1. The Introduction to Japanese haiku in the Netherlands

As will be shown below, it is probable that some Dutch poets during the first half of the 20th century got somehow acquainted with Japanese haiku, as one may assume through translations into German, French, or English. In 1960, the writer and poet Jef Last published an anthology of Japanese poetry, in which fourteen traditional haiku were included. Jef Last (1898–1972) spent most of his career writing articles, poems and stories that were inspired by communist political ideals, but he also studied Chinese and some Japanese. In the introduction to his anthology he pays much attention to haiku. He mentions that once, when he was in Tokyo, he sent his wife translations of thirty old Japanese haiku, as a birthday present. She, who had never seen a haiku before, wrote back that he did send the titles but apparently forgot the poems themselves! According to Last, it was understandable that there was little interest in haiku during the 19th century because people in the western world were used to longer poems and simply did not understand haiku poetry due to its very brevity. But in modern times, this sketchy shortness became attractive so that for example in America many young poets applied themselves to writing haiku. But, said Last: "Until now, none of them has succeeded in producing a masterpiece that can be compared to those of the great Japanese poets like Bashô and Isa (sic), and this is no wonder. For the brevity of those poems is no accident, but is connected with the uttermost simplicity of the ZEN philosophy, the essence of which often is masterfully summarized in such a poem. It is not just a description of a certain atmosphere, it is like a branch of peach blossom painted down with a few brush strokes, or a tender little body of a bird against a barely indicated background, whereby the mysterious identity of all life is indicated. The not painted and unspoken the reader must supply for her or himself.”

Here are some of the translations by Last:

Het oude vijvervlak . . .
Een kikker springt.
Plons! . . . En het is weer stil.
The old pond surface . . .
A frog jumps.
Splash! . . . And it is still again.
—Bashô

Zeg mij toch, kindren,
Die rode, rode maan,
Wiens eigendom is zij?

Tell me now, children,
That red, red moon,
Whose property is it?
—Issa

Hoe nu? Vloog een bloesem terug naar haar tak?
Neen,
Het was een vlinder!

How now? Did a blossom fly back to its branch?
No,
It was a butterfly!
—Moritake


In this book, the authors provide the characteristics of Zen, a sketch of its history in China, Korea and Japan, and its cultural significance, including the influence of Zen in the arts. Hence, one finds a discourse on Zen in Japanese literature (Chapter III section 171 et seq.) with special attention on haiku. This genre is introduced as follows:

"With the observation of the autumn, there is no need for the Japanese poet to get lost in a detailed musing about the numberless changing colors, a description of the dry fallen leaves, etc. A haiku may even suffice for him:

On a barren branch
A crow has alighted—
Autumn evening.

In this perfect indication of the autumn, there is no superfluous word. Just as in the Zen painting art, we again find 'reduction'; just as in the sumi-e the essential forms that lie at the base of the multitude of outward appearances are as it were 'caught'. The haiku may be characterized as moments of experiences; their suggestive quality that during an undivisible moment provides a perfect touch between poet and reader, is decisive for their value.

---

From this, it appears that the authors see a clear connection of haiku with Zen. This they elaborate further in detail, mentioning moreover that in Japanese poetry the alternation of lines with 5 and 7 syllables is essential, hence in particular for haiku the composition with 5, 7, and 5 syllables. They give a number of examples of haiku, providing translations that promise rendering of the original as true as possible, but do not pretend to be poetic recreations. They therefore don’t adhere to the 5-7-5 pattern. We give a few examples.

By Bashō:

*shizukasa ya*
*iwa ni sbimiiru*
*semi no koe*

The silence:
The penetrates into the rocks,
The chirping of the cicadas.

*umī kurete*
*kamo no koe*
*bonoka ni sbirosbi*

Over the sea the night has fallen,
The crying of the wild ducks
Is unclear and white.

*natsugusa ya*
*tsuwamonodomo ga*
*yume no ato*

Summer herbs—
Of brave warriors:
The traces of dreams ...

By Buson:

*suzushisa ya*
*kane wo hanaruru*
*kane no koe*

The coolness:
Loosing itself from the temple bell
Its bronze voice . . .

By Issa:

*utsukushi ya*
*shoji no ana no*
*ama no gawa*
How beautiful:
Through the holes in my shoji
The Milky Way . . .

By Shiki:

haru no yo wo
shakubachi fuite
torikeri

Through the spring night
Playing on a bamboo flute
He passed by.

In their discussion on the significance of Zen for Japanese poetry, the authors do mention concepts that have to do with atmosphere, such as wabi, sabi, shibumi, mono no aware, fuga. But they do not discuss season words or cutting words. Apparently their book was not immediately intended for people who wished to try and write haiku themselves.

Probably the book by Vos and Zürcher was not very widely read, but it did influence other writers. A much broader readership was reached by the Dutch writer and poet Bertus Aafjes, who wrote a series of stories about a certain Japanese judge Ooka. There has indeed been a magistrate with that name in Japan. He lived from 1677 to 1751. He was not only a judge, but also police detective and public prosecutor. He solved crime mysteries, and Aafjes’ narratives are a kind of Eastern detective stories. Aafjes’ Judge Ooka is a great lover of poetry, especially haiku which he quotes on occasion. In this manner, Aafjes brought haiku to the attention of a Dutch readership. In 1973 the story ‘A Chinese lantern for a blind person’ was published as a booklet to be given free of charge to everybody who bought a certain number of books during the National Week of Books, and which therefore came to be known to many readers. In the Epilogue to this book, the author said that he did not intend to write a historically correct tale. That is right. The historical Ooka was a younger contemporary of Bashō and thus lived at a time during which there was not yet talk of ‘haiku’. Aafjes’ Ooka cites Issa, for example, who lived much later. About haiku, Aafjes wrote in his Epilogue:

“Speaking about haiku: Ooka is a great lover of these unique and short Japanese poems. They consist of only three lines of successively five, seven, and five syllables – so seventeen syllables. Their content can be described as ‘the world in a nutshell’. For a haiku poet sees the world as a nutshell and a nutshell as the world.

“The haiku poet is able to shrug his shoulders at life as a whole and at the same time draw from it everything it has to offer. With an eyewink he plays down life as a mere illusion and at the same time he tries to push every fleeting moment into seventeen unforgettable syllables.

“Haiku are untranslatable. Even for Japanese, they are verses to be filled out, poems he can fill with his own emotional or thought content and this often in various ways. The translator can only write a three line poem in which he renders what he feels when he reads the Japanese original or a translation thereof.

“All haiku that are quoted in ‘A Chinese lantern for a blind person’ are due to Japanese poets, but it would be monotonous to mention their names. ( . . .) The Japan I describe is my Japan not the
Japan of lovers of unmistakable facts and indisputable direction figures. It is a Japan born out of the exaltation of wonder, a Japan that still amazes the writer just as the haiku poet who, bewitched by the snow on his hat, calls out:

‘the snow weighs lightly
when I consider:
it is my snow on my hat.’


J. van Tooren (pen name of Mrs A.M. Mulder née Swanenburg de Veye, 1900–1991) at an advanced age became acquainted with Japanese haiku translated into English because she received the book A Net of Fireflies by Harold Stewart from her husband, as a present on the occasion of her sixtieth birthday. She was enthralled by them: “. . . That conciseness, that suggestivity, not that moaning about oneself, that strong imagination, that deep background! I read the book and knew that this was how poetry should be.” Then she acquired the books by R.H. Blyth and discovered that haiku were, in fact, different from what could be gathered from Stewart as his translations were too free. She concluded that she had to learn Japanese, which she did. Thirteen years after that sixtieth birthday the abovementioned anthology appeared, covering a couple of centuries of Japanese haiku poetry, although the twentieth century was far less represented than the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Her introduction consists of four chapters: “Characteristics and technique of haiku”, “Mentality and spiritual backgrounds”, “Origins and history”, and “The play of translations”. In the first chapter she writes that form and subject are characteristic of haiku, together with the mentality of the poet. “The form of the haiku poem is very strict, and of utmost conciseness. The little poem consists of seventeen syllables, usually divided over three groups of five-seven-five each, and in principle forms just one sentence that can be pronounced in just one breath.” She points to the absence of final rhyme and the occurrence of onomatopoeia and internal rhyme and stresses the use of simple and common words. And further: “Haiku is nature poetry. The landscape is depicted, or the flowers, animals and things surrounding man, and man himself as part of it all. The poet does not stand in front of his poem to explain something, he prefers not to be in it at all; self expression for him is unimportant.” Of course, she explains this in more detail, but we quote these passages mainly because they express opinions that for a long time have had a great influence on Dutch haiku practitioners. At the end of this chapter she says, among other things: “The form of five-seven-five syllables, that resembles a wave coming up, flowing out, and receding, I feel to belong so much to the essence of haiku that it was impossible for me to deviate from it. Like many other translators, I am of the opinion that there lie great possibilities for our own poetry.” Van Tooren was influenced by F. Vos and very much by R.H. Blyth whom she greatly admired. This is apparent from her chapter on “Mentality and spiritual backgrounds”, with its strong emphasis on the

importance of Zen Buddhism. The opinions and characterizations expressed in Van Tooren’s introductory chapters were often strictly applied by Dutch haiku amateurs who disregarded the fact that they are not to be taken too literally. For instance: “the haiku poet prefers not to be in the poem at all” was interpreted in the sense that the poet should not talk about herself, and that the pronoun ‘I’ should never be used. It was not noted that in the very same anthology verses like the following could be found:

Travelling I became ill;  
over withered moors  
my dream kept wandering  
—Bashō

It pearced all through me;  
by the bed of my dead wife  
I tread upon her comb  
—Buson

I killed a spider,  
and had after that a cold,  
lonely evening  
—Shiki

J. van Tooren was a poet with great interest in languages (before she started on Japanese, she learned Sanskrit by herself) and her translations on the average have a good poetic quality due to her feeling for rhythm and sound. The translations below are literal and cannot really demonstrate these qualities; we provide them to enable comparison with renderings by Vos and Zürcher above.

Die diepe stilte!  
het sjierpen van de krekels  
doorklieft de rotsen.

That deep silence!  
the chirping of the crickets  
cleaves the rocks.  
—Bashō

Gras van de zomer!  
van dappere krijgsmansdromen  
bleef dit slechts over.

Grass of the summer!  
of brave warrior’s dreams  
only this remains.  
—Bashō
Een vleug van koelte,
as de tempelbelklanken
de bel verlaten.

A whiff of coolness
when the sounds of the temple bell
leave the bell.
— Buson

Op zijn bamboefluit
spelende liep bij voorbij
door de lentesnacht.

Playing on his
bamboo flute he walked by
through the spring night.
— Shiki

Dutch haiku amateurs obtained further information about the Japanese haiku tradition mainly from the very expert Flemish authors Karel Hellemans and Willy Vande Walle, both employed at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. They very regularly published articles in the Flemish-Dutch haiku magazine Vuursteen and moreover published books on the subject.³

2. Short Poems and Early Haiku Attempts

Poems shorter than sonnets do occur in Dutch traditional poetry. From the sixteenth century onwards certain poets wrote epigrams. Usually they contain a pun, or a joke, and perhaps one might compare them to senryū. A.C.W. Staring (1767–1849) wrote, for example:

_AAN EEN NAVOLGER_

_Gij doet den menschen wel, en ondank is uw loon?
Getroost het u! gij deelt het met de Goôn._

_TO A FOLLOWER_

_Thou servest mankind, yet receivest thanks nor fee?
Be comforted! the Gods share this with thee._

³ Karel Hellemans, _Tanka, Haiku, Senryū, Inleiding tot de Japanse poëzie, [Tanka, haiku, senryū, Introduction to Japanese poetry]_ Van Gorcum, Assen, Nederland, 1980; Willy Vande Walle, _Bashō Dichter zonder dak, [Bashō Poet without a roof]_ Peeters, Leuven 1985 (contains, apart from an extensive introduction, a complete traduction into Dutch of Bashō’s travel stories, with explanatory notes); Willy Vande Walle, _Haiku, Van scherts tot experiment, [Haiku, from jest to experiment]_ Amsterdam University Press/Salomé 2003. A historical overview of the development of haiku up to modern times.
Of course, there have been written quatrains, limericks and other short poems, but these have little or nothing to do with haiku or senryū. A Dutchman named Hendrik Doeff wrote haiku in Japanese during his stay in Japan from 1798 to 1817. He was head of a Dutch trading post on Deshima and learned Japanese. A haiku of his:

\[
inazuma no kaina o karan kusamakura
\]

Literally: let me borrow your lightning flash arms as grass pillow

\[
Laat mij je armen, 
snel als bliksemschichten, lenen 
als hoofdkussen op mijn reis.
\]

Let me borrow your arms, 
fast as flashes of lightning, 
to serve as pillow on my journey.

Probably this verse was written during a trip from Deshima to Edo for an obligatory visit to the shōgun. In a tavern he saw a girl cutting tofu at a high speed. Only one other haiku by Doeff is known:

\[
harukaze ya amakoma hashiro hokakebune
\]

A spring breeze —
they hurry to and fro:
the little sailing boats.

(Dutch translations by Professor F. Vos).

But it seems that further interest in Japanese culture developed much later, from the second half of the nineteenth century. Knowledge about Japanese literature reached Dutch poets and writers through translations into French, German, or English. From the end of the nineteenth century on, a movement started in Holland to renew literature, in particular poetry. Until then, poetry in that century had been mainly anecdotal and moralistic. The new movement stressed the importance of expressing personal feelings and emotions and freedom from convention. In the twentieth century, poetry became more direct and language less artificial. And then there were a few poets who attempted haiku-like poetry.

The well-known Dutch poet and writer Jan Jacob Slauerhoff (1898–1936) worked as a ship surgeon and travelled to many countries. In particular he made trips to East Asia: Indonesia, China, and Japan. In many of his works he shows affinity with Eastern culture. In his volume of poetry Joeng Poe Tijoeng ( Yöong Poo Choong) he provides versions in Dutch of various classical Chinese poets such as Bai Juyi (Po Chu I) and Du Fu. Probably he used translations into English, French, or German. His volume of Collected Poems contains one page of what he called ‘hokkais’. They are three-line poems of many more than seventeen syllables and their contents, albeit good poems, are not very haiku-like:
Het komen van mijn gedichten:
Als 't neerzweven van een vlinder
Op meeldraad van bevend jasmijn.

The coming of my poems:
Like the gliding down of a butterfly
On stamen of trembling jasmine.

Perhaps the most haiku-like:

De klokjes zijn nog boorbaar,
't Spoor nog niet toegevallen.
De kar al lang verdwenen.

The bells are still audible,
The track not yet filled up.
The cart long gone.

In the *Collected Poems* of the journalist, poet, and critic Jan Greshoff (1888–1971), one finds twenty two three-line verses designated by Greshoff as ‘simili-haïkaï’ that were written between 1925 and 1930. This designation suggests that he had somehow caught a notion of Japanese poetry. By calling them ‘simili-haïkaï’ he indicated that he did not pretend to write ‘real’ haikai. He did not count syllables but used a iambic meter. The first and the last lines rhyme. Some of these verses have something like a haiku atmosphere, such as

Wie brak het zijden snoer?
Ik hoorde alleen de kralen tikken
Op den arduinen vloer.

Who broke the silk string?
I only heard the beads tick
on the freestone floor.

Who broke the silk string?
On the stone floor I just heard
the beads ticking.  

De haag begint te dorren;
En langs de rimpelblaren glijdt
De gladde glans der torren.

The hedge begins to wither;
And along the wrinkled leaves slides
the smooth gleam of beetles.

The hedge starts to wither;
Sliding along the wrinkled leaves
the beetles’ polished glitter.

---

4. The first translation is literal; in the second, I have tried to simulate Greshoffs use of rhyme.
Others are somewhat more out of range: (in the following examples, I did not succeed in finding proper rhymes)

_Het dauwkrystal in ’t rood_
_Der rozen spiegelt duizendvoudig_
_Uw oog, volmaakte dood._

The dew crystal in the redness of the roses mirrors thousandfold your eye, perfect death.

_Hebben we elkaar van noode?_
_Wij dwalen in een dichten tuin_
_Van rozen, roze en rode._

Have we need of each other? We roam in a closed garden of roses white and red.

_De tuin is dichtgedaan._
_Geen oog bespiedt mijn tête à tête_
_Met de amoureuze maan._

The garden is closed down. No eye spies upon my tête-à-tête with the amorous moon.

And others again one can not possibly associate with haiku:

_Ik heb te zeer bemind_
_De schoonheid van dit blonde feest,_
_Heer, red mij, sla mij blind!_

I have loved too much the beauty of this blonde feast, Lord, beat me blind!

_Ik vlucht en zie beneden_
_De warme wonden van Gods zweep:_
_De dampenroode steden._

I flee and see below the warm wounds of God’s whip: the fume-red towns.

Apart from the question whether or not we are dealing with haiku, this was in fact a meritorious demonstration of all that can be said in a short three line poem.
Wim Hussem, 1900–1974, was an established painter and poet. He was well known for his short and precise poems. They were not haiku, but many of them had a haiku-like atmosphere, as the following examples may show.

\[
\text{schaduw van wolken}
\]
\[
\text{een school hemelse vissen}
\]
\[
\text{zwemt in zee}
\]

shadow of clouds

a shoal of heavenly fishes

swims in the sea

\[
\text{hoger en hoger}
\]
\[
\text{stijgt een leeuwerik}
\]
\[
\text{zingend in de voorjaarslucht}
\]

higher and higher

a lark rises

singing in the spring air

in silence it returns to earth

\[
\text{weerspiegeling}
\]
\[
\text{de zee ombilst de zon}
\]

reflection

the sea embraces the sun

\[
\text{zwaluwen jagen om het huis}
\]
\[
\text{de muggen dansen in de zomeravond}
\]

swallows hunt around the house

the mosquitoes dance in the summer evening

The actor, playwright, writer, and poet Max Croiset (1912–1993) wrote many short poems that testify a haiku-like sensitivity, such as

\[
\text{eer de dageraad}
\]
\[
\text{de eik ontbloot}
\]
\[
\text{voor mijn raam}
\]

\[
\text{heeft bij takken}
\]
\[
\text{blaren}
\]
\[
\text{stam}
\]
\[
\text{en kruin}
\]

\[
\text{van duisternis}
\]
before dawn
bares the oak
in front of my window

it has branches
leaves
trunk
and crown

of darkness

sneeuwlaag

verstilde echo

van zondicht

layer of snow
stilled echo

of sunlight

An outstanding figure was the writer, poet, and graphic artist J.C. van Schagen (1891–1985). From his earliest work on he shows an affinity with Eastern philosophy and art. For example, in his first published volume of poetry: *Narrenwijsheid* [*Fool’s Wisdom*] we find a long poem with the same title, that begins thus:

*Niets is, dat niet goddelijk is
daarom wil ik niets uitzonderen
ik geef geen namen

ik laat adel en schoonheid liggen, ik vraag niet naar recht
ik blijf niet staan bij slecht en lelijk
goed en deugdzaam gaan mij niet aan

There is nothing not divine
therefore I don’t want to exclude anything
I don’t give names

I let alone nobility and beauty, I don’t ask for justice
I don’t linger near bad and ugly
good and virtuous don’t regard me

Then he proceeds with an enumeration of what the rain does when it falls down on trees, land, people and so on, ending with a 5-7-5 syllable stanza:

zo regent de regen
daarom geef ik geen namen
ik ga maar en ben

thus the rain rains
therefore I give no names
I just go and exist

Later on, he published poems in approximately 5-7-5 format that might well be called haiku, such as:

het glasheldere
het waterheldere licht
in dit glas water

the crystal-clear
the water-clear light
in this glass of water

or senryū, such as

terwijl ze hem kust
ziet ze dat zijn overhemd
in de was moet

while she kisses him
she observes that his shirt
has to be laundered

In 1965, the widely read literary magazine *Maatstaf* [*Measuring Rod, or Standard*] published a 183-page issue on ‘the short poem’, containing essays and examples of short poems by various authors. The opening essay, “Why? Therefore!” was by J.C. van Schagen. He had the feeling, so he wrote, that in the proposal of the editors “their primary idea was the simple reflex such as we really did learn from the Japanese”, and so for him apparently the haiku, senryū and tanka were on the agenda. But he added: “It should be immediately admitted hereby that we must not start to write haiku or senryu here, that gratuitous imitation would be stupidity and that we must be concerned only with an independent western pendant. If we wish to write something of this ilk, that will stand in its own right, then we may and must accept from them only one thing – but this, then, surely is the essential—the lesson that much is little and little is much. And that whoever wants to tell everything should say nothing.”

And then there were people who really tried to write haiku in Dutch. A well-known example of these was the writer, journalist, and columnist Paula Gomes (1922–2013). A volume of hers appeared in the mid-sixties of the 20th century. It was entitled *Bamboo rustles in the West* and was printed, on the occasion of the turn of the year 1963–1964 as a gift publication. Afterwards, the publisher decided to put a second printing on the market, “convinced that wide circles would be interested in this specimen of Dutch haiku poetry”. The publisher provided the booklet with a Preface in which one can read how haiku were thought of at that
The Preface begins thus: “Haiku is the name of a Japanese form of poetry. A haiku is a kind of lyrical epigram consisting of 17 syllables only, divided over three lines, with 5, 7, and 5 syllables, respectively.” Next, it quotes the frog haiku by Bashō: furu-ike ya/kawazu tobikomu/mizu no oto with the translation of Dr. Jef Last:

\begin{align*}
\text{Het oude vijvervlak . . .} \\
\text{Een kikker springt—plons—} \\
\text{en bet is weer stil.}
\end{align*}

The old pond surface . . .
A frog jumps—splash—
and it is silent again.

According to the publisher, a philosophy of life is hidden behind these three lines. The image sketched in the haiku gives “an answer to the question about the significance of human life. It is, therefore, not just a little nature poem, it is in utter brevity and simplicity the philosophical answer to the core question of our existence. . . . The philosophy speaking here is the voice of Zen . . .”. Paula Gomes, according to the publisher, has “grabbed the haiku to give shape to her emotions and discoveries”.

A few examples of ‘a kind of lyrical epigram’:

\begin{align*}
\text{Een nieuw begin} & \quad \text{Eens wil ik sterven,} \\
& \quad \text{Vervuld van een nieuw begin,} \\
& \quad \text{Eén met de natuur.}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{Mijn ziel} & \quad \text{Als ’t hart tot rust komt} \\
& \quad \text{Ontdekt de ziel het geluk,} \\
& \quad \text{Dat ’t hart heeft gezocht.}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{Muziek} & \quad \text{Muziek pakt de ziel} \\
& \quad \text{En voert hem betoverd mee} \\
& \quad \text{Naar lichte hoogten.}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{A new beginning} & \quad \text{Sometime I wish to die,} \\
& \quad \text{full of a new beginning,} \\
& \quad \text{One with nature.}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{My soul} & \quad \text{When the heart subsides} \\
& \quad \text{The soul discovers the happiness,} \\
& \quad \text{That the heart sought.}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{Music} & \quad \text{Music seizes the soul} \\
& \quad \text{And carries it enchanted along} \\
& \quad \text{Towards light heights.}
\end{align*}
Emotions:

**Liefde**
*De nacht bescherm ons.*
*Zijn lichaam is warm en goed,*
*Vol van mijn liefde.*

**Mensen in een kamp**
*Geestdodend wachten*
*Hulploos starende ogen*
*Achter de muren.*

**Kou**
*In de felle wind*
*Snijdt kou meedogenloos scherp*
*De ziel aan stukken.*

**Love**
The night protects us.
His body is warm and good,
Full of my love.

**People in a camp**
Monotonous waiting
Helplessly staring eyes
Behind the walls.

**Cold**
In the fierce wind
Cold cuts mercilessly sharp
The soul to pieces.

Discoveries:

**Schemering**
*Als de schemer valt*
*Vormen lichten het patroon*
*In ’t kleed van de nacht.*

**De klimplant**
*Verweerde stenen*
*Helpen de jonge klimplant*
*Langs de muur omhoog.*

**Slootje**
*Voor de buizenrij*
*Bolt het bruggetje zijn buik*
*Over het slootje.*

**Dusk**
When dusk is falling
Lights form the pattern
On the carpet of the night.

**The climbing-plant**
Weathered stones
Help the young climbing-plant
Upwards along the wall.

**Small ditch**
In front of the row of houses
The little bridge curves its belly
Over the small ditch.
3. Haiku Organizations and Magazines

During the ‘seventies of the previous century, several people started writing haiku and commenting on them. The Institute for Dramatic Education of the University of Amsterdam, and the Institute for Language Expression of the State University of Utrecht organized workshops and courses were people could meet and have their work discussed. Then, in 1979 ten haiku poets met, discussed their works, and made plans. As a result of this, in 1980 the ‘Haiku Kring Nederland’ (HKN, Haiku Circle of the Netherlands) was founded. The aims of this organization were meant to be: ‘The stimulation of studying, reading, and writing of tanka, haiku and senryū as well as the furthering of contacts between those who occupied themselves therewith.’ The HKN organizes a general meeting every year with lectures, workshops and presentations, as well as a business meeting. The HKN supports local groups of people who meet at regular intervals to discuss the poems of members and other issues of interest. These groups are known as ‘haiku kernels’. Most important: in cooperation with the Haiku Center of Flanders a magazine called ‘Vuursteen’ [Flint] is published that is open for publications of, and on, haiku, senryū, tanka, kyōka, and haibun. The magazine has a mixed board of Flemish and Dutch editors. The selection of poems to be published from the material submitted occurs by one of the editors by turns, together with one of the senior advisors and one of the Flemish or Dutch ‘kernels’. During the first one or two decades, rather orthodox views on what a good haiku should look like prevailed, whereas in later years opinions have evolved towards a more free style of writing. The magazine appears four times a year, following the seasons.

Here are three haiku from the very first issue, February 1981:

De hagel slaat neer—
ook onder oude beuken
op veerkrachtig mos.

The hail dashes down—
also under old beech trees
on springy moss.

— Simon Buschman

Terwijl de kerstboom
onder het kleurlicht verdort,
lenen de dagen.

While the Christmas tree
withers under the colored light
the days lengthen.

— Bart Mesotten

Een huis is gesloopt.
Behangpapier met bloemen
in regen en wind.

A house has been pulled down.
Wall paper with flowers
in rain and wind.

— Jan Vercammen
And here are three from the Winter 2014 issue:

*zou er wel eens iemand
terugwoven
naar riet?

Would there ever be somebody
waving back
to reeds?
— Ettina J. Hansen

*straatmuzikant,
langzaam nemen passanten
zijn ritme over

street musician
slowly passers-by
take over his rhythm
— Henk van der Werff

*dageraad
vogels zingen alsof er
niets is gebeurd

dawn
birds sing as if
nothing has happened
— Ria Giskes

In September 1991, the late W.J. van der Molen started a ‘periodical for the short poem’ called Kortheidshalve [For the Sake of Brevity]. Van der Molen was dissatisfied with the editorial policy of Vuursteen as in his opinion there were too many rules and preconceived ideas about what a good haiku should look like. The magazine appeared three times a year and was open to all kinds of short poems. But in his articles and essays, Van der Molen paid considerable attention to haiku. His introductory article ‘The Short Poem’ begins thus:

“The magazine Kortheidshalve will occupy itself with the short poem, that unfortunately barely finds entrance in the literature, and also finds little resonance with the reader.

“It seems a change is in the air. The short format corresponds to the speed by which man lives nowadays. And also, so it appears to me, to the possibilities of poetry after the ‘fifties; a poetry that more directly than before directs itself to the stratification of human consciousness. The short poem therefore, but then mainly in relationship to that concrete Japanese poetry that during the second half of this century has been blown over to the West, in particular the three-line haiku form and to a lesser degree the five-line classical tanka.”

He then goes on to characterize haiku. The following remarks are important for illustrating his position:
“The totality of precepts that Japanese haiku would be supposed to obey has been disappearing for a century already, and also institutes that derived their mock authority from an ever more complicated growing body of compelling rules have gradually lost much of their influence.

“Around the Japanese verse forms there wrongly exists an obscure, exaggerated exclusive cult; a mock specialism with which the mainstream literature barely has points of contact, or none at all. There seems to have fallen a gap between poetic art and haiku that hardly can be crossed over by even the most talented reviewers, so much critics fear to start skating on thin ice unwittingly.”

What Van der Molen was aiming at was really a recognition of haiku and tanka along with other forms of short poetry by the literary world and the general readership. He had published, during the ‘fifties and ‘sixties of the previous century, some five volumes of rather traditional poetry and obtained a literary prize, the Van der Hoogt prize, for one of them. He was, therefore, well acquainted with several established poets of his generation. Nevertheless he did not succeed in his endeavor to attain a wider acceptance of Japanese-inspired short poetry in the literary world. On the other hand, his merits with regard to the modern development of haiku and other short forms were unmistakable. In his essays he explored the different forms of haiku that could be found in Dutch language haiku publications, and in his criticisms he clearly expounded his own poetics. Here are three haiku from the second issue (1992):

sometimes words have
two parents, one who speaks them,
one who asked for them
— Bas van Iersel

The biography;
captivating where the subject
attains my age.
— Nanneke Huizinga

It goes so slowly
but the speed at which (it does)
dumbfounds me.
— W.J. van der Molen

And here are three from the third issue of 2000:
Me bezighoudend
met de dingen van morgen
verlies ik vandaag

Occupying myself
with the things of tomorrow
I lose today
— Joop Barlage

het oude fornuis
in de nieuwe woning
zonder het vuur van toen

the old furnace
in the new residence
without the fire of old
— Cécile Evers

ondoordringbare mist
het rustige tikken
van een blindenstok

inpenetrable fog
the quiet ticking
of a blind man's stick
— Max Verhart

And, from the same issue, an apparently short enough poem:

Grensgebied

In het halfduister van de A6
struait tussen zwerfvuil
iets geelgigs

Twee werelden die elkaar kruisen:
de gebaande en de wilde
de gekooide en de naakte
de verzadigde en de hongerige

Vos die ik was
mens die ik werd

Borderline area

In the semi-darkness of the A6
rummaging through litter
something yellow-eyed

6. Motorways in the Netherlands have names like A6 or E 23. A6 is a four-line motorway.
7. See footnote 6.
Van der Molen died on the 6th of March, 2002. The last issue of *Kortheidshalve* appeared in June, 2002 thanks to Roel Brouwer, Cécile Evers and Cees van Dijk.

Wim Lofvers, a haiku poet who for some years served as president of the HKN, ran a private publishing house. At the beginning of the autumn of 1995, he published the first issue of *Woodpecker*, a ‘worldwide journal for sharing haiku’. The journal appeared twice a year. The editorial staff consisted of Wim Lofvers himself; Milivoj Objedović especially for contacts with Eastern Europe, mainly the countries of former Yugoslavia; Gerda Naarding-Tukkers for correcting the English. The journal published haiku, tanka and short haibun in the original language and a translation into English in cases where the original language wasn’t English. Of course, the journal published many haiku by Dutch-language poets, but also valuable contributions from all over the world, as Wim intended. Every issue also contained introductory essays by Wim Lofvers, shorter notes by Milivoj Objedović, and book reviews. The last issue appeared in the autumn of 2002. Lofvers, in his last introduction, of course wrote about the sadness of having to stop, and the fact that all things in this world must come to an end, but we will quote the following expression of his views on haiku and other poetry:

“As I see it it is the poets' duty to find a new attitude towards nature, an attitude free from presumption, judgement, private emotions, sympathy or antipathy; in short an attitude of inner freedom. This is what Bashō aims at when he writes:

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Yield to the willow
all the desire, all the loathing
of your heart
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In May 2010, another international haiku journal got on its feet: *Whirligig multilingual haiku journal*. It was edited by Max Verhart, Marlène Buitelaar, Klaus-Dieter Wirth and Norman Darlington, published by ‘t Schrijverke, Den Bosch, the Netherlands, and appeared twice a year for 6 years. The Flemish/Dutch word ‘schrijverke’ literally means ‘little writer’ and it is the name of a small black beetle that skates on the surface of lakes and ponds. The famous 18th century Flemish poet Guido Gezelle wrote a poem on this bug in which he asks it what it is writing on the surface, whereupon the beetle answers that it is writing again and again the holy name of God. The English name of this little creature is ‘whirligig’ and so this was really a nice name for this interesting journal. Every issue offered an anthology of a few outstanding haijin, and of certain regions in the world, haibun, haiga, antique curiosities and sent-in contributions. All contributions appeared in English and Dutch and in the original language if this happened to be neither Dutch nor English. Here are three haiku from the first issue:
One button undone
in the clerck’s blouse—I let her
steal my change

Een knoopje los
in haar bloesje – dan pikt ze maar
mijn wisselgeld
— George Swede (Canada)

Snow again—
how much my son’s footprints
have grown

Alweer sneeuw—
wat zijn mijn zoons voetafdrukken
groot geworden
— Ludmila Balabanova (Bulgaria)

Wolken zaaien—
de herfst loopt bij
de horizon langs

Sowing clouds—
autumn walks by
along the horizon
— Gerrit Wassing (the Netherlands)

And three from the November, 2014 issue:

Hij werd een vlinder
om in de avondstilte
dromen te zoeken.

He became a butterfly
to go and search for dreams
in the evening silence.
— Frank Berkelmans (the Netherlands)

Winterabend
die Fliege in meinem Glas
erforscht die Leere

winteravond
de vlieg in mijn glas
onderzoekt de leegte

winter dusk
the fly in my glass
explores the emptiness
— Dietmar Tauchner (Austria)
The final issue (Vol. VI/2) appeared November, 2015.

In the fall of 2013, a new foundation was established: the ‘Haiku Stichting Nederland’ (Haiku Foundation Netherlands) by Mr. Arie de Kluijver. The aims of this foundation are: (a) to further the public knowledge of haiku in the Netherlands (b) to stimulate the writing of haiku by oneself (c) to realize the innovation of the manifestations of haiku. The foundation’s website is <www.Haiku.nl>. The foundation publishes e-books that can be downloaded for free.

4. Publishing

The great publishing houses in Holland until now did not show much interest in publishing volumes of haiku poetry, although there have been a few exceptions. Meulenhoff, at Amsterdam, published volumes of haiku, senryū, and tanka, respectively, translated from the Japanese by J. van Tooren. These books have been very important. But Meulenhoff did not publish haiku by Dutch or Flemish authors. Kairos, a small publishing house at Soest, published a series of small books containing anthologies of Japanese haiku, senryū and tanka translated by Henri Kerlen and, on one occasion, Karel Hellemans. Moreover, Kairos published three anthologies of haiku originally written in the Dutch language. But the last one of these appeared in 1993. The Foundation for Literary Publications De Beuk (The Beech Tree) at Amsterdam has been very important in publishing volumes of poetry by Dutch haiku poets. Most of the works by outstanding Dutch authors found their way to a readership through De Beuk. After the death of its director Wim J. Simons in 2005, this publishing house ceased to exist. More recently, in 2009, an anthology was published in the series ‘Rainbow Essentials’ by Muntinga, Amsterdam, called Een handvol veren (A Handful of Feathers). But otherwise, most work by haiku and tanka poets is published privately or by small marginal publishers, the most important of which was ’t Schrijverke, Den Bosch, run by Max Verhart until his death in 2018. Nowadays, the possibilities for publishing are much increased due to the activities of so-called printing-on-demand publishers that are able to produce anything from one item to hundreds of them, depending on order. Rather often, the author is obliged to pay for their services, but this is not always the case. And, of course, the internet offers an opportunity to have one’s work published.
5. Haiku on the fringe of Dutch Literature

The well known poetry critic Guus Middag, in a leading Dutch newspaper (*NRC Handelsblad* 10-17-2003) summarized the status of haiku in Dutch literature thus: “A haiku volume: you even don’t want to be found with it dead! Haiku is woolly business out of the anthroposophical nature shop, outdated hobby, busy-therapy for spineless home stayers, that’s the scent surrounding haiku!” That he himself did not leave it at that appears from the rest of his article, where he showed that he did discover possibilities. But that was all of it. Prominent poet Ilja Leonard Pfeiffer wrote

*Geen haiku*

*vlinder in de trein*
*mijn god dacht ik als daar maar*
*geen haiku van komt*

Not a haiku

*butterfly in the train*
*oh my god I thought if only that*
*won't yield a haiku*

Some well known authors did on occasion write a few attempts at haiku, but in general haiku occupies a marginal niche in Dutch mainstream literature.

*Haren, January 2019*