eyes say summer
and the hunter is all finished
the hunter is all
gone like summer

the hunter is all green
the hare in the hunter calls
and the hare is all finished

the field in the field thinks shot
and the field is all finished

most of all the hare is finished
in the field and in the hunter

Buying apples

sadness ripe and crumbling mirrors her
in the market salesman's trays

delicate is she who loves apples
he sees that he sees her stubbornly

laughing about his sweet-n-sour jokes
he'd like to draw his jack-knife now

and show her both the rough pip halves
she's doubtful for what seems a fruitless hour

in the nick of time she catches the last bus

when she goes off to the dancehall
she bears a basket laden with red cheeks

there on her sun-coloured arms
lean the childmen begging
to take waterfruit to roofhouse roof

but she goes there to dance
when she goes there
 she goes there to dance

when she's there everything starts to dance
a little gospel squeal may sail across
from the south of tobacco faraway america

my lockhips want to sway
attempt her emptiness
until I am broken by dawn
and she is asleep beside me again

After the party

now let the world become fluid let the voices rise when she's asleep the glass has been broken dreaming happens drunkenly on sea the water opens is drunk I laughed out loud too loud my capacity played lazily jangling phones my speech dripped off the walls and tickled guest-toes couldn't really blame them that my face let me down when they looked at me I shame-smiled till I was purple and high time to go upstairs to change clothes past the window cleaning the rigid vomiting of days the distortion of her face in my thoughts as if she doesn't love me anymore next the recriminations will start to rise and the tears and fathers will ride their hobby-horses while they willingly get a refill I'm tarrying I'm trotting downstairs thought the party was done but me still in the middle of the hubbub the fine chariots paraded passengers and I wave bye people bye guests someone want to take any leftovers I'd wanted to say that revolving with stars through tripped-up nights I'd wanted to say I'd wanted to say don't mind my words let spin what comes to a standstill between us in frozen looks and then open your gob I'll put the proverb into practice and gently pull your hair sell my hide dedicate myself to our discussion and turn my back on you all ears so you can kiss my arse and tame my horses

it will stay with me really with me even if you clear the way a way with cleaver-weapon away from me start to chat up someone else even if my hearing remains bereft of your voice I will take on your rightness your sleeping rightness.

I said I see the rose
as a wreck
under construction

she swayed from the chandeliers
above the creamy tartlets

with a fork I prodded the pastry
on all sides

being the vessel of discontent I am
amble-heart included that for two days now
has lost its sense of place

and there's me thinking
I let her go but not without
a struggle not a letter faltered from my lips
all I did was stutter smoke

then she said bye I love you
I called out loudly to the plastic ivory
bye bye phone
byeyeeeee

Peaceful

in front of the green refurbished plywood doors of the tidied
theatre the man laughs he laughs at the ripe fruit on the
papier-mâché panelling tantalus who finally
figures out the trick snaps at the divine air
secretly sniggers into his crotch

well done
he's ready

nervously he gets out a bill
an edgy bill from the provinces
a fixed bill thought up by farmers

back pocket

he dances floridly toward the stage
happily down the isle toward the stage
throws the piece of paper on the table
and rouses the game of beads with a cry
there's a swell old fogey's rumble in hell
someone grumpy sings with
a drawl from a balcony
through the hall

I spoke to some cow
I spoke to a bum now could
I jack off a little here
just jack off a little here in peace

it's ok

it's a deal
consultation follows

one supplies and is reigned in
one supplies and is mounted

peacefully one has a lie-in

so she says

the wind through the twigs
finds a knot

the wind through the twigs
finds a trunk

trips in the ditch bank
and finds heaving water

stumbles

she draws a circle in the sand

the field in September is lush in the way a lazy pensioner in the prime of his life can lay down his work. high stakes. old money. a man who in spite of it all doesn't want to make way, who has come to see work as play. he takes up the scythe to lay down the last of the grass and feed it

how can we strike a final chord here
how can we be instrumental

who besieged by dreams that we
see as crucial allies run into
a barn at the slightest hint of rain

so she says

draw a circle on the ground
within which two sleeping people
to for the time being

or to prevent worse

Specialist in the field of window frames

it's raining and the specialist in the field of window frames says
that it couldn't possibly be down to his men's work

I am at the table with my downstairs neighbour who after five years
has decided to paint over the water stains

I used to write poems about my father and mother
about grandpa's and grandma's with a picturesque and painful past

now I listen to my neighbour

people will live in your house
who are too lazy to get up

people you don't know
who go to work and go back home

they're getting older
they're getting rounder

they try to jog off the pounds

they wave a child goodbye
and hang their clothes across a chair
before they go to sleep

their life is a refrigerator
from which after a full night's drinking
one could easily conjure up
a meal fit for a king

I know I know

there are connotations lurking about
that could ruin this poem

somewhere someone sings

don't come together
don't come together

drive a wedge

but my wife holds my week-old niece in her lap
and I can't get enough of seeing how well it suits her

we discuss what's to happen to the study
how and where we ourselves are to sleep
a sigh and the child disappears from our thoughts
we turn a corner and head for a good restaurant

furtively while we're already talking about something else

I look at the newborn child not lying in her arms

it breathes and it moves
it is almost there

Guestspeaker and chairman in the mess hall

when they admitted they were afraid that
if they were to extend a fixed allowance to us
we would no longer bring in new members

because they've become afraid of clubs
that so carelessly
that so needlessly clumsily

handle their files

the nerves stuck in our throats
yes it brought a blush to our cheeks

and in my sleepless nights such a thing soon
grows into a point that's hard to clarify

a jumpy dangle-arm during the meeting
could no longer stand my stammering

although I'm new well not new
but a new member anyway
still I want to speak my mind
will you keep track
of the time

are there conditions
when are you eligible
when are you admissible

to them
to that

you see

not only are we continuously
impeded and thwarted
by people from other organisations
but also and especially
by our fellow members

Four Henry's

four tight-suited henry's lie with their bellies
on a chair swimming through the air

the first kissinger babbles
plaster a fence or blow up an island
I'd rather make a wrong decision than
wait for wisdom

there's a gnat buzzing around the head
of the second henry

who cites the physicist feynman

why nature works according to mathematical principles
is a mystery

a snigger times four divided by one

and adds

that's what I mean

the four kissingers nod in their chairs
and carry on swimming

the universe is an inhuman setting
in which one may become
an impossible victim

the third hurtles into space

when four wagging labradors walk up to
the men and start licking their noses

this is the sign the fourth one thinks

so they get their folding bikes and ride out of this scene
for each to keep the peace to save their skin
and hurray, hurray

to rescue our eternally burning world

I drank until i was simple enough to be loved

I drank until I was simple enough to be loved. I let myself be loved. the earth tore open beneath my feet. I drank until I was simple enough to be loved. the drink started a fire in my throat and halted my thoughts. I drank until I was simple enough to be loved. she rang and I shivered. she fought for what I squandered. son to the thought. father to the prayer. viper coiling round the legs of the grand iron bed. kaleidoscope of grainy pictures. I smoked until I was calm enough to stay. the earth tore open. she rang and I shivered. we fought for what I squandered. the son to the thought. the father to the prayer. a viper coiling round the legs of the grand iron bed. I smoked until I was calm enough to be loved.

the man at the other end screaming down the line has no patience for the dialling tone. she doesn't answer. the man at the other end screaming down the line is standing on a plain. for him a field of flowers. in the middle of a meadow two lovers lying down without a phone. on the left side of the meadow there's a plain. on the right side a woman in a phone booth waiting for a call. a wire runs from the phone booth. in the middle of a meadow two lovers lying down without a phone. a thick white wire above them. when the woman answers the phone the birds fly away. they're making off with the flowers the man screams. he waits doesn't wait for the dialling tone. he waits for the birds. then.

he drags a child through the sand. that jams. that jumps up. make yourself scarce. make yourself change species. that you die out. he drags a child through the sand. that stalls.

rings under her eyes. fast forward. candles on the cake. fast forward. rings under her eyes. her child runs wild. gets angry. control your anger. delay. fast forward. fast forward to the plain. two lovers lying in a meadow. without a phone. without a view of the phone booth. without a view of the plain. the beach tore open beneath my feet. the child fell. she rang and I shivered. the flowers vanished from the dunes. I smoked until I was calm enough to see the lovers in the meadow laugh. drank until I was quiet enough to be loved.

Bed

the names you use
for food cutlery and crockery on the table
are not the first names

which I learnt for food cutlery and crockery
and when you touch me you sometimes touch
a completely different part of me

than where my sister
would pinch me after I'd teased her
or where my mother would put a little
more effort in washing me

we sleep in the same bed
but yours is shorter
and mine sounds more
like the bleating of a goat

your father and mother
your grandfathers and mothers
they are called something else

they never cuddled up to you
gave you a kiss
or a good wash

we live in the same world
I cuddle up to you
give you a kiss

for those things we use
the same names no

your bed and kisses
are growing longer
every year

Grave

I know where my stuff
and money will go
when I die

but nowhere
have I written down
that I want to enter the earth
naked in a blanket

where doesn't matter to me
my mother wanted to be far away from her children
because we had to move on
according to her

she was buried
next to her father's father
granddad went over there almost
every day

my granddad and grandmother lie neatly together
beside the church they didn't believe in
next to their home

where granddad would peel an apple for her
and change the channels with a bamboo fishing rod
we never watched a channel for more than one second

all three of them aren't lying in the ground
which they were born on top of but never a lot further
than 20 miles from it

from where I live
you can't see their graves
or find one on a day's walking distance

leeuwarden furthermore
is further removed from amsterdam
than the other way around

and I just realized that I am already somewhere else
I dropped skin and hair in indonesia Zimbabwe
and nicaragua

urinated and ate in their restaurants
the body renews itself
no part of you is the same at the end

and when it will die that will also be the end of my soul
so returning the empty corpse would serve no purpose

where you're going to leave it doesn't really matter to me
but you know that I want it to enter the earth
in a blanket naked

and in case you've accidentally
become a believer again around that time

throw before the sods
fall on the bones I left behind

a bamboo fishing rod
in with them

Big pond

the earth is a bag
on the shoulders of the moon

the earth is a bag
with feeble handles

stretched handles
cause the sun is so heavy

I fell in love with the first line
her o's made eyes at me

her images screamed
for a following

the sun hangs in a bag
on the moon's shoulders

it makes our hands warm
it turns on the tv

and then the metaphor disappears
into a tunnel

I'm thinking of the leaking nuclear power plants
in japan

could this be saying something about that?
should I push the poem
over there?

take it with me under my arms
to a radioactive beach

where old men in chairs
look satisfied at their buckets
at the fishes which were much bigger

or can the same earth be found in that water
was it not a bag
but the bucket of a fisherman?

'I set out to get as many readers as possible'

An interview with Tsead Bruinja

By Thomas Möhlmann, for Poetry International Web (2007)

Translated by Michele Hutchison

In 2007 the young Dutch-Frisian poet Tsead Bruinja published his seventh collection of poems, *Bang voor de bal* (Afraid of the ball). With Poetry International Web editor Thomas Möhlmann he talked about this new book, the two languages he writes in and the value of translations.

TM: Tsead, you've lived in Amsterdam for several years now but you were born in Friesland, the northern province where the second language of the Netherlands, Frisian, is spoken. As a poet you're developing parallel Frisian and Dutch oeuvres. What is the relationship between these languages and these oeuvres?

TB: 'I debuted in Frisian and in the beginning I wrote mostly in Frisian about my past – my family, my parents, and my grandmother and grandfather. When I used Dutch it was to write about the loves of my life who came and went, and it was more about experimenting with the language – the poetry was more language-based. At this moment in my life I speak more Dutch because I live in Amsterdam and I've noticed when I use Frisian now I write less Frisianly.'

Could that imply that the Frisian part of your oeuvre might slowly dry up, or that you might become more of a Dutch language writer pur sang?

'Perhaps, but it's still my ambition to write a beautiful Frisian book. Which means I'll have to entrench myself in Frisian, read more Frisian books, and then the poems should come about naturally.'

*Speaking of Frisian books, in 2004, together with Frisian poet Hein Jaap Hilarides, you put together an anthology of Frisian poets in Dutch translation, *Droom in blauwe regenjas* (Dream in a Blue Raincoat). Firstly, what was your aim in doing that, and secondly, now that three years have passed, has that been achieved?*

'I did that because the last bilingual anthology of Frisian poetry dated back to 1994 and from the intervening ten years, together with Hein Jaap Hilarides, I was able to add some new poets. We went on a tour of the Netherlands, the book received a lot of attention, and meant that another publisher brought out four Frisian poets in bilingual editions. I do think that Frisian poetry, which did have some standing, for example through Albertina Soepboer and Tsjêbbe Hettinga, gained further standing. People aren't surprised anymore when a Frisian poet gives a reading.'

As a Dutch reader, the ones I was aware of were people like Albertina Soepboer and Tsjêbbe Hettinga or a bit further back, Obe Postma. But what astonished me was that a book full of current young poets who were all writing in Frisian right now, didn't concur with the standard

image of Frisian poetry I had. For me as a Dutch reader, it meant that this book really filled a gap in the picture. I presume that that's also something you wanted to do?

'Yes, there was a typical kind of poetry written in Frisian, and maybe there still is, which really differs from Dutch poetry and in which there's more room for the surreal or the absurd. I'm referring to poets such as Cornelis van der Wal and Anne Feddema in particular.'

Let's just go back to your own Frisian and Dutch oeuvres. You've published seven collections within eight years, three in Dutch and four in Frisian. One might suppose that there's already some development to be seen in your oeuvre, or perhaps in your two oeuvres.

'I think my Frisian poetry has become narrower, more relaxed in tone, more concentrated, and I thought that this would also happen with the Dutch poetry. But the development in the Frisian poetry didn't really take place in the Dutch, instead there was another kind of development there, a move more towards anecdotes, with more ready-mades, a poetry that stays very close to home.'

"Close to home" is something you said about your new Dutch collection, Bang voor de bal (Afraid of the bal), much more than about the second which is called Batterij (Battery). But at the same time, as I read your new collection, the outside world is more present in the poems than it ever was before. There's just as much taken from the outside world as from the inner, from Oprah Winfrey to Henry Kissinger to the Dog Club, they seem to be worked in with much greater ease than in Batterij.

'I realized when you responded that that was not quite right, because Batterij was really close to home for me, but it spoke in a more abstract manner about a certain aggressive side of my character, and that's still there, but this collection is indeed about something else. Bang voor de bal is about whether you want to bring a child into this world, and this world is not only determined by me but also by Henry Kissinger types from the well-known Bilderberg group or the Bilderberg Conference, so in that sense I've let the world in more. Also by using ready-mades, simply containing chunks of what people have said.'

Which is how, again with Kissinger, but just as easily with Oprah Winfrey or the Dog Club, it's about the repercussions that these kinds of ideas in the form of ready-mades or descriptions have on you as a person.

'Well, it's also got to do with the fact that I was pre-occupied with names. I wanted to put a lot of names in this collection. In novels, we're all used to proper names but in poetry it's much less common. Usually people say 'he' or 'she' or 'you' or 'me' and I wanted to experiment with that. Amongst other things, there's this song by Peter Gabriel where he uses all kinds of names - "Jane plays with Willie" and "Suki plays with John"... and then there's suddenly a line "Adolf builds a bonfire" and you're shocked because it's Adolf Hitler, of course.'

Yes, you use a bit of text from Peter Gabriel's names piece as an epigram in Bang voor de bal. You also use other pop motives, actually quite a lot of them. Have they all got the same kind of function as the epigram from Gabriel - why do you always come up with bits from pop songs when you're thinking up epigrams?

'In part it's to honor people who have inspired me, and sometimes they were there first, I'd thought of them before the collection had taken shape. At a certain point, I knew that I wanted to give most of the cycles or sections an epigram. The first section of the collection

has got a bit of Marillion – “Warm wet circles” – and there’s a poem which has also got a circle in it, and then I noticed at once that a new connection existed. In the song it was about the same circle as I’d been writing about. So it can be that you find something that fits, and that it adds something or gives more depth.’

Peter Gabriel, Marillion – which other groups lent epigrams to the collection?

‘For example, Paul Simon and Dire Straits, who most people know. In ‘The Walk of Life’ they sing something like: “He do the song about the sweet lovin’ woman, he do the song about the knife,” so a woman and a knife. As an extension of *Batterij*, I find that really pointed (excuse the pun). It added some depth. I think it’s funny that most people think, “Dire Straits? That’s hackneyed,” but I really don’t care.’

Well, that’s clear. But they are all obviously the groups and the songs that we, as people in our early thirties, grew up with, it’s typical 80’s stuff.

‘That song by Paul Simon is from last year, and the other song by Marillion I use is from two years ago.’

Always nice to hear that people from that period are still writing quotable songs. Another thing, you’ve got your own website – www.tseadbruinja.nl, and there’s an enormous amount of work on it, a lot of material to give people an impression of your work, but what’s extraordinary is that you can browse in thirteen different languages. Aside from that, for a young poet, quite a lot of your work has been published abroad, and you get in touch with poetry translators from Dutch yourself. To be read in a language other than Dutch, the search for other countries and worlds outside of the Netherlands, are things that are obviously important to you. Why do you think it’s of such great value?

‘I think as a poet you’re in search of readers, so I set out to get as many readers as possible, equally in the Netherlands where I do my own PR, and abroad where there are simply more readers. You also hope for other kinds of reactions, that people might react with, “oh that makes me think of this or this poetry” and this might lead you to meet other inspiring poets or listen to them. That’s why I’m more than happy to do readings abroad, even though I’m not much of a traveler, but I do enjoy it and it’s part of what you hope for when you get taken up in those publications. It’s wonderful to hear your poems in another language, for example I was recently translated into Indonesian which is such a different language.’

But primarily it’s about reaching out to a readership of more than just the 22 million Dutch speakers, and then to meet other people there?

‘Yes, my site is in many languages and I see it as a kind of meeting places for readers and the poet. A lot of people say that English is really sufficient, but English is a second language for a lot of people so if I can, for example, get the same poem translated into English and French or Spanish and even Kurdish as well, then I find that nicer. Perhaps also because I’ve grown up in a minority language myself.’

Which brings us back to minority languages again, perhaps this is an unanswerable question, but do you see yourself as a poet in a mostly Frisian context, in a Dutch context, in a European context or in a broader international context?

‘Of course, as a Dutch poet, you primarily work and function in a Dutch context, and in my case in a Frisian context at the same time. And beyond that? Who knows what I am.’

I'm on a few international sites and in a few magazines. As a person I see myself as a European, yes I think it's mainly as a European... . But I don't feel I'm a European poet, basically because I'm very influenced by American poets and English bands.'

The question about context is naturally two-sided, it's about how you're perceived on the one hand and who influences you on the other. Could you name a few foreign poets that inspired or influenced you?

'In terms of foreign poets there's a lot of Americans - Whitman, Ginsberg, Ashbury. Ann Carson from Canada, and Neruda before, Drummond de Andrade ... and a couple of Iraqi poets I've worked with - Al Galidi and Mowaffk Al Sawad - all of these have changed both my view of the world as well as my view of poetry.'